

KATZMAN CONTEMPORARY
presents

YI XIN TONG
Strange New Health



Yi Xin Tong, *Tongue Accessories*, boat seat, crystal, steel, curtain ring, 12" x 13" x 9", 2016

STRANGE NEW HEALTH

I watch you from the window as you struggle to blow up a large inflatable pool with a bicycle pump. You haven't figured out yet that you need a different attachment. Now it's cloudy outside, the weather changed yesterday, and though it's the wrong temperature for a swim you're too stubborn to go back on what you said you would do. An idea for a music video. Soggy pizza slices, ambient electronica, images of water and light.

There's something idyllic about gathering near bodies of water. An oasis in the desert of your formerly neglected yard, later we sit around the periphery of the pool drinking orange juice from a carton that has more sugar in it than we know. Watch the swishing of blue water against a brighter blue plastic. The slow, becoming-blue sky over an un-blue fence. An aerial view of the neighbourhood reveals a landscape dotted with trampolines and swimming pools, like shoddy punctuation marks enlivening a relentless grid. So many clumsy backyard monuments fulfilling a need for movement in a stagnant place – props for jumping or diving; for catching air, or becoming submerged. A series of tiny, parallel escapes. *Tropicana. Americana.*

Some friends you've invited to be in the video sit on the steps of the deck wearing black lipstick and vintage Adidas, nylon sportswear and mesh. Health goths who laugh palely from the fringe of the pool and litter the ground with empty packs of cigarettes – those ones with the grotesque health advisories on the boxes showing images of deformed babies, rotting teeth and gums. I'd like to bum a smoke from them but am too shy to approach. If I could, I would start by complimenting the girl in the white tee shirt: the one with the upside-down Nike checkmark and the words *I Just Can't*. How clever.

The brilliance of lifestyle brands is that they express the desire for individualist containment with no risk to the individual. (You: breaking your arm jumping off trampolines in our youth; Me: perpetually choking on chlorinated water.) So what if we were wise enough to buy into this one early? Trade our scepticisms for an ideology, an attitude, a way of life. Endorse the backyard pizza party and the runny eyeliner, the *Just Do It*, or the *Just Can't*, like the famous swimming baby on the cover of Nirvana's *Nevermind*, reaching for a wad of cash. Athletics, meet aesthetics. Aesthetics, athletics. I could be a woman with a lisp, or meaning is made by articulation. Like, I wore my running shoes just to go shopping at the mall the

other day. Does that make me vain? *Athleisure*, I've heard it called. (Ambient music – the kind you are making here – was playing in all of the stores: pulsating, uniform, predatory. We were shoppers stalking each other in rooms dark as caves, ducking behind exotic plants to run our hands over the floating racks of branded “non-brand” white cotton t-shirts: the latest in post-postmodern urban irony.) I asked you once whether you “worked out” and you said *no* but that you liked to lift weights sometimes at home as a way to unwind. Oh and that you drank a protein shake every morning so as not to “lose your edge.” In truth, yours is a body built for the image of the plain white tee: embodying the strange new health that is so obsessively bought and sold but meant to look entirely effortless.

Enter Girl 1 in a black bikini, drifting from pool left on an inflatable mattress. She paints her nails with a metallic gold nail polish, holds the bottle between her knees. There's a tattoo on her right shoulder of a spiralling serpent and a stick-and-poke on her wrist of a smiling hot dog. Some beer bottles discarded on a rusty trampoline. Enter drum track and the sound of a drowned Casio keyboard ...

There are differences between you and I not unlike the differences between pools and trampolines. Both of us need props to believe, containers to feel pleasure. But while I might enjoy the occasion for napping poolside, you are perpetually in search of cheap, adrenaline-fueled ecstasy. The organs, airborne, fuel a crazed and reckless energy – a superhuman feeling of abandonment – and it frightens me, watching you jump so high. Ours is a problem of tempo, I say. Until you remind me how, as children, we used to bounce and double-bounce each other to the point of total exhaustion, eventually collapsing on the taut nylon like family of fallen stars. About the mute miracle of animals forming and deforming in the clouds (I'm back on your side).

Falling asleep to the gagging of my bulimic neighbour, I recall an old news story about a python who'd escaped from a pet shop and slipped up through an air vent to strangle the upstairs neighbour in her sleep. Defying gravity. The perfect crime, like the icicles I used to fantasize about, their elusive evidence. Had the girl with the snake tattoo heard about the pet shop murder when she got it? The symbol of the snake is associated with water, magic, health, healing. A shape-shifter with a strong protective power, a guardian of the underworld. There's nothing so macabre about the pool in your yard, but all the same, I become mildly superstitious. If portals

exist, surely this is one of them. How else does one explain the uncanny accumulation of details that make an occasion of our random assembly?

We've been laughing about your romantic conceptualism for years – at your love letters to science fiction, your bohemian exploits in fishing and home videos. Your short-lived days with an above-ground pool: another experiment in social participation. Sometimes it's difficult to know whether we're really a product of our times, or just misguided *infants-terrible* of eras past or ones to come. Unknowingly branding our efforts at sincerity as something like art, or fashion, or cultural prescience.

You'd never tell me so, but I know that you sold the pool so that you could buy a new sound system. I saw you deflating it that day, before a teenager pulled up in an old car and counted out a stack of twenties into your open hand. Now there's a round patch of brown lawn where the pool used to be. The health goths have all gone, leaving behind a ring of cigarette stubs like fairy circles in the grass. – Jacquelyn Ross

Jacquelyn Ross is a writer and critic based in Toronto, Canada. Her writing has appeared in *Mousse*, *The Bartleby Review*, *C Magazine*, *The Capilano Review*, *artforum.com*, and elsewhere. She publishes books by emerging artists and writers under the small press Blank Cheque, and is currently at work on her first collection of short stories.



Yi Xin Tong, *Above Ground Pool Dog Bowl*, ceramics, chocolate chips, 9" x 9" x 4", and *Above Ground Pool* video with sound (4'16") on screen, 2016

ARTIST BIOGRAPHY

Yi Xin Tong is a New York based artist, amateur fisherman, and subscriber to Kmart newsletters. Tong makes multimedia installations, site-responsive works, Internet projects, music, and books. He received his MFA from New York University, and BFA Honours from Simon Fraser University. His work has been shown at the: Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art, National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, 80WSE Gallery, Vanguard Gallery, Hanart TZ Gallery, Galerie de La Rotonde de Stalingrad, and VIVO Media Arts Centre. He received Joan Mitchell Foundation Scholarship, Takao Tanabe Award in Visual Arts, British Columbia Arts Council Scholarships, Orange Corporation Annual Award in Visual Arts, and the May and Samuel Rudin Foundation Multimedia Technology Scholarship. Tong was the British Columbia winner of the BMO 1st Art Award in 2012, and a finalist for Equitable Bank's Emerging Digital Artists Award in 2015.

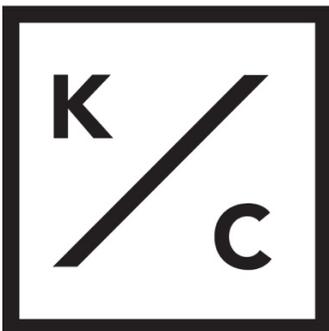


Yi Xin Tong, *Trampoline Pool*, trampoline steel frame, inkjet print on vinyl, springs, 96" x 96" x 5", 2016



Yi Xin Tong, Gateway, trampoline leg, trampoline shoe & accessory bag, keyboard segment, dried fish, OFF! Deep Woods® Insect Repellent, wrecking bar, violin bow, toy axe, firefighter party hat, paint, cable ties, foam bird, 56 x 34 x 11 inches

Strange New Health will be remounted in its entirety in a curated exhibition by **Zhang Jianling** and **Guo Xi** for **Long March Space** (Beijing), one of the top galleries in China, early this December.



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