

Meetings with X.Man

With the Obamas as the First Couple, seemingly vanquished racist stereotypes—Barack as a “witch-doctor;” Michelle as an ape— once again crawl out of the mud to be revealed as not only having been merely dormant, but a constant ghosting awaiting visibility and materialization.

X.Man proceeds from a position of being already implicated by the racist caricatures he collages from pre-existing and infinitely adaptable imaginaries. His use of postcard or vernacular aphorisms source the works from within popular culture as images associated with contemporary tourism and other zones of historical encounter.

In X.Man’s photo-collages—what he calls “drawls,”— he uses an ongoing character as an alter-ego, a “monkee” (sic.; its spelling referencing the ubiquitous pop band from the 60s and 70s). The monkee, named *Why*, gleefully enacts stereotypes of the foreigner, the simpleton, the buffoon, the deviant and the lunatic, all of which X.Man is keenly aware are how people already see him.

Yet, this is not the work of an “outsider” in the way that this term is mythologized within the artworld as someone who is disengaged from everyday, shared reality, or who is unconcerned with the implications of their work. X.Man’s work is about the culture around him, about race, about history, about language, about the everyday politics of living; it’s less about what it means to be poor in a wealthy city, and more about the social psychology that polices the boundaries of what it means to belong. His art pursues absurdity in the face of numbing reasonableness, attempts reason against overwhelming absurdity.

Moi Tsien, September 2009