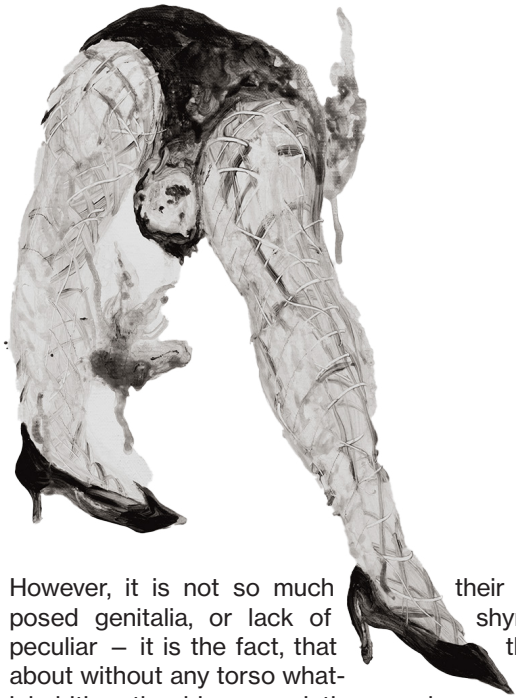


Good
will
Hunting

WEN
GUM GUM



They are as strange as they are familiar, these roaming bodies – vulvas out and *in-our-face*, their legs swathed in net stockings or low-waisted flared pants, high heels click-clacking.



However, it is not so much their choice of style, exposed genitalia, or lack of pecularity – it is the fact, that they seemingly wander about without any torso whatsoever. For the figures inhabiting the bizarre paintings and sketches of artist Wen Chia-Ning, or Wen Gum Gum, this seems to be a rather ordinary state of physical appearance. A figure named 'Mom' who makes their appearance in the work Intro《初引》(2022), a cartoonish digitally rendered collage, explain to us that due to a congenital effect, every woman within the family when turning 20 experience a complete dissolution of their entire torso, eventually only leaving their head on top of their legs. In undergoing this oddly predetermined metamorphosis, they come into an existence as “bodiless women”. This “bodiless” shape seems to be the shared trait among the many feminine, masculine, and gender-ambiguous figures appearing in Wen Gum Gum’s series *Good Will Hunting* 《善的意志會狩獵》(2022). The unusual community appears comically dismantled and absurd: some are stacked on top of one another, forming a human tower on the former-shoulders-now-ass of a bodiless figure, three posing bodies flaunt their chests; others are busy pleasuring the side curb with a golden shower; a figure named 'Kevin’s mom' elegantly pose while donning nothing but a pearl necklace (a literal one).

Wen Gum Gum draws influence from Susan Sontag’s infamous 1964 cornerstone essay on the notion of ‘Camp’, described as a sensibility, vision or taste that revels in artifice and stylisation, theatricalisation and exaggeration, irony and playfulness.¹ Through her tongue-in-cheek humour and the blatant attitudes of her caricatured subjects, Wen Gum Gum addresses processes of identification and social coding, akin to the ‘private codes’ or ‘badges of identity’ among urban cliques inherent to Sontag’s Camp, while investigating a myriad of eroticised images and narrow gender portrayals prevalent in the media and on internet platforms. With coded (visual) language, signalling and ‘flagging’ (referring to covert and not-so-covert ways of indicating a belonging to a queer community) being crucial subjects of queer experience, history, and theory – not to mention the impact of appropriation of such signifiers, found in queer coding and queer-baiting within cinema, media, and marketing.



1 Sontag, Susan. (2018). Notes on camp. Penguin UK. (Original work published in 1964). Note 1).

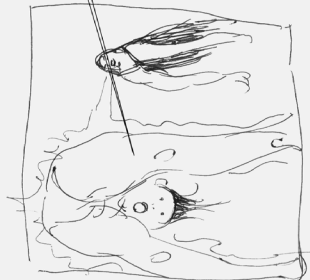
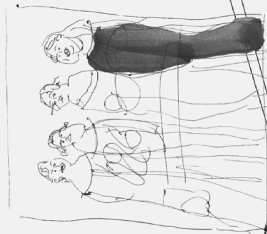
‘the woman who has no body at all, only the head and feet.’

“It's time for you to know.

for of a congenital defect, all the women in the family when we turn 20, dissolve half a body and the head merges on top of the legs”

「是時候讓你知道.....因為先天性缺陷，我們全家的女人到了二十歲，上半身便會消失，頭長在雙腿之上。」

mom:
媽媽：

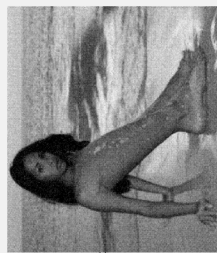


These shoes don't fit right now.
這雙鞋現在非常不合腳

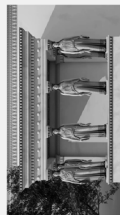
Stop, Stop Time!
停止，停止時間！
Stopp, Seisku Aeg!
Stopp, stopp die Zeit!



oh no... why?
不.....為什麼？



他們就是這樣發狂的，這裡的雕像把我們帶到天堂。
ni kaeduo head See kaeduo sim ju laere mad vid.



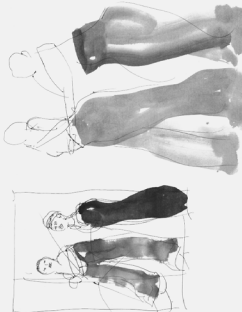
The reconstruction of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. Model: John
The reconstruction of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. Model: John
The reconstruction of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi. Model: John

the duality of the bodyless woman - to emulate classic feminine image while at the same time commemorate its defeat.

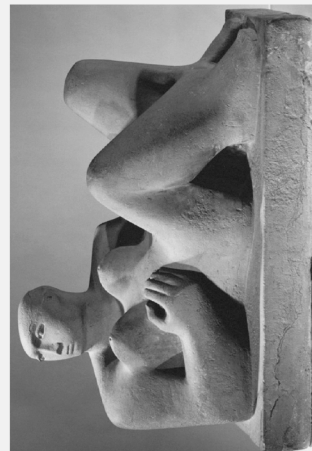
無身體女人的雙重性——模仿經典的女性形象，同時紀念它的失敗。



Les dites caratides. Agnès Varda. 1984. 13'. color. France
《女體像物語》安妮·華達，1984年，紀錄短片，彩色，13分鐘，法國



Artista Mailed The River. 1938-1943. Museum of Modern Art, New York
阿提斯馬爾德·馬利爾《河堤》1938-1943年，現代藝術博物館，紐約



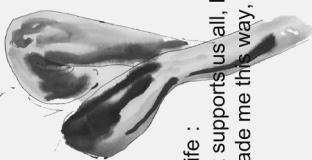
Henry Moore. Reclining Woman. 1930. National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
亨利·馬爾德·摩爾《斜倚的女人》1930年，加拿大國家美術館，渥太華

✂

Although had no body, it even says in the media that is happy with her life :

‘My life is not normal, I'm happy with the life that I do, I have a wonderful family that supports us all, I have a society that does not see from the outside but from what I am inside, God made me this way, but not means will I deny god who gave life.’

儘管沒有正常的身體，但她甚至在媒體上說對自己的生活很滿意。媒體上刊載的一條訊息是：
「我的生活不平凡，我對自己的生活感到滿意，我有一個支持我們的美好家庭，
我有一個從外面看不到但從裡面看的社會上帝以這種方式創造了我，但並不意味著我會否認給予生命的上帝。」



Not unrelated to matters of queer signalling, the series *Good Will Hunting* explores queer 'prowling' culture and -discourse, conjuring the image of particularly queer men roaming among bars, (sex)clubs, dance floors, parks, bath houses and back alleys (not unlike 'cruising', generally considered a code word or slang term referring to the act of walking around urban areas, or 'cruising grounds', in the hope of finding sexual partners²). How are we to understand this hunting motif (also luring in the exhibition title borrowed from In Gus Van Sant's popularised film from 1997) in the works of Wen Gum Gum? The figures seem caught up in camaraderie, a variety of social activities and solo-explorations – are the figures, carried by the bodiless figure, 'prey' of the nights prowling? Or is something considerably different taking place? Perhaps we might consider the very definition of 'camaraderie' as "a spirit of trust and *goodwill*" among people closely associated in an activity or endeavour".³ The uncertainty itself is a key feature of camp, Sontag notes: "To camp is a mode of seduction – one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsider."⁴



Another concern of Wen Gum Gum is the role of information and knowledge-production along with (aesthetic) sensory experience, in which the medium of painting becomes crucial. She finds herself confronted with the devaluation of painting, by some considered lacking in terms of creating a sensuous space for active social engagement or questioned as a carrier or producer of knowledge. However, to Wen Gum Gum, even pieces of trash can come to be carriers of information: "As I am constantly attracted by restless images in front of my eyes, I pick them up and paint them; lured by garbage paper fragments on the ground, I stop my busy hands to sort out the layered information that arise and trouble me at the same time." In this way, garbage, internet-phenomena, media images, queer bodies, spirituality, and self-introspection come to serve as an intertwined, hodge-podge-palette of information.



2 Gove, Ben. *Cruising Culture: Promiscuity, Desire and American Gay Literature*. Edinburgh University Press, 2000.

3 Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "comradery," ["camaraderie"].

4 Sontag, note 17.)



In this manner, Wen Gum Gum aligns with numerous contemporary feminist artists who have turned to figurative painting in reimagining queer and female bodies. Like the medium of painting, particular bodies have been historical hot spots of dispute and violence – or phrased in the words of Barbara Kruger: “Your body is a battleground” (a phrase appearing in her influential piece *Untitled* depicting the disembodied face of a woman for the Pro-Choice March in 1989).⁵ Artists and art historians have long investigated how canonised art and media images – often produced by men – have perpetuated and idealised the female form, while feminist artists have reclaimed the female body and depicted it through a variety of lenses. Departing from these bodies-as-images, Wen Gum Gum addresses another fraught space within feminist and queer theory: the politics of pleasure. Here ‘pleasure’ is configured as a space of re-imagination, protest, and politics. Wen Gum Gum’s (de)fetishised figures prompts an investigation of projected imaginaries and portrayal of individuals, particularly in relation to defining, confining, and expanding gender roles, -expressions and -boundaries.

While the notion Camp denotes a love “for the exaggerated, the “off,” of things-being-what-they-are-not”, “a love for the unnatural”, the relationship to the unnatural bodies of Wen Gum Gum is one of ambiguity and complexity.⁶ In *Adoption*《舉與養》(2022), a bodiless figure, is running off with a strange body-image on its head, while an odd slogan across *Intro* reads: “the duality of the bodiless women – to emulate classic feminine image while at the same time commemorate its defeat.” The disturbed figures seem to find themselves in a loop of adopting, rejecting, and challenging the images imposed on them (especially those conjured by the Male gaze) – images akin to statues of Henry Moore, such as *Reclining Woman* (1930) depicted in *Intro*. We are familiar with such imagery: elegant and graceful women; lying, resting and passive women; women integrated into architecture, bearing weighty elements without displaying the strain and strength evident in their male counterparts. Conversely, in their campy-naïvety, sketchiness, and diluted forms, Wen Gum Gums figures are on-the-move, in the process of building-up, holding-up, pissing-off as active figures coming into being – rather than being the virtual image of the static female stone-figure of Henry Moore.

“One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious,” notes Sontag.⁷ Somewhere within the Campiness of it all, within the irony, playfulness, and mockery – along with the queer bodies, semantic bodies, and absurd bodies – we come to find a conglomerate of vulnerable bodies and pounding sensibilities.

5 Murphy, Julien. *Gender Struggles: Practical Approaches to Contemporary Feminism*, Edited Anthology, (with Constance Mui), 2002, 10.

6 Sontag, notes 8.) and 1.)

4 Sontag, note 41.)