

Stewart Uoo,
Huxtable Effect,
2014, c-print,
35 x 27.5 in.



Mirror, Mirror On Da Wall...

Daniel Horn

Stewart Uoo, "No Tears in Rain"
Galerie Buchholz, Berlin
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The young Siegfried Kracauer, before rising to fame as the acerbic diarist of messy and modish Weimar Republic city life, wrote his dissertation on the radically unsexy subject of seventeenth to nineteenth century Berlin ironworks. The stylistically varied yet hardly exhilarating iron-wrought gates, railings and balustrades discussed there in soporific detail, would reappear decades later within the rather mundane mise-en-scène of the assorted film stills illustrating Kracauer's 1960 classic *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*. There, these inconspicuous structures present a strangely compelling material linkage between personal-political narratives as divergent as the proletarian plight and uprising of Wallonian miners documented in *Misère au Borinage* (Misery in Borinage, 1933) and the 1931 sexual coming-of-age drama of tender Manuela von Meinhardis in *Mädchen in Uniform* (Girl in Uniform). Such inscrutable correlations running through Kracauer's oeuvre—where emergent subjectivities forming and acting amidst specific features of the built environment render more concrete the power dynamics that shape urban planning and demographics—were not only reactivated but noticeably revamped in Stewart Uoo's arrangements of various pre-fab white-enamelled steel fencings. All titled *Security Window Grill*, 2014, and ranging in versions from "I" to "IV," these were alternately affixed to the wall, posing as quasi-paintings or placed more conventionally on the floor as sculptures. Sprouting mildly unsightly tufts of an unspecified species—I thought of those troll dolls from the 1990s—they came complete with distressing industry-standard surface, plastic flaps and shreds simulating artificial as much as rotten skin tissue meticulously grafted onto the linear interstices. Perhaps the semi-humanoid refuse of a VIP-only art world-frequented uptown clinic-cum-chamber of horrors?

Uoo introduced the style-conscious tribe living amongst these transmogrified Minimalist structures via glossy photographs, beautifully shot by Berlin's go-to photographer Heji Shin and casually stuck to the wall Tillmans-style, although hung in an understated spread-out spacing complementing the gallery's smart and airy premises. Stylistically the images passed for a techno-futuristic, street-cred, camp fashion spread featuring DIY-Rick Owens looks with the occasional oversaturated drag flavor à la John Waters, in *You Can Come And Get It*, and the more heavy metal touch of a Mapplethorpe as in the black-and-white print *Wait For It*, both from 2014. In the latter work, what appears

to be a bolt cutter of substantial size sharply penetrates and conjoins—butt-to-butt—fashionably unascertainable genders. *Wet Wonder*, 2014, printed in color, and *Huxtable Effect*, 2014, in black and white, picture the same female protagonist in the *ingeniously Instagrammable* setting of a minimalist bathtub set into white marble adjoining a mirror wall; her liana-like sinewy hair extensions rhyming with the stone's veining, her countenance expressing symptoms of spreading narcissistic personality disorder. If there were such a thing as a Man Ray-filter for Instagram, these pictures would easily qualify as fine art prototypes. I mistook the model for Azealia Banks, the singer who if already mainstream at least identifies as polysexual, but later learned from the press release that the subject was in fact one representative of “figures and shapers of the current New York club/social media/art/fashion context,” which is just as well if not superior.

There are instances of odd beauty and exposure such as in *Bad Bitch Heaven*, 2014, where a stockier, dolled-up, gun-toting Snow White in-the-hoods faces the viewer clad in a perfectly ill-timed perforated mini dress and a pair of flimsy fuchsia stilettos, sinking into the snow yet striking a pose without batting a fake eye-

lash. Zero-degree snowfall conditions or not: No “Tears in Rain” here. Because not only is she no Rick Deckard, who despite the two tough *ck*'s of his name gets dewy-eyed over an unmistakably feminine human replicant as in the closing scenes of *Blade Runner*, but more importantly because you can't afford to fuck up the high-maintenance mascara.

When Uoo captures and choreographs his exotic entourage consisting of the city's arguably subcultural players and presences—keeping in mind the archaism, in fact invalidness, of this denomination alone—he does so as an active participant within the aforementioned “context” rather than as a naively intrigued or a dutifully researching artist-as-ethnographer/fan/gatecrasher and so forth. A position that situates his work within a still fairly young art history and which transpires in the visual freshness and discursively unburdened directness of the works, their high degree of stylization notwithstanding. It's precisely this pictorially reflected, intra-perspective take, crossing observer-observed boundaries, that shows familiarity and kinship with, say, Tillmans's (or Nan Goldin's) by now iconic repertoire of select nightlife and fashion circles from almost

Stewart Uoo,
*Security Window
Grill I*, 2014, steel,
enamel, rust, silicone,
acrylic varnish,
humain hair,
80 x 36.6 x 6 in.



two decades ago. Yet whereas the latter's works radiate and extend such insider intimacy through their warm, “natural” or emphatic and seemingly spontaneous look, transmitting a 1990s inclusionism still virginally untouched by the relentless image competition and monetization fought out on the social media frontier, Uoo's cast enter the picture semi-professionalized and fully media-savvy, completely staged and thus harder to face. And ironically, despite this concerted effort at speculative capitalization of some kind or another, more taxing for democratic consumption. The characters' overall ferocious air—styled for maximum impact towards on-screen capturing and circulation, detailed in the bold make-ups, shellacked hair-dos and pleathery get-ups—creates as much a barrier and a protective shield as the various security grills and fencings some of these kids are surrounded by when professionally shot in their ostensibly “natural” habitat, which here tellingly dodges secure localization: cold ghetto or already hot ZIP code?

Miroir, miroir sur le mur...

Daniel Horn

Stewart Uoo, *No Tears in Rain*
Galerie Buchholz, Berlin
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Avant d'être élevé au rang de célébrité pour ses chroniques acerbes dépeignant le faste et le chaos de la vie en ville à l'époque de la République de Weimar, le jeune Siegfried Kracauer avait choisi un sujet de thèse beaucoup moins séduisant; son mémoire portait sur les travaux de ferronnerie à Berlin du XVII^e au XIX^e siècle. Les portails, grilles et balustrades en fer forgé de styles variés, mais peu enthousiasmants, examinés avec une précision soporifique allaient réapparaître des dizaines d'années plus tard dans les agencements banals des photogrammes illustrant le classique *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality* de 1960, de Kracauer. Là, ces structures discrètes proposent une relation matérielle fascinante liant des récits politico-intimes aussi divergents que la situation critique des prolétaires et du soulèvement des mineurs wallons traité dans le film-documentaire *Misère au Borinage* (1933) ou l'accession de la douce Manuela von Meinhardis à la maturité sexuelle dans *Jeunes Filles en uniforme*. Avec ses multiples agencements de portails et de barreaux de fenêtre préfabriqués en métal blanc émaillé, Stewart Uoo a non seulement réactivé mais aussi remarquablement remis au goût du jour ces corrélations impénétrables à travers l'œuvre de Kracauer mêlant les caractéristiques particulières d'éléments architecturaux aux