

CAN'T FORGET GOSSIP NEEDS YOU: CFGNY AT AMANT

Qingyuan Deng reports from the collective's ten-year anniversary show

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Editor and actor Blake Abbie and artist Sung Tieu performing. All photos: the author.

The acronym for Concept Foreign Garments New York (CFGNY) has evolved over the years, owing to its many fans (and perhaps some detractors). My favorite variation, which happens to be the most popular one, is Cute Fucking Gay New York. It is an endearing reminder that being cute (a term sometimes thrown at us Asians in an exoticizing, infantilizing manner—you have to have experienced that kind of racialization to get it!) and being gay (a word that is still very much still entangled with white masculinity) can wonderfully co-exist, and that this combination is in fact cool and sexy. Last Friday, I went to the all-Asian collective's ten-year anniversary outdoor fashion show/performance, co-commissioned by Amant and the Kitchen.

The event took place at Amant. Wandering around the premises before the show started, I ran into core member Ten Izu's parents, David and Evelyn, who said they remembered me as a young Chinese gay man they once met at New York's Japan Society, and how I'd told them that my mother wanted me to go back to Shanghai and get straight married. I couldn't recall our encounter, but they were accurate about my biographical details, so I went along with it. I later tried to confirm the story with Ten, who in turn told me their parents must be mistaken—they have only visited Japan Society once, during the 2023 CFGNY fashion show, which I did not attend. "This is a beautiful mistake," I said to Ten, which made me realize—in the spirit of CFGNY's aesthetic approaches to mirroring and mistranslation—that I have a doppelgänger out in the wild. Who is the copy and who is the original? Would I even know?



Artist Kenneth Tam, Megan Mi-Ai Lee, Jacob Jackmauh, Pam Lins, novelist and Trisha Baga's partner Molly Dektar.

The performance started with Lydo, one of nightclub Basement's resident DJs, walking toward the sound booth, from which they played a thrilling set of industrial-sounding music for much of the runway show. The Amant open-air lot had been transformed into a parking area featuring two stationary trucks with projection screens, intersected by large wooden plinths. Ten, along with CFGNY's Tin Nguyen and Daniel Chew, proceeded to introduce the histories of the brand as well as the Kitchen, Amant, and the Sony Portapak, the world's first portable, battery-powered, single-operator video recording system, a 1970s export from Japan to America that enabled the birth of a truly democratic video (and video-art) culture. A classically CFGNY-looking stuffed animal—ambiguous looking, somewhere between a teddy bear, a baby alien, and a squirrel—was visible on the screens, as were close-ups of Tin, Daniel, and Ten. The LED screens largely resisted iPhone camera capturing, appearing only as moiré and rolling shutter patterns on my phone. The effect seemed like another instance of the collective's bootleg logic, where an image automatically becomes poor once photographed by my half-Chinese device.

Angelique Rosales Salgado, the Kitchen's assistant curator and organizer of the performance, showed up as a glamorous, CFGNY-clad dominatrix. After doing a full lip in the side-view mirror of the truck, she announced herself as the after-dark hostess, opening a night of sociality, desire, rumors, and moving images. For one night only, we learned that CFGNY also stood for Can't Forget Gossip Needs You. In a seductive tone, Angelique recounted how New York's experimental video culture produced so many mythic figures, such as Nam June Paik, Joan Jonas, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Steina Vasulka, Shigeo Kubota, Merce Cunningham, and Charles Atlas. These artists' exploration of authorship as a collective process, self-representation as an infinitely generative play, and the blurring of border between body, object, and performance is closely tied to the context of the postwar years, when the politics, technologies, and economies of the United States, Japan, and South Korea became more entangled. CFGNY's investigation of how affect and relationality are organized along lines of race, gender, and sexuality is indebted to this history.



The Kitchen curator Angelique Rosales Salgado and artist Trisha Baga performing.

As Angelique spoke and interacted with the runway models, artist Trisha Baga declared they could sense the strong smell of gasoline in the air as a drone flew over our heads—a moment that immediately brought to mind the Vietnam War. Angelique and her former colleague at the Kitchen, independent curator and writer Lumi Tan, then engaged in a compelling (scripted) diva-out: “Where is this voice coming from?” Angelique pretended to be annoyed when Lumi started speaking about Kubota. “What are you doing here?” She then playfully interrogated Lumi. Equally glamorous writer and publicist Cynthia Leung gave us full-on freestyle dance and piercing dramaturgy. Cynthia proposed that Cunningham, Atlas, and John Cage were in a throuple, performed an alluring cigarette flick, and suggested that sex is better on-screen, rid of biology and refined to mediated images and signifiers.



Writer and communications consultant Cynthia Leung performing.

Numerous larger-than-life enactments happened throughout the runway show. Choreographer Anh Vo, walking around the set, brushed his hair manically as he declared “Art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful,” wryly parodying Marina Abramović’s overly historicized 1975 performance. Next, artist Diane Severin Nguyen appropriated the Asian stereotype of cute, affected, Instagram-friendly womanhood by taking selfies and facetimeing artist Puppies Puppies; the two eventually gave each other an IRL hug and walked together. Artists Paul Pfeiffer and Cole Lu leaned heavily into the macho mafia hunk archetype, which, according to curator Zandie Brockett, was “very daddy and hot like *Heated Rivalry*.” But isn’t queerness always hotter in person? And like queerness, CFGNY is hot because it leans into errantry, reappropriating how our bodies get overdetermined by the unspecific category of “vaguely Asian.” Not only is this a generative contradiction, but it’s also a continually relevant theme thanks to Asia’s ever-growing status as the world’s principal supplier of production, labor, and technology.

After the presentation concluded, my writer friend Lily Kwak and I went to the upstairs of the very fancy Amant-affiliated restaurant Zoli to enjoy fries and natural wine with the models. Lively conversations continued. I complained to my friend Cherisse Gray, an artist who is a close ally of CFGNY, that I had run into enemies, ex-crushes, and my ex-boyfriend's current boyfriend (the gaysian community is small after all), to which she replied: "They were standing in the back and you were sitting in the front row. THERE IS A DIFFERENCE." Diane and I talked about how exhilarating the show was, reaffirming our commitment to Asian excellence. "Right now I'm really into being imaginative, smart, and hardworking," she mused. "I don't care if it makes me sound super Asian." I told Diane I was one-hundred percent on her side. Cynthia, Pati Hertling (director of Performance Space New York), and I debated the difference between "vaguely Asian" and "honorary Asian" to no conclusion; we simply couldn't decide which was a better title to wear. The party reached its climax when a beautiful cake was presented to Angelique, whose birthday happened to be on the same night. A double win indeed. I got wine drunk quickly and had to say goodbyes. My last words at the party were to Tin: "Congratulations on a historic night. There is no better time to be gay and Asian than right now." Tin wholeheartedly agreed.



Collector Dennis Freedman and José Esparza Chong Cuy, director of Storefront for Art and Architecture.



Amant founder Lonti Ebers and Amant chief curator Tobi Maier.



Artist Michael Smith, artist Jacob Borndal, director of Artists Space Jay Sanders.



Collector Marc Müller, artist Kuby Lin, Performance Space director Pati Hertling, dealer Leonie Chelsea Lang.



Editor and actor Blake Abbie and artist Sung Tieu performing.



Designer Danny Well, artist sgp, artist Cole Lu, artist Cherisse Gray.



Designer Telfar Clemens and Cynthia Leung.



Artist Ren Light Pan, collector Jeffrey Liu, artist Taro Maushio, artist Emilia Wang, writer Hyungtae Kim.



Curator Christopher Y. Lew, dealer Sam Agnew, artist Hanna Hur, curator and writer Simon Wu.



Dealer Yve Yang, curator Wang Xin, artist Chando Ao, dealer Erica Kyung.



Artist Ami Lien and Cici Wu.



Curator Lumi Tan and artist Diane Severin Nguyen.



Collector Cherry Xu.



Jacob Smith, artist Nile Harris, curator Kathy Halbreich, MoMA curator Stuart Comer, artist Nicholas Sanchez.