



**"Robert Bittenbender with  
Joseph Geagan, Julien Ceccaldi,  
Andrea Fourchy, Valerie Keane,  
Bradley Kronz, Maggie Lee,  
Taocheng Wang"**

Greene Naftali  
25.6. – 14.8.2015

by Harry Burke



**Robert Bittenbender**  
Untitled, 2015  
Mixed media, 191 x 125 x 15 cm

New York, if you ask many older artist, critic and curator residents (as well as some younger protagonists) is over. It's no longer a place suited to experimental or progressive cultural production. Whilst appealing as a social and economic provocation – it is true that many Western cultural centres have shut their doors to residents making a living from creating difference – this is not the most interesting way to frame the artistic production that is still occurring, as it preemptively negates artistic agency of the type on display at this beautiful group show at Greene Naftali's 7th floor space on 26th Street in Chelsea.

A wordy and expendable press release proposed that a new generational attitude to identity informed the work in the show, one characterised by "something far more molecular" than "the accepted notion of a collective 'minority experience.'" Like the narrative of gentrification in New York itself, its top-down reading did a disservice to the art. Better to evaluate one's own reading of identity politics vs history here and move on.

Expressing an internal logic of excellence more than any strong structural critique, "Robert Bittenbender ..." was most successful when it freed space for the works themselves to do the exhibition's work; at heart it was a summer showcase of emerging artists, and was more rewarding to encounter on these terms. Amsterdam-based Taocheng Wang, the exhibition's sole artist not living in New York, presented meditative, dark and delicate mineral colour drawings of massage parlours on rice paper. A video of hers, *Reflection Paper N.1*, 2015, explored the production process of colour and paper, linking the formal poetics of her painting and drawing to the material ecologies that allow for more intangible artistic labour; a compelling awareness that was evidenced across the exhibition.

Julien Ceccaldi's paintings stood out too. He is by trade an illustrator, and transitioning this practice to canvas here scaled up his brooding, pleading characters in a way that felt pleasingly incongruous against the coolness of the white cube, and alluded to messy emotional realities in the midst of an otherwise clinical world. The star of the show, though, was Maggie Lee. She exhibited video work across multiple, personalised Sony TV sets that, although appearing at first glance cute, was deeply and darkly personal; constructed out of family video recordings and recordings of phone calls, it centred on the artist's recently deceased mother. Headphones were decorated with hair to become cartoonish wigs once worn by the viewer, and trinkets decorated the television sets, creating movies as micro-environments that wrenched you back into the powerful and productive hope and emotional instability of childhoods past.

Summer group exhibitions are often opportunities for the reshuffling of art world hierarchies, and new names here emerged like clockwork out of a gallery that's built the market position to insert emerging artists into some sort of bigger art-world system. Yet there can still occasionally be a small sublimity in encountering artwork that is fresh, well produced, and cognisant of its construction as such. If the next generation's identity politics brings with it – as here – a return to artists who skilfully evaluate the material possibilities and the trappings of their craft as extensions of their own identity, then maybe there is hope in the art world after all.



**Maggie Lee**  
**Mommy, 2015**  
 Personalized Sony TV. Mommy/Green Naftali edit, 47 min.



**Julien Ceccaldi**  
**Fool Drawing Near, 2015**  
 Acrylic and charcoal on dura-lar, paper and tracing paper, 51 x 41 cm

All images: Courtesy of the artists and Greene Naftali, New York