

Art in Review

Yee I-Lann

'Picturing Power'

Tyler Rollins Fine Art
529 West 20th Street, Chelsea
Through Saturday

Born in Malaysia in 1971 and now living in Kuala Lumpur, the capital, Yee I-Lann has been widely exhibited in Southeast Asia and in Australia. Now she is making her New York debut with this small, tight show of work that, like a lot of art worth thinking about, reflects and transcends where and when it was made.

Two photographs are excerpts from a 2003 series of pictures based on the stark image of an unbroken horizon line. The Japanese photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto has imbued this theme with an air of Buddhist equanimity, but Ms. Yee does the opposite. Her ash-gray-and-black panoramas carry a sense of threat. In one picture, distant high-rise buildings push over the horizon like the advance troops of an invading army, their full strength not yet visible.

For nearly two centuries, Malaysia was under the thumb of Western imperialism, and Ms. Yee's work returns repeatedly to ethnic tensions and economic inequities generated by that encounter. In a series of 2013 photomontages titled "Picturing Power," she mixes colonial-era and contemporary images to suggest a Malaysian present still dictated by a complicated and unresolved past. The subject is heavy, but Ms. Yee's pictures are light, ghostly, leaving the didactic work to the lengthy titles.

An abstract-looking series from 2012 with a single long title — "The sun will rise in the East and deliver us from this long night" — wears its politics still more gently. For these pictures, Ms. Yee harvested photos of embracing couples from the Internet and erased the figures except for their interlocked arms. Their shapes ingeniously spell out the words of the title, though a string of embraces across a wall speaks a universal language of its own.

HOLLAND COTTER



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A Malaysian present dictated by an unresolved past: a photomontage from Yee I-Lann's "Picturing Power" series at Tyler Rollins.