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Three Artists Contemplate Coming-of-Age in a Harlem Exhibition



Left: Sami Tsang's "Hot Tea Melts Me Down" (2022). Right: Ebony Russell's "Decorative Urn: Pink and Useless" (2022) and "Decorative Urn: Blue and Hopeless" (2022). From left: © Samie Tang; © Ebony Russell. Courtesy of the artists and Claire Oliver Gallery

By Roxanne Fequiere

Girlhood can be a prickly thing. The artists featured in "Teetering on the Brink: Femininity, Inheritance and Disaster," a new exhibition at Claire Oliver Gallery in Harlem, explore the friction that occurs when childhood innocence meets gendered expectations. "Many people come to my work and are tantalized by its saccharine and overtly feminine qualities," says Ebony Russell, an Australian artist whose intricate porcelain pieces are inspired by her favorite childhood ceramic figurines and call to mind a cake with icing applied to the point of near collapse. "But the more you look at it, the more you see the menacing underlying subversion." Suyao Tian, a Chinese artist based in Minnesota, draws on the gulf between her childhood love of nature and the rigidity of her upbringing in China to produce watercolors that channel botanical illustrations and the unexpected beauty of bacteria cultures. Rounding out the group show is Sami Tsang, an artist with roots in both Toronto and Hong Kong, who approaches her practice as "a personal diary of my past and future," she says. Her sculptures occupy a liminal space between the whimsical and the grotesque, like "Take a Good Look at Yourself" (2020), a plump, pastel visage that reveals more than one pair of menacing eyes within it. "Growing up in a traditional Chinese household, my opinion didn't matter, because I'm the youngest and the girl in the family," Tsang says of her drive to express her inner world. "It's been a very slow journey of being brave and adding [that] to my work." "Teetering on the Brink: Femininity, Inheritance and Disaster" will be on view at Claire Oliver Gallery from March 15 through May 11, claireoliver.com.