

# BROOKLYN RAIL

## ELEEN LIN AND TAMMIE RUBIN: *MYTHODICAL*

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Eleen Lin, *Perils of Life*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 28 x 36 inches. Images courtesy of C24 Gallery and the artists.

In *Mythodical*, the heavens drip into the sea, horns hang from the ceiling in a silent siren, and marshy debris on canvas and entangled sculpture suggest mysteries unseen. This is the world built by painter Eelen Lin and ceramicist Tammie Rubin in their collaborative exhibition at C24. The space is drenched in a sense of story, nodding to the literary and consumerist myths Lin and Rubin set out to explore. The two wield color to lull us into a state of play, only to discover we might actually be drowning in a riptide. Lin and Rubin's work suggest the narratives that inform our lives come at a cost.



Eleen Lin, *Phantom of Life*, 2019. Oil and acrylic on canvas, 48 x 72 inches. Images courtesy of C24 Gallery and the artists.

Lin, a Taiwanese artist raised in Thailand, and Rubin, a Black ceramicist and educator, bring essential perspectives of the immigrant and minority experience to their work. Over the course of their exhibition, the initial stimulation of deeply-saturated colors and suggestive shapes slowly melts away, and we leave this *Midsummer's Night* fever-dream having to confront the moral of the story: the myths we live by have consequences.

The works on display in *Mythodical* were developed as independent projects by the artists, and brought together by curator and director David C. Terry. Lin's series of oil and acrylic paintings are part of her almost decade-long project investigating the mistranslations of *Moby-Dick* between English and Mandarin. This is not Lin's first project that contends with themes of myth and communication. Her "Pet Society" series applied Lin's signature collaged compositions to our domestic commune with animals: folkloric and pop-cultural references of man and beast romp along desolate highways and in camouflage folding chairs. While the whimsical stylings remain in Lin's "Mythopoeia" series on exhibit in *Mythodical*, the comedic undertones of "Pet Society" have been left behind. What remains is a deep, ethereal confrontation of the stories humans tell and what is lost in translation.

Rubin's sculptures, pulled from many of her series, including "Biomorphic" and "Silence Magical Thinking," contribute to this dialogue of myth. The slip-cast porcelain pieces of incongruous colors and patterns occupy tables and are suspended from above, standing (or hanging) approximately a foot tall, sometimes two. The works allude to religious totems, harbingers of death, and ceremonial accoutrements. There is also something Suessian about them. Her porcelain bubbles and clay funnels are decorated, bespoke with *fun*. These emblems of lore are eye-catching and wrapped in a veneer of kitsch that seems to ask: how much for this story? To grab it, buy it, consume it, make it mine? Themes of consumer culture have long been a focus of Rubin's work, who often repurposes mass-produced objects. Rubin theorizes, "the desire for sensory experiences, and feelings of dissatisfaction, mirrors a longing often felt in a consumer society."



Tammie Rubin, *Always & Forever (forever ever ever) No. 6*, 2021. Pigmented porcelain, underglazes, glaze, 10 x 24 x 10 inches.  
Images courtesy of C24 Gallery and the artists.

Rubin and Lin's work grip the viewer with something mystical and then invert the narrative. Lin's *Phantom of Life* (2019), a large oil and acrylic on canvas, depicts a figure standing proud in their boat amid a surging sea, seemingly rowing toward the heavens. The sea-foam green of the water is phosphorescent and foamy, and oceanic rings sparkle with dew drops that seem to mirror a galaxy. But hiding among the sea is a collage of limbs, toiling beneath the bow of the boat. Arms extend in all directions, seemingly in search of the surface. The sailor rows onward, toward his own heaven. New shades make themselves known on the canvas: putrid yellows and muddy browns mark the ship's trail through the water. This sailor's odyssey left casualties in its wake. Nods to fantastical childhood escapes also haunted me throughout the exhibit. Miyazaki-like creatures lurked over the surface of a lagoon and were drawn into the clouds in Lin's *Strange shapes of the unwarped primal world*, (2022) and its companion iteration *Strange shapes of the unwarped primal world*, (2020).

Rubin's work also plays into these primal curiosities and enchantments. Her works warp religious iconography with something more playful. In *The Beauty of Insignificance* (2014) multicolored spheres are stacked in vertical balance, evoking a fanciful rock stacking or a set of steeples from a dream.

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Once enveloped in the bait and switch of Lin and Rubin's playful works, we are confronted with the troubling truth of a lived myth: the pursuit of fabled ideals is paired with monsters. The *Mythodical* dream warps to nightmare in *Perils of life* (2022) and *Always & Forever (forever ever ever) No. 6* and *No. 7* (both 2021). In *Perils of life*, a raft floats on a seemingly still surface of inky, purple water. The raft is filled to the edges with figures entangled in an unforgiving rope. One is attempting to slip out, in forced pursuit of the sea. One edge of the raft deflates as ghostly tentacles graze its organ-like pink exterior. One cannot ignore how *Moby-Dick* and the modern migration crisis merge. The nautical journeys forced upon so many immigrants in pursuit of a better life can so often end in a scene reminiscent of Lin's *Perils*. In overcrowded, capsizing rafts, the white whale of a new life is elusive, and sometimes fatal. Rubin's *Always & Forever* pieces evoke their own ominous energy. Positioned on a table in the center of the exhibition, these masked cones are reminiscent of the Grim Reaper, executioners, the KKK—figures of fable and doctrine who conduct their gruesome intentions behind a mask of obscurity. Their 360-gaze over the exhibit drives home an important message; these myths are not child's play.

<https://brooklynrail.org/2022/04/artseen/Eleen-Lin-and-Tammie-Rubin-Mythodical>