

The Work and Wardrobe of Artist Catalina Ouyang

The stylish visual artist incorporates video, sculpture, and other media to create striking, thought-provoking works of art.

BY HELENE SAYAD OCTOBER 20, 2016 8:00 AM



PHOTOGRAPH BY KEVIN A. ROBERTS

Themes: “The locus of my practice is looking at the intersections of identity, gender, and sexuality, and it’s mostly from my vantage point. What does it mean to be a Chinese-American woman? I’m situating the question into wider narratives of cultural diaspora and this history of imperialist takeovers that affect us today, as well as my role as a nonwhite female in what has been predominantly a male canon.”

Inspiration: “Certain writers inform my work. The way I look at visual art is different from the way I look at reading, so I like to keep certain books in my studio to inform what I do. Anne Carson is one—she pulls from historical characters and revises them with a sort of irreverence.”

Hair: “I bleached it for about five years, so now the color is gradually growing out. I like the patina of it; it’s the same way I feel about my tattoos as they fade or bloom. I haven’t been to a salon since I was like 14; I’ve been doing it myself.”

Attire: “The top is from Priory, a Canadian collaborative. The pants I bought five years ago for \$1 at a night market in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The boots are from a London-based company called Irregular Choice; I bought them in Florence when I was studying abroad.”

Style Influences: “It’s hard to pinpoint any one influence. I don’t read fashion magazines or blogs. Usually when I change my hairstyle, it’s by necessity... I grow and change, and so does my style. These days, I am interested in interesting silhouettes, textures, odd cuts, and asymmetry. If I had the budget, my entire wardrobe might be Junya Watanabe, but it’s just as well that I don’t, because it forces me to be creative.”

Avatar: “I am working with this digital avatar named Kitty Tuna, which is my social media name. I created her when I was making a video in which Kitty Tuna and an avatar of artist Louise Bourgeois meet. In the video, the avatars flew into the technoscape, and they talked about art and their families and love. That’s how the avatar was born, and now she has evolved into this form that is a blue-eyed monk; it’s in keeping with this loose, allegorical investigation of identity and cultural loss, as well as the question of what one holds sacred.”

Media: “I grew up drawing and painting...and I was encouraged to read theory and explore other mediums, like video. It was never a conscious decision to work in sculpture or 3-D, but organically it made sense. When I am thinking about a body of work—be it sculpture or digital collage—I’ll in some way incorporate painting... It’s its own vocabulary.”

Marble: “I recently did a residency in Portugal. I arrived without a concrete plan, but I knew there was marble there and I wanted to explore the experience of carving it. I loved working with the material of classical antiquity—of Michelangelo, Rodin, and Brâncuși. I became interested in the performance aspect of chiseling... I literally filled my suitcase with marble. I have a new body of work that will be showing at The Millitzer Studio & Gallery in early December.”