

conveyor





*Beauty 02 Quadriptych, 2012*

In *Beauty*, a series of double portraits, it becomes clear that the aesthetic conventions of ideal beauty are becoming more and more enigmatic. Today, physical beauty is not only inspired by symmetry, style, youthfulness, and the outward perfection of oneself, but by the incorporation of various ancestral backgrounds. Claiming that modernization has influenced the social and cultural values of many Asian women, Beijing-based artist CYJO creates newfound paradigms of beauty. Disguising this complication of identity as straightforward documentation, she surreptitiously questions the desire to look “more Western,” a desire which has led to facial surgery for decades.

Photoshop’s tools are, in many ways, like a surgeon’s instruments. The amalgamations of features can be interpreted as

exercises in physical modification, the result of interracial generations, or perhaps purely as computer-simulated fantasies. The doubling that occurs in the familiar “before and after” trope acts as a mirror of possibilities; subtle shifts of an eyelid or the structure of the nose solidify a slow shift of conventions. Evidenced in this perceptual dance, both plastic surgeons and Photoshop retouchers manipulate the real in ways that might be subtle to the eye but drastic in their social effects. The digital manipulation, however, can remain frozen forever for further scrutiny, while physical changes inevitably fade through aging or overlapping modifications. The tools in both processes, though, allow our perception of reality to be deceived and in turn influence the social relationships between those who may be swayed by these images or perceptions.

Rather than having the doubling effect serve simply as a “before and after” testimonial, CYJO’s *Beauty* begins to act as a collective composite, showing the multiple meanings and intentions that can form as individuals alter themselves in relation to a driving trend. As it does in passports or mug shots, the portrait links an individual to a set of material truths. However, it also identifies and documents, more globally, the relationship between the very definition of beauty and the deception inherent in shaping it. Changing trends and ideals skim the surface of modern life, but there is something deeper and more telling of our globalized society in the depths below. The depths are certainly palpable here in CYJO’s treatment of complex beauty. Perhaps the biggest surprise lies in which version or versions of it we now would accept as ideal.







