

Mark Schroder, born 1980, Aotearoa New Zealand

Fortune Teller
2021
Mixed media

Mark Schroder is based in Tāmaki Makaurau. His day job which he describes as ‘a corporate lawyer drone’ informs his artistic practice. With an ongoing interest in exploring boom and bust economic cycles, corporate paraphernalia and fictitious companies, *Fortune Teller* expands on these areas through a site-specific lens that juxtaposes corporate goals with employee happiness. Occupying the entirety of the Dome Gallery, Schroder’s installation is informed by the use of this room as a former reception area from 1961 to 1989 when television studios. Previously fitted with a low ceiling that blocked view of the glass dome, a refresh of this space in the 1980s promised to make ‘staff happier by improving their dreary surroundings’.¹

Purposefully reminiscent of bad office décor from the 1970s and 1980s in its colour choices and furniture, *Fortune Teller* presents a tightly packed warren of reception counters, teller windows, cubicles and offices. The installation is home to *The Bureau of Happiness* which specialises in generating prototype employee value propositions, template corporate value statements and universal well-being programmes for government and corporate employer-clients. This fictional office is usually filled with non-essential white collar workers whose role it is to produce, amongst other things, direct to market motivational posters and copious memos. Yet at *The Bureau of Happiness* the inspirational products are muddied by the staff’s own general malaise, whose pursuit of unattainable KPI’s and mediocre tasks infiltrate any intended wellbeing measures.

Fortune Teller takes aim at the aspirational clichés companies use to motivate their workers and embeds these in an environment that is perhaps as surreal as it is familiar. Laden with corporate documents – agendas, minutes, and ‘introductory sales’ powerpoints – Schroder’s installation is filled with countless objects, their realistic rendering as ceramic replicas of the originals creating an effect of trompe l’oeil where nothing is quite as it seems.

Encountering the meandering installation, we are met with a plethora of debris – from the usual office supplies to personalised good luck trinkets belonging to ‘trusted’ workers. The haphazard environment ushers in thoughts of workers departing in a hurry, where a lack of return remains unresolved. Encircled by pre-fab style partitions, bare wooden structures and an out of place trellis more akin to a garden, Schroder experiments with motifs, textures and visual cues that oscillate between the expected and the outright unconventional. Fused with

¹ “Exposed – a superb glass dome!” by Peter Shaw, *New Zealand Woman’s Weekly*, July 21 1986.

an absurdist humour and insightful critique that speaks to global worker experiences, Gus Fisher Gallery is proud to present Mark Schroder's most ambitious installation to date.

"What use is success if it can't be shared? What happiness does that bring?" - Motivational poster from *The Bureau of Happiness*.

Artwork courtesy of the artist

Wong Ping, born 1984, Hong Kong

Wong Ping's Fables 1 & 2

2018-19

Two single channel video animations with sound

'I live in the internet so I make work there' – Wong Ping, Frieze, 2018.

Wong Ping's Fables are a series of five animations by Wong Ping, one of Hong Kong's most exciting emerging artists. Originally studying in Australia, Wong Ping took an unconventional route to art by working in post-production for television. In 2014 he set up the Wong Ping Animation Lab and in recent years his artworks have been exhibited widely internationally including at the Guggenheim, New York, and Camden Arts Centre, London. This is the first Australasian showing of Wong Ping's acclaimed *Fables* series which take inspiration from the literature of the Brothers Grimm and Aesop's Fables to present a series of morality tales for the modern age.

The animations comprise of five concise fictional stories made up of imaginary characters that each communicate a moral lesson. Featuring problems including those of an insect-phobic tree and a chicken obsessed with social media, the fables touch on issues of love, narcissism, appearance and fear. The exhibition's title is taken from one of the stories in *Fables 2* about a cow whose selfish pursuit of wealth sees it exploited by the system that helped it achieve success. The story ends with the bittersweet cliché, *happiness is only real when shared*.

Fables are laden with an absurdity that hints at the ludicrousness of the consumerist mindset. As modern capitalist desires take hold, we watch the characters' helplessness in navigating their fate, each pervaded by "a profound sense of social awkwardness."² With a subtlety of references to broader themes including global health crises, personal

² "Hong Kong's Youth Culture, Captured in Disturbing Animations" by Barbara Pollack, *The New York Times*, May 18 2018.

responsibility and definitions of truth, the narratives in *Fables* are additionally informed by political turbulence in the artist's native city of Hong Kong.

Visually exuberant with sugar-coated graphics reminiscent of 1980s computer games, *Wong Ping's Fables* are rooted in a world of fantastical surrealism that works to furtively mask the stories' more serious undertones. While the characters and the events that take place may seem odd or illogical, the films address toils that affect each of our contemporary daily lives. Providing a cuttingly cynical and wry insight into societal behaviour, the messages and symbolism in *Wong Ping's Fables 1 & 2* provide further contemplation in a post-2020 context.

Artwork courtesy of the artist and *Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong / Shanghai*; *Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York / Los Angeles*

Pinar Yoldas, Turkey / USA

The Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance
2016

Posters, single channel video, 12:40 minutes

The Kitty AI: Artificial Intelligence for Governance is a work of speculative fiction that offers a cultural critique on situations of governance by imagining the successful integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and governance in a near future scenario.

The video is set in the year 2039 and focuses on an anime-like cute Kitty AI who, as the first non-human governor, leads a politician-free zone with a network of other artificial intelligence. The Kitty AI lives in the mobile phones of its citizens and is capable of loving up to three million people at a time. This is an experiment in what Kitty AI calls "applied micro-democracy" as opposed to "abstract macro-democracy" as citizens can make contact with the AI directly through their smartphone devices.

The Kitty AI takes care of citizens on a personal level, from making sure domestic tasks like the rubbish collection happens and the children get to school on time, all while maintaining diplomatic relations with physical and virtual world leaders.

In the video, Kitty AI talks about her work as ruler of a megalopolis and speaks from the future on a range of unsolvable past crises that has enabled AI's to rise to power. Speaking candidly about the horrors of human displacement, climate change and natural disasters, the AI's sweet voice and appearance belies the seriousness of the subject-matter and the covert control taken from humans by artificial intelligence.

Tapping into the milieu of the digital natives of Generation Z and Gen Alpha, in an excerpt from the video the Kitty AI states; *'We had all experienced violence but mostly from video*

games or CGI heavy horror movies. We had experienced loss, but only when we lost our iPhones or broke up w / our "swipe-right" girlfriends. We had experienced chaos, but only in our desktops or our bedrooms while looking for clean underwear amidst a vortex of scarcely worn outfits.'

As part of the exhibition, Pinar Yoldas' work extends the dialogues to the realm of AI technology and prompts insightful questions into the potential advantages and pitfalls of artificial intelligence. 'What if AI also made decisions for us, and what if AI became political leaders with a vision, agenda and 4 year plan? Would they not have many advantages as opposed to human leaders?' Yoldas' project traces the steps towards such a future and raises awareness of the use and development of artificial intelligence in many organisations worldwide, heralding the prospect of it becoming the new normal.

This speculative future scenario imagined in the Kitty AI is inspired by the Black Mirror episode 'The Waldo Moment'. In the episode, a cartoon character becomes a presidential candidate, a concept perhaps less absurd than global political developments have been in recent years.

Artwork courtesy of the artist