

NEWCITYART

A Fractured Culture: A Review of Antonius-Tín Bui at Monique Meloche

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Antonius-Tín Bui's work is a monumental reminder of what it means to be human in the shit in = shit out ChatGPT DALL-E world of creative mediocrity. Witness firsthand what the hand and wrist and elbow can do when connected to the flesh and blood of a mind that searches, wanders the past of ancestor's paths and locates the discoveries of self in the present moment. It is like being in the presence of the sacred, if not the divine. The artist's second solo show with Monique Meloche, "There are many ways to hold water without being called a vase," is at turns poetic, stoic and erotic. It is a show charged with the frenzy of manic inspiration tempered by the cool contours of fine craft. Bui tells stories. Cut paper and paint explode myths, ideas and preconceptions with furious orgasmic delight.

Portraits of friends and family, cut in subdued hues, blacks and blues bounded by and overlaid with patterns traditionally associated with East Asian decorative art, fill the first gallery. The titles are evocative and the poses formal. "A silence settles that isn't so silent" features a married couple, one figure is seated, the other stands behind with hand reassuringly on shoulder and arm. Bui's carefully cut forms radiate palpable affection between them.

Antonius-Tín Bui, "Because I stopped apologizing into visibility. Because this body is my last address. Because this mess I made I made with love. Because only music rhymes with music. Because I made a promise," 2022. Hand-cut paper, ink and paint, 83 x 42 inches/Courtesy moniquemeloche gallery



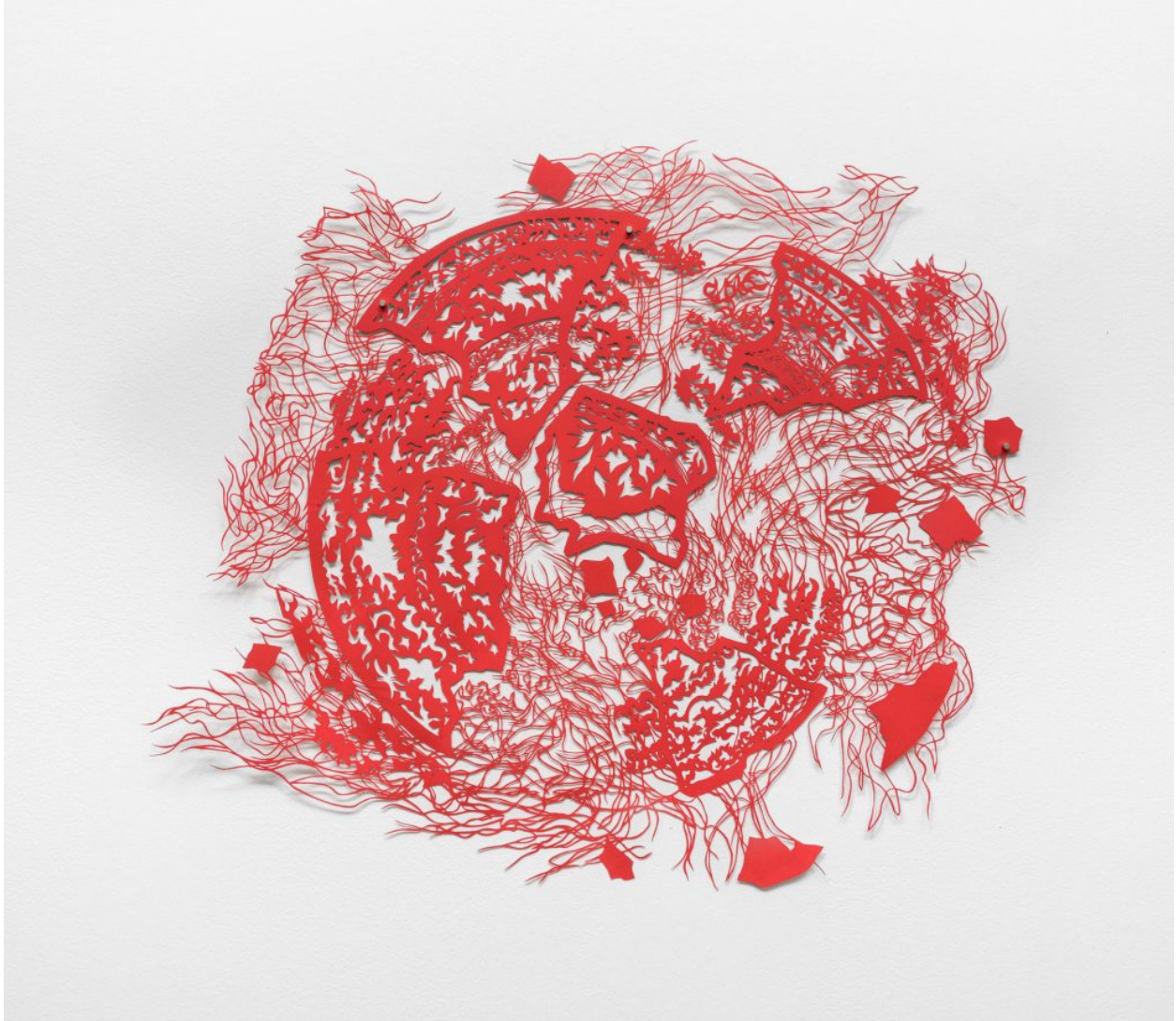
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The pieces in this room trace a continuous conceptual thread, weaving its way from one work to the next. They address the perennial question: where have I come from and who am I becoming?

The second gallery offers tentative answers.

An orgy of male bodies intertwined announces the coming of new perceptions. Aggressive, assertive, masculine, erect, these figures, cut with the beauty of Bui's hand, challenge stereotypical conceptions of the Asian male body as submissive and femme. To underscore the point, many of the figures erupt from the womb-like confines of jars and vases, cocks in hand, destroying the classic embodiment of orientalist form in their (re)birth. Each work is a web of interlacing interacting slivers of paper, some so finely cut that it's a wonder that they hold together. They have presence and substance and yet float lightly with ease, casting subtle colored shadows against the white walls upon which they glide.

Antonius-Tin Bui, "A silence settles that isn't so silent," 2023. Hand-cut paper, ink, and paint, 52 x 41 inches/Courtesy moniquemeloche gallery



Antonius-Tín Bui, "There's Nothing Left Here for You," 2022. Hand-cut paper, ink, pencil, paint, 33 1/2 x 32 inches/Courtesy moniquemeloche gallery

Smaller, quieter pieces "In Between Deaths" and "There's Nothing Left for You Here" recapitulate the show's broader transformative theme. But by depicting only the shattered plates and porcelain vessels, they become amorphous and strange, imprecise in their meaning, and so more open and forgiving in their interpretation. A show about our many and changing perceptions of self and the crucial role ancestry plays in grounding a fractured culture, "There are many ways to hold water without being called a vase" lingers long after you've left.

Antonius-Tín Bui, "There are many ways to hold water without being called a vase" at Monique Meloche, 451 North Paulina, on view through July 29.