

Framing Phantasm

Kevin Chin | Aimee Fairman | Lucy Griggs
Curated by Simone Hine



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Half-remembered dreams and distant memories have very disparate origins. A dream, an unconscious imagining created as if by chance, could not be any more different from an event that has occurred and been recalled in memory. Yet, both have an indefinable formal quality that links them. Existing only in each individual's perception, both retain a sense of immediacy despite their impalpable form. And both have moments of clarity that are coupled with a murky sense of absence.

Dreams and memory are a well trodden area of discussion; perhaps most notably these intangible acts of the mind have formed the basis of psychoanalysis. However, my concern in bringing the works of Kevin Chin, Lucy Griggs and Aimee Fairman together in *Framing Phantasm* is not to understand the nature or purpose of dreams and memory, but is instead to playfully explore the intangible qualities of this ubiquitous presence.

The series of paintings by Chin sit somewhere between dreams and memory. *Little Pieces (Orange Wagon)* looks as though it might depict a market: animals are strung up and fruit stacked, presumably to be sold. This image suggests the type of memories associated with travel as everyday sights can appear unfamiliar and thus noteworthy to a traveller. Following on from this, *Little Pieces (Bricks)* combines an unusual multi-coloured mound, in close proximity to an intricate street topiary and a circular ruin. In contrast, the fox in *Little Pieces (Fox)* presents a less natural scene. This detail appears almost surreal as the suspended fox seems paused in motion as it hangs above an open well. The three paintings combine to create the feeling that we are looking at the same place from different vantage points. However, the subtle slippages between the ordinary and fantastical create a delicate mix of commonplace moments and strange happenings typical of dream states.

The three watercolours by Griggs that constitute *Reckoning Time* have been developed from a street photograph taken by the artist in Singapore. While these works have their origin in memory and the captured moment, Griggs has embellished the world with her own imaginings. Two of the paintings depict an ordinary scene of a man tending to a potted tree. Again, we might think of memories of travel, this time, a traveller trying to identify something quintessential about a given place. However, one of the three paintings depicts a dragon emerging from the soil of a potted tree; the man continues to tend the tree as though oblivious to the fantastical nature of what is before him. Like *Little Pieces (Fox)*, this painting gives cause to re-examine the other two paintings. The inclusion of the fantastical creature in one of the paintings creates a dream-like air across all three works as we are invited into a world that may not be what it first appears. In this way *Reckoning Time* seems to conflate the process of painting as the layering of pigment, with the layers of embellishment that make up a dream.

Both Chin and Griggs isolate the figures and objects they depict by only painting fragments of the scene. Figures seem to float upon the canvas and paper without context. Chin's paintings feel as though there is a larger scene that we are not privy to, which evokes the erasure of detail by memory, or perhaps the concealment of details in its re-telling. The figures that inhabit Griggs's work on the other hand, seem to sit as complete scenes despite their isolation from context, evoking the unconscious combination of imaginings and memory.

For both these artists the edge of the canvas or paper does not create the edge of our vision; instead this occurs within the borders of the work. The artists literally isolate small details of a scene and in so doing create the effect of a forgotten or partially realised scene. The combination of detail and absence invites the viewer to elaborate upon what is present in the work, in much the same way as a memory or dream develops as it is told and re-told.

Fairman's series of sculptures, *Lithocardites*, provide a counterpoint to Chin's and Griggs's works, as the sculptures embrace the kitsch aesthetic of fantasy genres. Unanchored from lived experience, these objects appear to be not of this world. Instead the strangeness of the forms suggests the unspecified nature of a dream state, open to whatever forms the mind can conceive and the artist can construct. Although Fairman's strange objects do not have a referent in the natural world, the craft materials from which they are composed appeals to our material knowledge of the past through the lived experience of childhood play.

The combination of the glass domes and craft objects suggests that we may be looking at a botanical specimen removed from a B-grade film. The use of glass domes to contain and isolate these strange forms appears to be in vain, as the specimens ooze beyond the imposed border. The combination of overgrown organisms and glass domes creates the impression that the viewer is looking at a moment in the uncontrollable evolution of the forms. This replicates the way unconscious thought seems limitless because it is not bound by the natural world. In contrast to Chin and Griggs's isolated details, Fairman invites the viewer to embellish the work beyond what is present in the gallery by showing the border of the work to be already engulfed by her specimens.

Each artist in *Framing Phantasm* invites the viewer to suspend belief in order to enter their partially formed or partially obscured worlds and to embellish the blank spaces left by the artists. There is a familiarity about each of the works which echoes the indefinable quality that dreams and memory share.

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beam contemporary

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Front Cover Image: Lucy Griggs (2013) "Reckoning Time 1", Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery
Back Cover Image: Kevin Chin (2009) "Little Pieces", Courtesy of the artist and dianne tanzer gallery + projects
Overleaf: Aimee Fairman (2013) "Lithocardites", Courtesy of the artist