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AN INTERNATIONAL PUBLICATION FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

• April 6, 2014 Written by [admin](#)

Yee I-Lann: Picturing Power at Tyler Rollins Fine Art

Shotgun Reviews are an open forum where we invite the international art community to contribute timely, short-format responses to an exhibition or event. If you are interested in submitting a Shotgun Review, please [click this link](#) for more information. In this Shotgun Review, Bansie Vasvani reviews Picturing Power at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York City



Yee I-Lann's solo exhibition *Picturing Power* at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, is an emphatic act of subversion. Her black-and-white photomontages, made from two centuries of archival images of the Dutch and British colonization of Malaysia, present a reengagement with reality

through a new language of alterity. For Yee, the exposure and visibility of the past create a vocabulary that focuses on emancipation and justice.

In Picturing Power: Wherein one surreptitiously performs reconnaissance to collect views and freeze points of view to be reflective of one's own kind (2013), shrouded black figures posed as 19th-century photographers are juxtaposed with a comic scene of colonizers standing below large, overturned tables. Set against a stark white background, these incongruous figures symbolize colonial suppression. In Yee's work, recurring images of tables represent transactions, power, and control. The inversion of these objects becomes a strong metaphor for the reversion of power from centuries of repression. More importantly, the dark, haunting, ghost-like figures appear to be voyeurs looking into the past and upending memories of hard times and the subjugation of the colonized. Here the artist's language demands a heightened level of representation that is both humorous and a clearly articulated negative critique.

In Picturing Power: Wherein one nods with political sympathy and says I understand you better than you understand yourself, I'm just here to help you help yourself (2013), hundreds of native Malaysians line up in quiet acquiescence behind one of their oppressors, portraying life in the colonies at the time. Yee's ironic titles, dripping with sarcasm, compel the viewer to visualize an era of dogmatic coercion. *Picturing Power: Wherein one cultivates cultural codes, the noble endeavors of mankind and thereby puts them in their place* (2013) presents the native woman whose long tresses transform her into the stereotypical mythological enchantress. Seated against a backdrop of spice plantations, which were the most lucrative colonial trade, the figure—with her lengthy, unruly hair—is symbolic of the classic temptress who had to be controlled.

While the eight images from *Picturing Power* use historical mimesis to expose colonial inequities as a constructive expunging exercise, *Tabled* (2013), from a previous exhibition titled *Suspended Histories*, has a conciliatory tone. Images of current life in Malaysia, representing entrepreneurship, freedom, and mobility, are printed on dinner plates referencing

blue China from the Dutch and British colonial periods. Neon-colored outlines of embracing figures in *The Sun will rise in the East and deliver us from this long night* (2012) seem to suggest reconciliation as the best path toward retribution. At the end, the viewer is left with the indelible mark of history on Malaysia and the strength of its people to move on.

Yee I-Lann: *Picturing Power runs through April 12 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art in New York.*

Bansie Vasvani is an art historian and critic. She lives in New York City.