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"Subtle Tonality in Su-Mei Tse's *Elegy* at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong"

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SUBTLE TONALITY IN SU-MEI TSE'S ELEGY AT EDOUARD MALINGUE GALLERY, HONG KONG

Art Exhibitions, Review• Abby McKenzie

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The Chinese and British artist Su-Mei Tse's latest exhibition, *Elegy* at Edouard Malingue Gallery, Hong Kong, is an engaging presentation of a multi-disciplinary practice that incorporates audio, installation, photography and sculpture to compose a body of work in which lyricism and the sensory moves to the fore. A classically trained [cellist](#) herself, studying at the Luxembourg Conservatory, Tse was raised in a musical family by a violinist father and pianist mother. For the duration of her later studies at the École Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Tse continued her musical studies, thereby informing her work through the infusion of the two mediums from the outset. The current exhibition at Edouard Malingue utilises this visaural language to present a series of works exploring a historical cultural aesthetic and the phenomenological perception.



Exhibition View, Sui-Mei Tse, *Elegy*, 2017, on view at Edouard Malingue Gallery, HongKong, Courtesy: The Artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery

A Composition of Echoes and Sequential Tones

As the title of the exhibition suggests, Su-Mei Tse's work is underscored by a **profound lyrical sensibility and musicality**. In *Elegy*, this lyricism takes the form of a subtle series of sonorous associations. Moving throughout the gallery, the viewer experiences the soft sound of the flowing ink from the fountain *Many Spoken Words* (2007-2017), a base note that reverberates throughout many of the other pieces within the space. However, despite this, the most perceptible influence of Tse's musical grounding is not in an overt auditory manner but rather a composition of echoes and sequential tones connecting each of the works in a harmonious expression of her central themes.

The works presented within *Elegy* have predominantly been inspired and composed during Tse's recent residency at the Villa Medici in Rome. In this respect, the influence of classicism is overt from the fountain of *Many Spoken Words* (2009-2017), the bust and sculpture of *Rome (Adriana)* and *Rome (Athena)* to the use of marble material in *Moon I* and *Moon II*. Within this, however, there is an abstraction of the iconography: the photographs of the objects are largely framed within blank backgrounds; the busts and sculptures themselves are fragmented from the whole; even the placement of the fountain within the gallery space is a rupture from the original context. The result is an **emancipation of the iconography from an authentic cultural context**. As such, Tse presents the objects at their preliminary stage in the process of cultural and artistic heritage, distilling said objects into material and aesthetic inspiration. In this sense, the fragments of "classical culture" are reduced to ingredients or bricks, the material in which innumerable differing narratives and images are formed. The overall consequence is a comment on the numerous ways in which artistic heritage has and continues to inspire.



Exhibition View, Sui-Mei Tse, *Elegy*, 2017, on view at Edouard Malingue Gallery, HongKong. Courtesy: The Artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery

A Cross-Sensorial Stimulation

In a similar vein, the treatment of these aesthetic influences investigates the associations between visual language, time and cultural tradition in a manner that highlights both **interloping commonality** and the **individualism of perception and experience**. The viewer encounters a series of references to Tse's time in *Rome* from photographs, revisited techniques and materials; however, the overall image is fractured, a collage of memory, distanced and mediated through a lens. The effect is heightened by the notable use of mirrors in many of the works, further splintering the impression from Tse's memory and further abstracting the viewer's perception. This aspect is particularly strong within *The Pond* (2015), in which the viewer stands over a photographic diptych of lilies within still, opaque water, layered with reflective glass. When considering the mythological references to Narcissus, alongside the hyper-reflective material of the piece, one can examine the idea that the piece intends to **evaluate the inescapable reality of psychological projection upon the perception of aesthetics, time and cultural-memory**.

Ultimately, it is the subtly layered, thematic exploration and cross-sensorial stimulation that are most interesting within Tse's practice. *Elegy*, in particular, is an evocative presentation of her multi-tonal work. From a curatorial perspective, the exhibition is notably substantive; her current body of work an authoritative, interrelated narrative on the process of cultural inspiration, disintegration and rejuvenation through forgetting and reinterpretation.

Elegy runs through 13th May 2017 at **Edouard Malingue Gallery**, Hong Kong.



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Featured images: Tse Su-Mei – *A Whole Universe (Pomegranate)*, 2017. Fresh fruit, wooden shelf, 26 x 18 x 4 cm; *Many Spoken Words*, 2009-2017. Installation, ink, stone and iron casted fountain center piece, 110 x 110 x 200 cm, Diameter 350 cm. Unique. Courtesy: The Artist and Edouard Malingue Gallery.