

## His Art is Quite Artless : John Teddy Chan

'I'm noticing a new approach to art making in recent museum and gallery shows [...] It's an attitude that says, I know that the art I'm creating may seem silly, even stupid, or that it might have been done before, but that doesn't mean this isn't serious.'<sup>[1]</sup>

The works of John Teddy Chan is artless. That is not to say that what he creates is not art, but rather that he as a creator challenges the canon placed upon the term 'art' through the works and displays which he generates. Every piece, although visually literal, holds a subtext of meaning, which allows for the viewer to experience the piece with richness and depth that may not be achieved solely on a visual level. Highly inspired by artistic theory, he is an artist that embodies the polarity of Metamodernism; his works exist between cynicism and sincerity — always striving for more than the aesthetic allows. In example, arguably the most metamodernist of all of his works, *Just ... \*Sigh\** (2015) portrays the polarity as a golf ball balancing just outside the pull of going in the hole, surrounded by uneven turf.

His works are artless because they are without deceit, without façade and retain a sense of purity because they do not present themselves with the intention of being seen as something they are not. Instead, they are presented to the viewer as an open book with all of the necessary ingredients for contemplation and absorption. The piece *White Wizards in the Studio* (2015) presented itself as both the actual drinking game as played in the studio at the private view, as well as the aftermath of it all. Although the remnants left could have been staged to seem as though something had taken place, they were quite literally left, as they were in order to showcase the authentic spirit left from an event.

First inspired to make pieces to be stood as an institutional critique, he challenged the perception of traditional media and display of art within an institution via his work *Ingredients for an Art Piece* (2011). Here he invited the viewer to construct an 'artistic' work out of plaster, steel, clay and the like, on a plinth in order to question the role of a plinth in artistic representation. Following with the intention of questioning the role of objects, *Contemplation on Doors* (2012) allows the viewer to reinterpret what function the structure of a door has when the door has been removed. These two pieces set out to redefine not only the role of art in the institution, but also to reinterpret functional value which had been instigated by theories of Bourriaud and so forth.

Straying slightly from the focus of institutional critique John went on to explore the culinary as a new media for fine art practice. His piece *The Look of Cookies* (2013) quite literally combined ingredients from the culinary world with traditional media used in fine art; as he created sheet cookies that contained plaster and acrylic paint along with flour, eggs and butter. Without reading the label — and reading into the piece — the viewer was presented

with what visually appeared as an average cookie. Although the piece was highly focused on the culinary as a media for fine art, the necessity of the label to fully understand the piece was intended as an institutional critique, blending the two worlds together. Continuing on the culinary/critique path, John created the works *Something About the Smell of Butter* (2013), *Untitled (Hot Pots)* (2014) and *Can I Eat with You?* (2014), which integrated the participation of the viewer into an integral part of the work itself. Via the social aspects of the culinary, he constructed works which not only challenged the viewer to participate in the work itself, but ultimately the reinterpretation of what constitutes as a work of 'art'.

Harking back to the core of institutional and artistic critique, John produced *Artists/Viewers* (2014), which stood as a direct statement on the price it takes to hold the title of 'artist' in comparison with that of 'viewer'. Both pieces, *And the Best Artist Award Goes To...* (2015) and *The Act of Working: Reimagine - Corin Whitelaw-Rennoldson* (2015), embodies the critique of the institution of art schools as well as the classification of 'artist' and ownership in various forms. Coming full circle, *You Are the Real MVP* (2015) focuses on the institutional glorification of a plinth in giving meaning to an artistic object and questions the necessity of a plinth, as well as the classification of 'art' object.

Never identifying solely as an artist, John Teddy Chan shapes ideas concerned with theory, artistic critique and the viewer's perspective, into works that allow for the reinterpretation and challenge of artistic perception. Not afraid of straying from traditional media associated with fine art, he develops works that are intended to be presented, to the viewer as self-aware of its intentions and role as 'art'. He is an artist, art director, curator, designer, theorist, editor, and author who creates with the intention to question, deconstruct and reinterpret what it is to be an artist, what it means to be a viewer, and what exactly the purpose of terminology is when defining 'art'.

- Ashley Fernandez, 2015

[1] Jerry Saltz, 'Sincerity and Irony Hug It Out: At P.S. 1's "Greater New York," a new union of opposing attitudes' *New York Magazine* (27 May 2010).