

Fraenkel Gallery's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* & Alter Space's *Awkward Threesome*

By Bonnie Mata

Two seemingly unrelated San Francisco galleries offer comparable provocations in both of their latest shows. At first glance, the 18-artist exhibition at Fraenkel Gallery's cozy yet refined photography space couldn't be further removed from the mere 3-person show at Alter Space, itself a converted BDSM club fit with an underground jail cell now used for artist residencies. Despite obvious initial differences, Fraenkel's *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* and Alter Space's *Awkward Threesome* both present powerful displays of creativity from a diverse range of artists largely concerned with issues of performativity and intimacy, desire and vulnerability, and artistic production.

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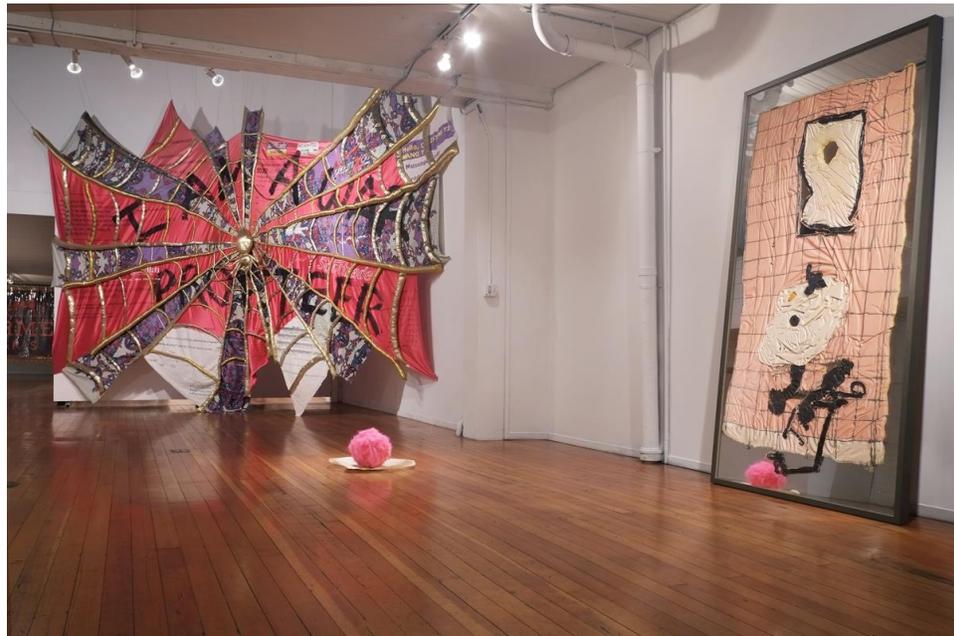
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Installation view of Christine Wang's *Spider Painting* (2015) and Kim Ye's *Please wash your hands* (2013/2015) at Alter Space's latest show, *Awkward Threesome*. Photos courtesy of Alter Space.

From the very title, *Awkward Threesome* evokes simultaneous conflict and complicity between sexual beings as well as the ever-present fissure between expectation and outcome: between idealism and reality. Like the *Lonely Hunter*, this *Threesome* is likely suffering from the listless sense of desire without a destination. Kim Ye's latex reproductions—most notably of gifts sent to her from clients of her work as a dominatrix—exude a sense of the unfinished, the simulacrum, and the castrating yet creative effects of frustrated longing. In beholding her latex Hermes scarf-cum-shower curtain, the tender sense of desperation behind the sentiment of both the original gift and its artistic reproduction becomes apparent.



Kim Ye, *You Deserve Nice Things (er•mez)*, 2014, Alter Space.

In the main gallery at Alter Space, Christine Wang’s work, while less intimately connected with matters of the heart and flesh, conjures instead the tormenting thoughts surrounding expectation and reality as a maker of art. Her politicized meta-works on artistic creation offer the notion of ceaseless pursuance (be it eco-ethics, financial stability, or satisfaction) as an innate and critical aspect

of art making. Wang’s massive *Spiderweb Painting* installation that dominates a large portion of the space calls attention to the incredible complexity and fragility of creation as both an individual, creative endeavor, and a commercial enterprise.

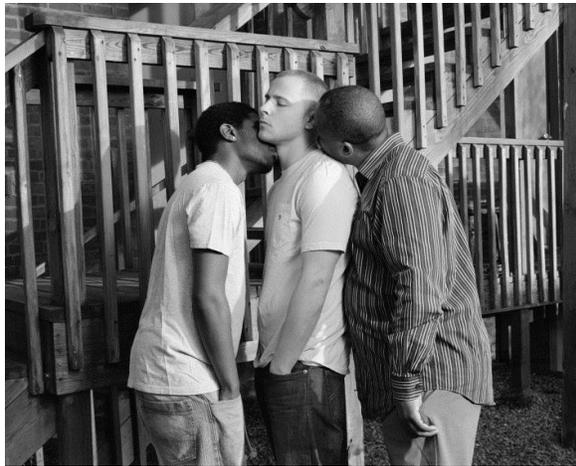
Much like Wang’s work addresses her own problematic relationship with her art, Raphael Noz’s ongoing performance of painting on two canvases simultaneously—while demonstrating both physical endurance and artistic ability—likewise serves as a testament to the (often) masochistic and endless pursuit of artistic completion or accomplishment. While Noz is the presumed third leg of Alter Space’s *Awkward Threesome*, all three artists demonstrate a great deal of soul searching or “hunting,” falling in line with *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* exhibition at Fraenkel Gallery.



Installation view of Fraenkel Gallery’s *The Heart is a Lonely Hunter* showing works by Dru Donovan, Fu Ishino, Judith Scott, and Ying Gee Zhou, among 14 others. Photos courtesy of Fraenkel Gallery.

Fraenkel Gallery's exhibition features 18 photographers and artists hand selected by Katy Grannan, whose intended narrative for the space started with her inspiration from the title of the show's namesake: the novel by Carson McCullers as well as William Sharp's poem "The Lonely Hunter." The small Penguin paperback is hung unassumingly among the other artworks, immediately coloring the space with tones of longing, loneliness, and human emotion. With such a large quantity and diversity of artists, McCullers's phrase serves as a point of entry into a wider dialogue between seemingly disparate works—rather than limiting the conceptual scope of the show, *The Heart* and its disparaging pursuit allows for a complex discourse around desire, vulnerability, artistic creation, and (often failed) intimacy.

Perhaps most notable is Grannan's choice to feature established, graduated artists from Yale and elsewhere intertwined with artists from the Center for Creative Growth like Dwight Mackintosh, for example, whose artistic praxis exists predominantly among scribbled artifacts of a life spent in mental health institutions. With the intimate yet markedly deliberate black and white photographs of Dru Donovan placed in conversation with Judith Scott's haphazard, anthropomorphic figures of bound fabric and yarn, both spontaneity and a measured style are entertained as equally powerful modes of expressing a dual artistry and vulnerability. Donovan's portrait of two black males gently embracing a white interceder (all with hands in pockets), while overtly addressing issues of race and sexuality, also speaks to notions of performativity that inevitably accompany or complicate public and private acts of intimacy.



Dru Donovan, *Untitled*, 2009, Fraenkel Gallery.

In many ways, the performed privacy of Donovan's portraits or, as another example, the interrupted intimacy of Fu Ishino's glass-overlaid photographs could best be represented in Zak Arctander's terms of "the idea of looking for [something](#)." Arctander—who first met Grannan while they were both at Yale School of Art—is admittedly preoccupied with desire and "how everyone is reaching for something outside of themselves." Lonely hunters

indeed, Arctander and fellow artists like Bryson Rand or Christopher Miner offer the idea that desire itself is what is most valuable—perhaps the pursuit is worth more than the ultimate product. This sentiment—however nebulous or unattainable—is reflected in many of the works at Fraenkel Gallery and seemingly omnipresent in the performances and individual artworks of Alter Space's "awkward" trio.