

FRIEZE

Shuang Li's Ode to Fangirls

At Peres Projects, Milan, the artist's recent video continues her focus on the emo band My Chemical Romance

BY GIOVANNA MANZOTTI IN EXHIBITION REVIEWS | 25 JAN 24



You can hear the screams and the music before you even enter the gallery. Emanating from the 11-minute video *Heart Is a Broken Record* (2023), by Berlin-based Chinese artist Shuang Li, they form the soundtrack to a montage of footage shot at My Chemical Romance concerts by fans and uploaded onto YouTube. It's easy to imagine the young girls who made these films crammed together at the front of the stage willing their heroes to appear. By only using footage from the moments leading up to the start of the concerts, the artist creates an atmosphere heavy with longing for an event that, in her version, never transpires. The work alternates these scenes with images of blood spots, veins and lava pouring out of a volcano: a climax of organic fluids that acts as a metaphor for the visceral devotion which characterizes the culture of fandom.

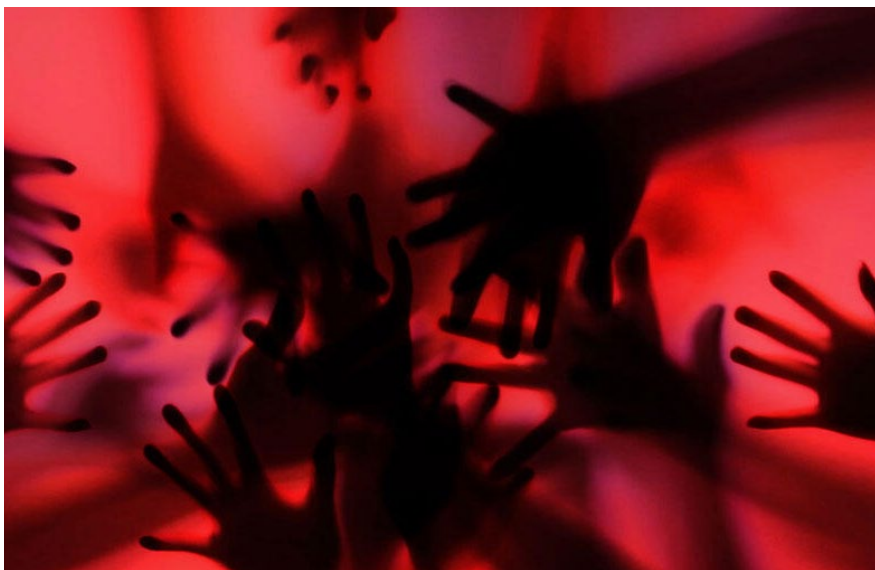
Heart Is a Broken Record – the central work in 'Forever', Li's third solo exhibition at Peres Projects – acts as a tribute to the artist's own fanhood. She often claims in interviews that listening to My Chemical Romance not only taught her English but even saved her life. As she told *Coeval Magazine* in January: '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 [...] On these forums, I was encouraged to write and to create in general. Looking back, it was where my language started taking shape.' The video is screened on the base of a heart-shaped fountain or wishing well, creating the illusion of images swirling and floating up to the surface of the water like fleeting emotional snapshots of fandom.

Installed around the fountain are a number of wall-mounted works and floor-based sculptures that further explore the relationship between screen and body, image and illusion, a recurring focus of Li's practice. The eight wall-hung pieces comprise selections of trinkets, charms, plastic pearls, fabrics and the artist's own handwritten texts preserved under dense layers of acrylic paint and resin. *Famous Last Words* and *Can You Stake Me before the Sun Goes Down* (both 2023), for instance, are reminiscent of oversized

PERES PROJECTS

mobile phone screens on which both forms and messages remain frozen on the surface. Combining personal possessions with found objects, Li creates a narrative that reflects on the genre of portraiture in fan culture through souvenirs and gadgets that serve as surrogates for absent idols.

This theme is continued in two prints on mesh sandwiched between plexiglass panels (e.g. *Helena*, 2022) and three sculptures cast from deformed platform boots and leg warmers (e.g. *As Your Body Remains*, 2023), which reference a performance the artist staged for the group show 'Where Jellyfish Come From' at Antenna Space, Shanghai, in 2022. Unable to leave Europe to attend the exhibition in person due to pandemic travel restrictions, the artist instead hired 20 performers to dress as her – in My Chemical Romance T-shirts, shades, platform shoes and legwarmers – for *Lord of the Flies* (2022).



Speaking to our desires and obsessions, the works in 'Forever' act as emotional triggers that prompt us to reflect upon how – and, arguably, whether – reality can be parsed from the fiction of the digital realm in which we increasingly inextricably reside.

Shuang Li's 'Forever' is on view at Peres Projects, Milan, until 2 February