

# PERES PROJECTS



## SHUANG LI

Daria Miricola– Coeval Magazine – January 11, 2024



**Daria Miricola:** Currently on view at Peres Projects, your latest show, *Forever*, looks back at the cult era of emo bands as My Chemical Romance. Often labeled by the mainstream media as an alienated, troubled, and misfit youth, these bands' fanbases have blossomed new forms of queer desire and creativity in the digital realm. How did the notions of fandom and fan art influence you personally and stylistically?

**Shuang Li:** Growing up in a small town in China, the only form of fandom I had access to was the My Chemical Romance message board/forum. We were all inspired by the message in MCR's work – unlike most emo bands who just sing about how sad they are, MCR starts there, but it takes you somewhere else. On these forums, I was encouraged to write and to create in general. Looking back, it was where my language started taking shape.

**Daria Miricola:** I have always been interested in the way emo pop-punk artists and bands have challenged the most heteronormative and masculine-encoded genres within the music industry. As your focus is on who's on the other side of the stage, how do you think this phase has shaped the aesthetic imagery of today's fandom and fangirls in particular?

**Shuang Li:** My Chemical Romance, particularly Gerard Way, has long been regarded as a queer icon. In fact, I once encountered a fan who initiated a project called "MCR Trans Flag," dedicated to collecting stories from trans fans about how My Chemical Romance has positively impacted their lives.

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The perception of a fan or fandom has evolved significantly. Initially, a fangirl was often stereotyped as someone shallow and frivolous. However, over time, this stereotype has transformed into a more nuanced understanding. Fans are now viewed as individuals with agency, and fandom itself has emerged as a substantial platform, providing a sense of empowerment to the community.



**Daria Miricola:** Your work *Heart is a Broken Record* (2023) is a fountain around which the exhibited corpus of work gravitates. As a centerpiece, a fountain keeps together different sides of the emo identity. On the one hand, it recalls a very romantic and picturesque scenario, but at the same time, and opposed to this, it is also an aesthetic trope of suburban shopping malls. Can you tell me what inspired the choice of this subject?

**Shuang Li:** I'm happy that the work's aesthetic resonates, as it was my intention, albeit subconsciously. In one of my initial meetings with the producer for the fountain, I was asked about the kind of finishing I envisioned. Without hesitation, I replied, 'a fountain you would find in a shopping mall.' This choice aims to create an intriguing contrast with the Neoclassical architecture of the gallery, Palazzo Belgioioso, and the rich history and culture of Milan as a city. Drawing the aesthetics from the most generic contemporary architectures as shopping malls, the fountain, placed here, is almost a non-object itself. I hope it can function like a vortex.

I've primarily experienced the fandom through digital and immaterial channels, much like this fountain reflecting a parallel world. I've witnessed bands going on tour through YouTube and lived Warped Tour vicariously through MySpace posts, as if I was watching an alternate reality. While traditional wishing wells may hold coins, this one contains a concert that will never start – a compilation from edited YouTube videos capturing the brief moments before bands appear on stage.

**Daria Miricola:** Functioning as a screen projecting YouTube-found videos of My Chemical Romance's concerts, *Heart is a Broken Record* (2023) conjures the action of filming as an authorial gesture that turns a fan into an artist on their own. And then there is the idea of a fountain being a reflective platform where our image is mirrored, more or less like a fan seeks a role model to identify with—can you tell me more about how the fan-idol relationship is at play in this show?

Shuang Li: It involves a bit of iconoclasm, considering that a crucial aspect of being a fan or forming a fandom is the absence of the idol. Yet, it is within this absence that fascinating mutations occur. Witnessing the accomplishments of fans and fandoms, myself included, extends beyond the realms of pop culture

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to impact politics and economics. Examples include K-pop fans intervening in a Trump rally a few years ago and Taylor Swift fans unintentionally preventing a recession by buying concert tickets, the latter with exaggeration, I assume.

Fan art is where I started, and I believe it deserves proper credit. Through my work, I consistently strive to recreate the gothic lyricism I firsthand experienced with emo music. The relationship between fans and idols used to be unilateral and hierarchical, but now it's situated in a flattened media landscape, which will definitely bring fundamental changes.



**Daria Miricola:** I'd love to know more about the series of wall works on view encapsulating traces of the fandom fashion and consumer vocabulary. Being that emo has often been accused of being a sellout subculture, I think these bits and pieces reveal a tension between the notion of conformism vs. non-conformism and authenticity vs. inauthenticity...

**Shuang Li:** Emo didn't happen in a vacuum – it coincided with the booming era of shopping malls at the dawn of late capitalism. These days one barely calls anyone or anybody sellout anymore, it's now an outdated concept, just like the term subculture itself. Mark Leckey can pinpoint the context of Fiorucci Made Me Hardcore (1999) to working-class youth, but such a clear classification isn't possible today. You go to an underground club in Shanghai or Berlin and there will be all kinds of kids with a wide range of backgrounds. Today subcultures seamlessly blend and meld on platforms like TikTok, creating a landscape where constant remixing and reproduction make it difficult to distinguish the origins of cultural elements.

It is a tension to be labeled as sellout while starting off as a subculture that expresses the sentiment of being rejected by the world. But usually, the most personal can be the most universally relatable.