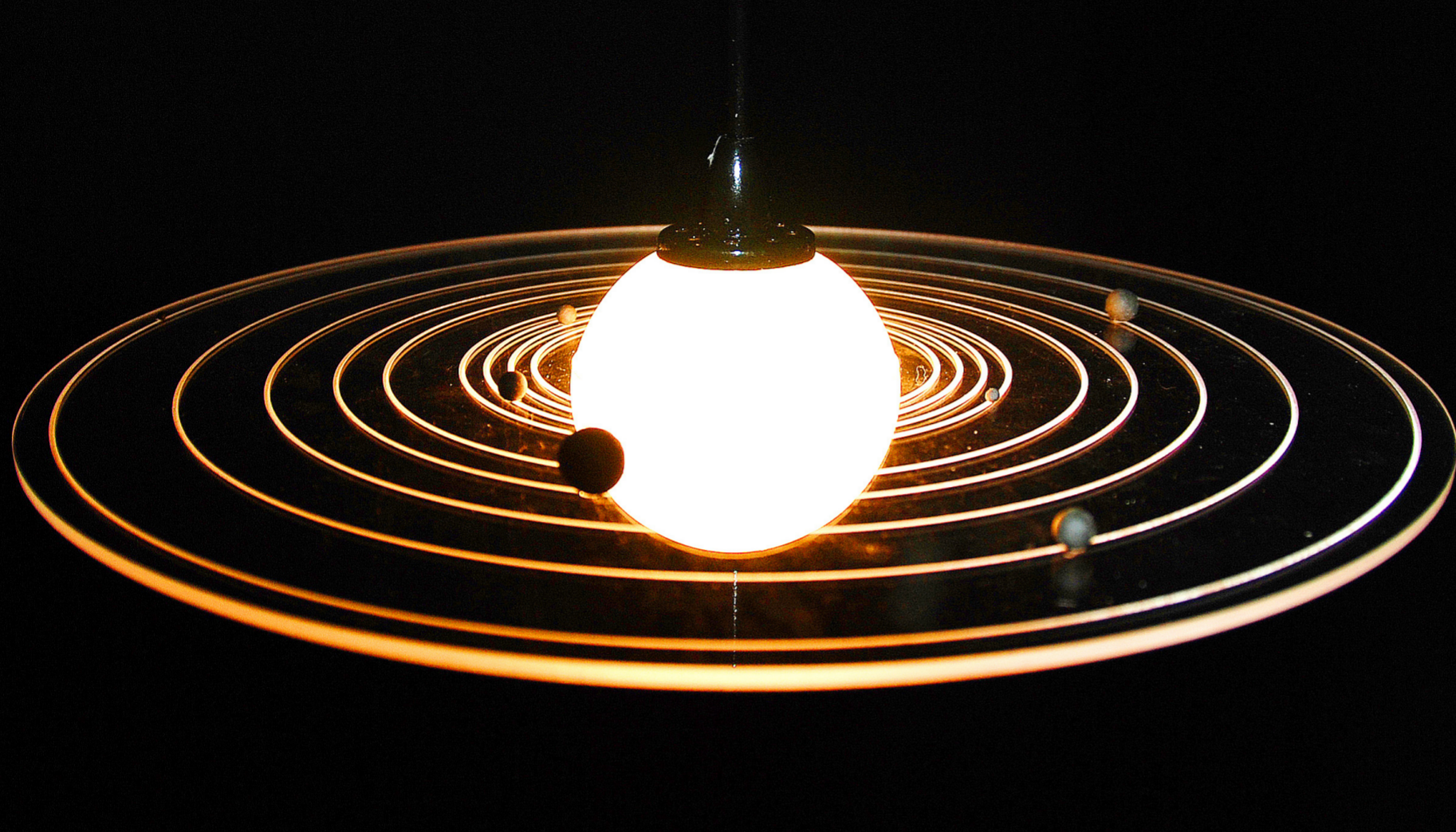


[ART JOURNAL]

Objects in the mirror are stranger than they appear

Yuki Okumura and Chiang Chung-lun's works invite viewers to think twice about what they think they see

BY HO YI
STAFF REPORTER



"I saw a little head floating in the air one time when I rode a motorcycle on the street of Taipei. I was startled for a second," said Japanese artist Yuki Okumura, who in 2007 was an artist in residence at Taipei Artist Village (台北國際藝術村). It took Okumura another fleeting second to realize that the floating head was actually a motorcyclist's face reflected in his rear-view mirror.

This and other novel experiences in Taipei became inspiration for the 31-year-old artist's first official exhibition at a private gallery in Taiwan, where his art is on display with works by up-and-coming Taiwanese artist Chiang Chung-lun (江忠倫) at Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術). The joint exhibition Yuki Okumura/Chiang Chung-lun: Secret Life (奧村雄樹 / 江忠倫：秘密生活) sees the two artists using their own bodies and low-tech gadgets to make everyday experiences seem less familiar and offer humorous new perspectives on our daily routines.

Okumura's pieces in the exhibition transcend the boundary between fantasy and reality by making a synthesis out of the two. In *Me Riding Motorcycles in Taipei*, large poster prints show what at first appear to be ordinary photos of motorbikes in heavy traffic. But a closer inspection reveals that the reflections in each motorcyclist's rear-view mirror have been replaced by images of the artist's face.

"As civilized human beings, we know that the faces in the mirror belong to bikers behind us. But sometimes I doubt it. I imagine what he or she looks like, thinking 'Maybe they are all me riding motorcycles?'" Okumura explained in English.

A similar reality-bending game plays out in *Me Eating Fog in Linkou*, which was shot using a consumer video camera and shows the artist appearing to swallow fog at his apartment in Linkou (林口), Taipei County. The heavy fog that Okumura said surrounded his room 24 hours a day seems to have inspired him to reenact the Japanese myth of fog- and mist-eating immortals who live high in the mountains.

Like Okumura, Chiang is also adept at



discovering the strange and the bizarre in the mundane. Currently a student at the Graduate Institute of Plastic Arts at Tainan National University of the Arts (台南藝術大學造形藝術研究所), Chiang is known for using everyday items and low-tech gizmos to simulate images commonly seen on television and in other popular media.

Composed of a series of photographs and video shot by a consumer digital camera and mobile phone, *A-Fo Project* is Chiang's vision of Tainan as a Taiwanese version of Area 51. What appears to be a UFO, but is in fact the lid of a cooking pot, is seen rising from the ocean, flying over the city, crashing into a building and crash-landing in a park in images that look as if they were captured using a Polaroid camera.

Chiang said he plans to mine unsolved mysteries such as the Loch Ness Monster and crop circles for future material for his ongoing series. "For all we know, the Loch Ness Monster and crop circles may well have been made up by locals to promote tourism. Perhaps one day Taiwan will also be famous for its Choshui River Monster and rice paddy circles," he said.

For *Microcosm*, Chiang created a model of the solar system using a light bulb and acrylic paint. Visitors are advised to refrain from touching the work. Aside from the fact that this is (usually) proper museum etiquette, the planets were made from the artist's own feces, which he dried using the flame from a cigarette lighter.

Chiang gave a terse reply when asked why he used his own excrement for the piece: "The cosmos is in the human body."



Top: Chiang Chung-lun, *Microcosm*.

Above right: Yuki Okumura, *Me Riding Motorcycles in Taipei*.

Above left: Chiang Chung-lun, *Nocturnal No. 4*.

Below and right: Chiang Chung-lun, *A-Fo Project*.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GALERIE GRAND SIECLE

EXHIBITION NOTES:

WHAT: Yuki Okumura/Chiang Chung-lun: Secret Life (奧村雄樹 / 江忠倫：秘密生活)
WHERE: Galerie Grand Siecle (新苑藝術), 17, Alley 51, Ln 12, Bade Rd Sec 3, Taipei City (台北市八德路三段12巷51弄17號). Tel: (02) 2578-5630
WHEN: Through June 28. The gallery is open Tuesdays to Sundays from 1pm to 6pm
ON THE NET: www.changsgallery.com.tw

Celebrity Interview



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They laugh at the trio's onstage banter, but when they play *Stonehenge* or *The Majesty of Rock*, they react as any other audience would to a favorite band trotting out its classics. They howl their approval the minute they recognize a song. They pump their fists and do that devil's horns thing with their fingers. No one seems to be doing it ironically.

Shearer nods: "You can't get onstage and play music you hate or want to make bad. If you're playing crap music or have contempt for what you're doing, where the hell is the fun? Of course, we wrote it with the intention that it be credible that a band could have some kind of career playing this music, so it had to be at least borderline credible that someone might be ignoring the stupidity of the lyrics and enjoying the music."

Shearer and McKean laugh easily, but Guest arrives trailed by a reputation for being rather hard work. His Wikipedia entry includes a section devoted to his "offstage demeanor" in which the phrase "off-putting" figures heavily, and an interviewer who found him "rude, condescending and intolerable" is quoted. He's none of those things today, but he is grave and unsmiling. On a couple of occasions, I assume he's being deadpan and laugh at something he says, and he shakes his head: "I'm not," he says flatly, "trying to be funny."

At another juncture, I lightheartedly remark that the famous scene where Nigel Tufnel throws a tantrum because the slices of bread in Spinal Tap's backstage catering are the wrong size must make it hard for Guest to complain if his own catering genuinely isn't right. He looks blank — "We aren't difficult Hollywood people that travel that particular path, we have modest backstage demands" — before launching into an exhaustive list of his meager dressing-room requirements. "We ask for fruit, bananas specifically. We ask for a chocolate bar each, a specific brand of chocolate bar. We ask for coffee. A couple of bottles of wine." As he goes on, he sounds not unlike Harlan Pepper, the character he played in *Best in Show*, who couldn't stop himself from continually demonstrating his ability to name every variety of nut in the world.

But you can tell when Guest is being funny, because he transforms into Nigel Tufnel and says something snortingly hilarious. When the conversation turns to how Spinal Tap might be coping with the ongoing collapse of the music industry, Guest starts explaining that the bandmembers probably haven't noticed: "If you're deluded, you live in a place where there isn't everyone else's reality. The last time people saw Nigel, he was raising miniature horses and complaining that he couldn't find a jockey small enough to race them, as if it was a possibility that he might find a guy two feet [0.6m] tall, you know: I haven't done looking yet. For a guy like that, to say to him, there's this world where record companies barely exist any more..."

His voice tails off, replaced by a familiar British drone, rich with the entitled effrontery of a thick, chippy rock star and laden with pregnant pauses, during which his mouth hangs open slightly. "What do you mean? No, it's not going wrong at all. That's what you don't understand. It's going right. This is what you don't know. That's where you're stupid, you see. You don't get it at all. You look around and see something, I see a different thing. My thing happens to be right. I see great promise."

It's confusing: a man who gives every appearance of having no sense of humor suddenly revealing himself to be the funniest guy in the room. But then, as has already been established, much of Spinal Tap's world is confusing. Despite Guest's steely assurances that there's no similarity between Spinal Tap's on-screen misadventures and the experience of touring as Spinal Tap, the line between actors and characters does seem to blur occasionally. Every now and again, one of these erudite satirists says something about music that might have come from the lips of the people they're satirizing. Shearer enjoyed last night's gig in Atlanta not merely because of the audience reaction, but because the band played "balls out": "It's almost physics. It's an interchange of energy. The audience gives it to you and you give it back." I know what he means, but still, say it in a gormless English accent and it would be tough to distinguish from the golden philosophy of Derek Smalls.

Guest, meanwhile, has endorsed Marshall amplifiers in character as Tufnel, which boggles the mind: a mythic rock star famed for being so stupid he hasn't actually fathomed out how the volume knob on an amplifier works, being paid to recommend amplifiers to other musicians. When touring, Shearer says, they've run into "all the stuff that's in the film — silly promotion men, strange groupies," the latter apparently undeterred by the fact that the rock star they want to sleep with doesn't actually exist.

"A satirist's dream is you make fun of it, then it's all fixed," Shearer smiles. "The reality is you make fun of it, then go and do it yourself, and you wind up thinking, how stupid am I? I knew how this was going to be, and it is, and I've signed up for it."

He keeps signing up for it, the audiences keep turning up in their thousands, and the cult of Spinal Tap shows no sign of waning. Back at the Ryman, the gig pauses for questions and answers. "If I were a woman," declares one teenage boy, "I'd let all three of you have me, one after the other." Someone else raises a hand. "Could you give us some background into Spinal Tap's formation?" he asks. "You mean," says Shearer, "as if we were a real band?" And the audience cheer and thump the backs of the pews in approval.

Note: *Back From the Dead* is out on June 22, the anniversary DVD in September.

