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亚洲 ASIA

VISUAL CULTURE NOW 当下视觉文化

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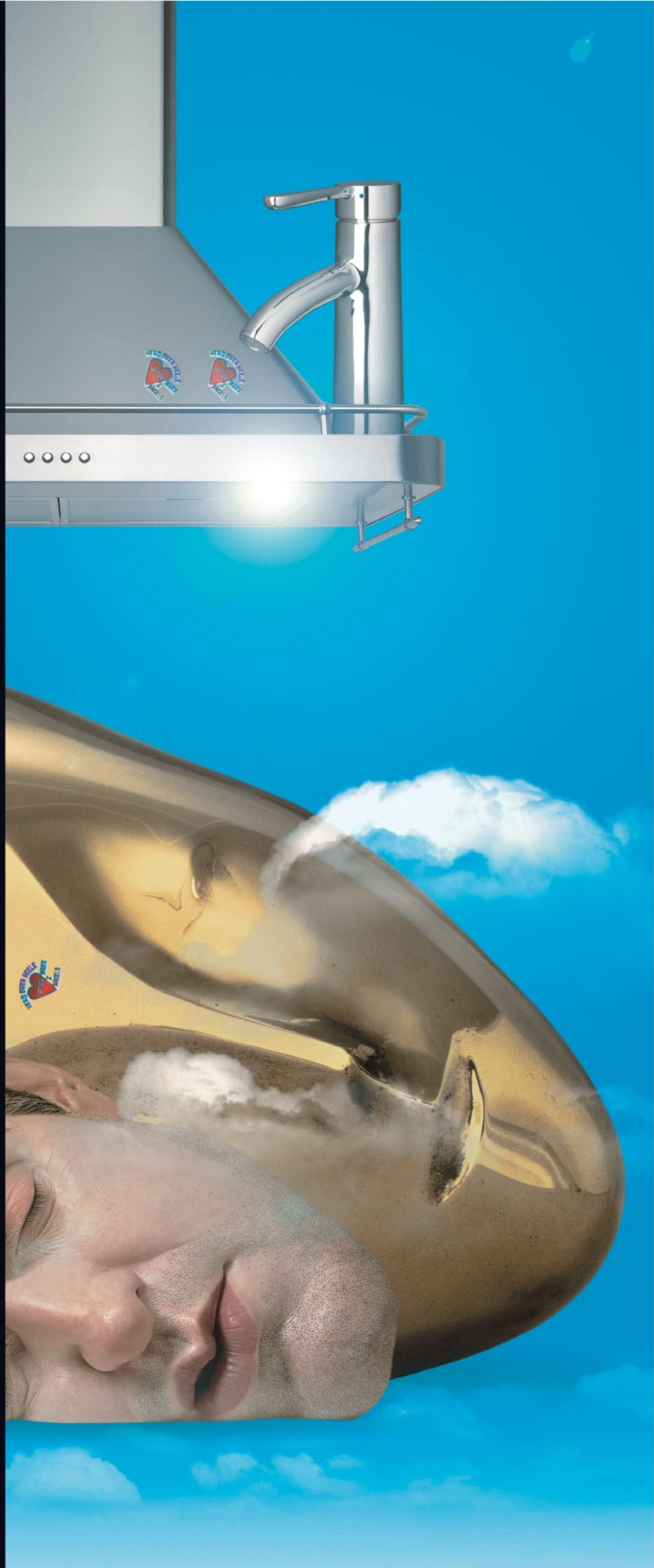
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# BEAUTY COMPLEX

## by Venus Lau

# 美颜复合体

## 文/刘秀仪

**As academia pays little to no attention to the fleeting beauty in pop culture, societies obsess over aesthetic standards, with artists delving into the depths of the surface.**

When one googles *mei* (“beauty”) in Chinese, the results present a combination of companies and venues with the word in their names, demarcating a semiotic landscape of the commendatory term whose meanings stem from the Chinese ideograms *yang* (“lamb”) and *da* (“big”). Googling “beauty” in English, meanwhile, one finds a staple of information about beauty industries—spas, cosmetics, skincare, fashion magazines—and commercial activities based on widespread aesthetic standards. Tellingly, however, search results for *images* of “beauty” in both languages are extremely similar. The realm of visual beauty, it would seem, is largely about *beauties*: women with alluring smiles, radiant skin and charming body figures. Beauty, then, is a pendulum swinging between relativisms: It is, on the one hand, about personal taste, a quality which lies in the eye of the beholder; at the same time, it is a cultural construct—or, in the opinion of comparative studies professor Ackbar Abbas, a cultural obsession, one that has to do with what is agreeable and tolerable, with discrepancies arising when encountering geopolitical boundaries.

Beauty is not a synonym of simple pleasure. Marie Rainer Rilke’s popular quote, “For beauty is nothing but the beginning of terror which we are barely able to endure” (*Duino Elegies*), reflects the complicated affinity between beauty and horror—two enemies growing into each other’s bodies. Rilke’s comment on beauty serves as an explicit diagnosis on how aesthetic standards are superimposed on human bodies, with foot binding as only one “outstanding” example. Theodore Adorno proposed a similar notion of beauty, close to Rilke’s beauty-terror recipe, in which beauty is a sublimation of ugliness that is “historically old,”—an aesthetic representation of fear. Jean-Luc Nancy’s beauty transcends personal taste, inducing desires overriding the object of beauty, with Caravaggio’s *Narcissus* offered as a case in point. In the painting, the mythical character stares at his own reflection on the surface of the dark water. It is common knowledge that he is going to pay for his self-obsession: His own gaze pulls himself down into the depths beyond his image, depths reminiscent of Graham Harman’s notions of “allure”—an intermittent separation revealing a gap between and beyond an object’s qualities and itself.

Philosophical investigations of beauty—whose inherent, intimate connection with art is the reason behind this text—are elevated to an ontological occupation, a pursuit of the transcendental and

**尽管学术界很少或几近不关注流行文化中转瞬即逝、瞬息万变的美，社会却对审美标准抱有迷恋，有艺术家突破表面进行深入探索。**

汉字“美”的谷歌搜索结果纷杂，除了词义阐释（包括它与“羊”的关系），也有含“美”字的地名、商户、股票消息和博客等，测绘“美”字作为褒义词的广泛应用和其符号学地貌。“BEAUTY”的搜索结果则集与美容相关的讨论和商业资料—SPA地址、化妆品网上订购站、美容杂志……二者的图片搜索结果则出奇地相似，主要是笑意娉婷、皮光肉滑、身材曼妙的女性，美似乎关乎主观判断，但又牵涉普同性，百人眼中有百美，但关乎差异至于又暗藏各种美学标准的普同性，是摇摆着的相对主义。美是文化产物，甚至如学者阿巴斯 (ACKBAR ABBAS)所言，是“文化迷恋”。当碰上地缘政治界限时，美是对标准的一致性和对差异的宽容之间的角力场。

美并非单纯的快慰，里尔克被多番引用的“因为美无非是我们仅能承受的恐怖的开端”（《杜伊诺哀歌》），明言美伴随着可怖，像两个敌人深陷彼此身体。它的表征是整容缠足等美的标准硬压于身体。和里尔克的论调相似，阿多诺 (THEODORE ADORNO)将美丑相提并论，认为美是对比其更历史悠久的丑陋所描摹的恐惧的升华。南希 (JEAN LUC NANCY)眼中的美超越了个人品味，它诱发出的欲望超越了美的载体本身，借以陈述的例子时卡拉瓦齐的《纳西索斯》，少年临水自照的，注视暗昧水面的倒影，希腊神话迷知道少年为自恋所付的代价，对自己的凝视将他拉进自身图像后的欲望深度，就像哈尔門 (GRAHAM HARMAN)的“魅诱”概念，是物和其特质的断续性脱钩，这些不连续的空缺或者就是所谓的深处。

哲学家和他们发展的美学，侃侃而谈对超越的、升华、在时间之外的美，但对流行文化短暂的美不屑一顾。他们心中的美，不管是建筑的（狮身人面像）、自然的（如天虹）、还是艺术的（《蒙罗丽莎》）似乎也要和永恒并肩—并非它们永生不灭，而是它们的美超越了时间，起码是人类可以想象的规模的时间。类似的意见再艺术圈并不罕见，就算当代艺术，所注意的是永恒的当下，而不是短暂的时尚新陈代谢。中国艺术家黄

# The realm of visual beauty, it would seem, is largely about beauties: women with alluring smiles, radiant skin and charming body figures.

the sublime outside of time (or at least the time scale of human lives, as epitomized by the enduring images of the *Mona Lisa*, the rainbow or the Great Sphinx of Giza), with little attention paid to the fleeting and changing beauty in pop culture, relegated to the definition of “pretty.” Just as philosophers are less concerned with beings than with “Being,” academic notions of beauty make strong distinctions between the quality itself and the objects said to embody it. The intermittent gap between the objects and its qualities (including functionality) is not “deep” enough in this kind of beauty, but this “superficial” gap still provides a space to delve in, like Paul Valery’s praise of the depth of skin. Similar thoughts are not uncommon in the art world, whose metabolic cycle is longer than fashion’s, leaving artists to look at an eternal present. Huang Ran, for example, works closely with fashionable elegance without being devoured by the commercial disposition of the industry. Huang collaborated with his wife Lucia Liu, a renowned Chinese fashion stylist, on his film *Administration of Glory*, which was nominated for Short Film Palme d’Or at Cannes in 2014. An eerie elegance is also seen in his early work *Blithe Tragedy*, a short film whose non-linear narrative features only an intense, silent exchange between two characters with heavy makeup on their faces.

The concept of beauty in Asian societies (as represented by pop cultures) largely conforms to the agreeable/difference dialectic. Pale skin has long been a mainstream pursuit in the region’s history, especially in East Asia, although the shades of white are not always same: Ancient Japanese of the Heian period praised powdery, snowy white faces (one can still get the idea through the Noh masks), while in the Tang dynasty of China, the beauty standard was faces whitened by lead or rice powder and then loaded with heavy blush on chubby cheeks. Recent definitions of beauty in Asia seem to be homogenized for men and women alike: In Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam and Thailand alike, we see faces geared with Caucasianized double eyelids, thick eyelashes, pointy chins, large irises adorned by dazzling color contacts, straight celestial noses, colorful, curly hair and overly plump *aegyo-sai* (“eye smiles,” a type of eye bag believed



然并不回避作品与时尚的靠近，但又不被时尚机制侵蚀。2014年的戛纳参赛作品《对荣耀的管理》就是与其妻子 – 出色的中国时尚造型师LUCIA LIU合作的产物。他更早的录像作品《愉悦悲剧》也表现出同样荒诞又优雅的美感 – 两位演员脸上的雪白浓妆，掩盖了其叙述的角色，他们的美和其叙述的缺乏，构成了一种浅层断裂，这种“浅层”的不接续不代表肤浅，反而是像瓦雷里对皮肤的礼赞的表皮深度。

亚洲区美的“同与异”矛盾历史悠久 – 东亚地区多追捧雪白肤色，但唐代中国在白之上好重施胭脂的红，和日本平安时代的纯白又有差异。近年韩国流行文化席卷亚洲，经由大众娱乐推动的资本流通“美人”的标准越发。“欧式“宽双眼皮”、浓密的长睫毛、尖下巴、美瞳下装点炫丽虹膜、染色卷长发、异常饱满的卧蚕 – 在亚洲人身上少见的外貌特征是现在整容的基本配套，打堆砌看似混血儿甚至漫画人物的“美人”，在整容和PS技术发达和普及后可以大量生产，人们也渐渐习惯选美参赛者面容相似。那些建构在想象的国籍上的轮廓，链接为与血缘无关的虚构之网。虽然医学美容填充剂（如玻尿酸）让整容之路平坦一些，但也不如修图般轻松。韩国艺术家JI YEO的摄影系列《复原室》展示处于整容手术复原期的韩国女子，她们有些是半裸的，有





# Dominant aesthetics are effectively disseminated by the mass media and made achievable by the advancement in cosmetic surgery and easy access to Photoshop.

to signify youthfulness and sex appeal in Chinese physiognomy). Most of these facial features are uncommon to Asian faces, but may be found on Asian-Caucasian mix, or even manga characters. Still, these aesthetics are effectively disseminated by the mass media and made achievable by the advancement in cosmetic surgery and easy access to Photoshop; jokes about indiscernible Miss Korea candidates went viral on the Internet, and the prosopagnosia quickly spread to other Asian countries. Shared facial features based on an imaginary mixture of different races are the knots in an imagined network constructed by similar faces from disparate bloodlines. Even though the invention of filler injection (like hyaluronic acid) makes the path to beauty less thorny, cosmetic transformation through plastic surgery is no fairy tale. Ji Yeo's *Recovery Room* is a photographic series documenting women experiencing recovery from plastic surgery in Korea—a country with the highest rate of such medical procedures per capita. The women are half-naked and bandaged, some of them are in pressure suit, some of them are hooked to drainage tubes. They seem emotionless, yet the blood stains are there to remind viewers the pain.

Rhytidectomies (or “facelifts”), another radical means of corporeal transformation, involve a logic of subtraction, surgically reducing aging signs and sagging skin dragged by time and gravity force through a process not unlike mounting canvas onto frame. But professional makeup sometimes saves people a bloody trip. Singaporean cosmetic artist Zing is famous not only for collaborating with Asian divas like Faye Wong, but also for renewing makeup as a concept. Instead of “perfecting” the skin condition or facial features of his clients, Zing treats the face as a canvas and membrane to contemplate the relationship between the artist and his subject. Painting is built on a physical flatness linked to a multitude of depths—from illusory space based on linear perspectives to the psychological profoundness under the “tautness of feelings,” as David Joselit (via Greenberg) once suggested. Painterly surfaces are seen as *tabula rasa*, homogeneous planes in which their objecthood is

些则被压力衣和绷带包裹，甚至插着引流管，目无表情的面下的身体却隐有血迹，提醒观者她们的痛。

拉皮是整容手术中较为激烈的一种，通过改动皮肤和筋膜等提升脸部轮廓。早期的拉皮手术涉及剪除松弛皮肤，情况犹如绷画框的减法。化妆提升轮廓免了新加坡化妆师ZING不止因与天后王菲和刘嘉玲等人的合作闻名，也因为他的独特化妆概念。ZING的化妆术有别于一般化妆美化原有轮廓和肤质，却比较像绘画。绘画的深度建构始于平面性—不管是线性透视法的虚构三维，还是在物理平面上紧绷的情绪。绘画的悠久历史让绘画平面被抽象化为白板(TABULA RASA)。ZING画妆时面对的却是有轮廓的脸，经常以喷枪精准地开拓其地貌，甚至曾经以化妆色粉“砸”到模特脸上，消解化妆师和客户之间（哪怕是通过化妆工具）的接触，听起来有点像将颜色交付给随机性和地心吸力的行动绘画。HEIN-KUHN OH的摄影系列以面孔的地貌测量韩国—整容大国的不同群体。《妆面女孩》("COSMETIC GIRL")系列是艺术家从街上找来的带妆少女，部分正面照看似证件照也像化妆品广告的构图，女孩大方展示脂粉下、ELAD LASSRY式扁平单色背景上的脸庞。《阿珠妈》顾名思义拍摄韩国中年妇人，等同中国人口中的“大妈”。表面上是对中年女性的普通称呼，背后隐



deprived. Zing paints faces as painterly surfaces with contours and a sign of absolute alterity. He loves to use his cosmetic airbrush to investigate the possible landscape of the face, and has even thrown pigments, Action Painting-style, onto models' facades—a method of facial “mapping” with minimal contact.

Korean artist Hein-Kuhn Oh's photographic series “Cosmetic Girls” is comprised of portraits of teenage girls wearing their own makeup. On flat, monochrome backdrops reminiscent of Elad Lassry, the frontal shots look like yearbook portraits of poker-faced girls. Oh's other pictorial series “Ajumma” delineates another Korean female community in black and white: *Ajumma* is a term used to address mid-aged women in Korea, preserving stereotypes based on a perceived lack of sex appeal; they are even referred to as a “third sex” in the country. Oh's images integrate and analyze the “standards” of outer appearance assigned to certain communities and the social values behind them.

Compared to plastic surgery, manicure is a lightweight version of bodily transformation, but the past millennia have seen significant efforts towards achieving human pseudo-claws. In photos of Empress Dowager Cixi of the Qing dynasty, for instance, one finds long decorative nail guards made of precious metals and stones. Manicures used to be a symbol of class, a luxury enjoyed by people who were able to stay away from labor and chores. Today, of course, it is a pleasure available to different classes; according to *The New York Times* (Sarah Maslin Nir, “The Price of Nice Nails,” 10 May 2015), there are more nail salons than Starbucks in the Upper East Side. Indeed, in the United States, nail salons are a common option for unskilled Asian immigrants—which is not to say the work is easy: while polishing and filing nails may not sound strenuous, it is a repetitive, thankless occupation, especially when one considers the ubiquity of labor exploitation and diseases due to prolonged exposure to chemicals. Chinese artist Ye Funa's ongoing project “Curated Nails” calls for manicure proposals by (mostly) artists and curators like Chen Tianzhuo and Ju Baiyu. Hinting at the similarities between the rapid metabolism of manicure and art exhibitions, the project is similar to Ed Fornieles' manicure booth at Frieze London 2014, but the element of Chinese kitsch spices it up. It remains a central concern in her practice: the artist regularly updates the project on her “Curated Nails” Facebook page and has pursued collaborations with the likes of Helijia, an app/company that provides affordable manicure service to your door.

Beauty is a utopia, and like all utopias, survives at a distance from reality. Sometimes that distance is so great that it exists in another dimension entirely. Alternative dimensions are at the core of early Japanese ACG (Anime-Comics-Games): “two-dimensional” is a term used by the Japanese to describe a group of people overly

含某些典型特质，主要是性魅力的缺乏。阿珠妈甚至被认为是韩国的“第三性”。不同的女性面貌特征建构了不同的群体，构成不同年龄层的所谓“应分”。

美甲相对整容和专业化妆，只是轻量级得身体改造。人们往昔人对指爪的养护有时不惜工本，现在我们还是能看到黑白照片中慈禧太后手上的精致的镂金宝石指甲套。美甲曾经时贵族阶层专利，至少十指不沾阳春水的人才有资格享受，现在是各阶层的乐趣，根据纽约时报报道（SARAH MASLIN NIR, 《纽约移民美甲师：指尖上的泪与痛》，《纽约时报》，2015年5月10日）纽约上东区的美甲店比星巴克还要多，虽然将一个行业和一个品牌的店铺密度比较有欠公允，但是也足以证明美甲市场强大。在美国美甲店称是低技术移民的跳板，不少劳工为亚洲女性，工作量看似轻盈，但却要面对不断重复带来的枯燥和职业病，长期暴露与挥发性化学溶剂的危险。中国艺术家叶甫娜对于美甲这种和展览更易速度相当的美容项目有所感受，但并未如意料之中地聚焦其背后的社会问题，反而关注大众美学和艺术形式之间的界限。叶的《指甲计划》“CURATED NAILS”公开征集美甲方案，参加的多是艺术圈中人，比如艺术家陈天灼和媒体人鞠白玉。项目有点像ED FORNIELES 2014在伦敦FRIEZE博览会的美甲服务作品，但是叶的多了一份艳俗。这个计划还在进行中，不是可以看到叶在脸书上张贴的现场图，而且她也曾和上门美甲公司河狸家合作。

美是乌托邦，乌托邦的存在条件是与现实的距离，有时候甚至有点太远，比如说动漫的二次元—此词也用于形容沉迷动漫而忽略现实世界的人。《子宫战士》(UTERUS MAN, 听起来像日本特摄经典角色ULTRA MAN)是中国艺术家陆杨的半开源作品（或者让人想起PIERRE HUYGHE和PHILIPPE PARRENO合作的ANNLEE），它的核心是个中性的超级英雄，其形象似



Lu Yang, *UterusMan Cosplay*, 2013, Courtesy of the artist

Timur Si-Qin, *Attractors (Neutral Female)*, Courtesy of the artist and DISimages








# Beauty is a utopia, and like all utopias, survives at a distance from reality.



obsessed with the manga world and mentally detached from the reality. *UterusMan*, whose name recalls the classic Tokusatsu character Ultraman, is a manga hero and a half-open-source project designed by Chinese artist Lu Yang, reminiscent of Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno's *Ann Lee*. It takes the forms of videos, comics, computer games (created in collaboration with the students at Kyushu University), installation and cosplay. In the male-dominated world of superheroes, a character based on the shape of a female genital may ignite a mental knee-jerk: is this a Kristeva-inspired feminist artwork in which the phallus—a landmark in the cartography of psychoanalysis—is replaced by the womb? Lu's answer is no, confirming her skepticism towards the expected sexuality schema: indeed, in her efforts to add corporeal volume to the project's design, she worked with Mao Sugiyama, a Japanese "asexual" man who had his/her genitals and nipples removed.

Superheroes and manga may be too flat an aesthetic system for some, but idealized faces can be equally flat in person. Recently, facial mapping expert Chris Soloman constructed "the most beautiful" male and female face with the EFIT-V PhotoFit software. The "most beautiful" faces are surprisingly average: they look pretty and approachable but not intolerably beautiful. They look, in other words, like stock photos—versatile and accessible, an empty shell waiting to be filled with different contents and situations. In Timur Si-Qin's "Stock Photography as Evolutionary Attractor," developed for *DIS Images*, one of the images is a virtual female face with gratifying traits: clear skin, heart-shaped visage, arched eyebrows, almond-shaped green eyes, thin nose, moist pink lips. Like the criteria of the "most beautiful female," it was created by the facial composite system used by witnesses to reconstruct the faces of criminals. The states involved in this process reflect Si-Qin's interest in evolution—a process geared not towards a supposed ideal but rather based on random conditions and events. Evolution simply happens: It is a machine without a goal, a means without an end. Beauty, in the end, may be said to emerge through a similar mechanism: After all, in Levi Bryant's pan-mechanism everything is a machine, one with "heterogenous consistency." 

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在动漫的二次元世界并不陌生：不自然的发色、不合比例的大眼睛、小巧鼻子、红色虹膜……其灵感来自与艺术家并存的子宫，被陆杨置放到漫画、电脑游戏、动画甚至COSPLAY等平台上。这个创建于女性生殖器官的虚构超级英雄，或许引起思维反射动作：这是否一件女性主义作品，克里斯蒂娃(JULIA KRISTEVA)式地将子宫在二次元幻想世界平面化、符号化之后，用以代替阳物的心理学地标地位？艺术家的答案是否定的。她对无性更感兴趣，邀请了日本的首位“无性人”作UTERUS MAN的角色扮演，为虚拟英雄增加肉体的内容。

超级英雄和动漫世界作为美学系统对某些人来说太平面化而虚妄，但我们心里的理想相貌或者一样平面。面部造映技术专家所罗门(CHRIS SOLOMAN)以EFIT-V PHOTOFIT软件运算出“最美丽的面孔”，它们意想不到地普通，“最美的面孔”并非得惊天动地，对各种人都具有亲和力。它们像图片库的行货相片那样美的波澜不惊，像一个空壳那样亟待各种内容的填满。铁木尔思琴和下届柏林双年展策展人DIS MAGAZINE的《作为演进性吸引子的行货图片》(STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY AS EVOLUTIONARY ATTRACTOR)的其中是一张女子面庞的图：美人尖、瓜子脸、清透肌肤、上扬眉毛、杏眼、绿眼珠、小巧鼻子和粉红色的湿润嘴唇，看上去像上述的罪犯拼图软件制作的“最美的脸”图像，铁木尔引用了动力学数学领域的“吸引子”概念，铁木尔对进化的兴趣——所为进化不是向某个预设的理想状态靠拢，而是随机往发展成某个结果，就像石块沉积在下游，像没有目的的机器一样自然而然。“美”兴许就是类似的机制，像哲学家拜仁(LEVI BRYANT)的“泛机制”——所有事物都是一台机器，一台具有异质连贯性的机器。

刘秀仪是《Kaleidoscope Asia》的特约编辑。她是北京尤伦斯当代艺术中心的策展顾问。