

*Saint Perpetuum*, 2007, oil-based enamel on canvas  
Courtesy of the artist & Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles

SEPTEMBER 16 - DECEMBER 16, 2011



# GUSHER

PEARL C. HSIUNG

SELECTED WORK 2003-2011

# GUSHING OVER

In the mind of Pearl C. Hsiung, an earthquake, geyser or volcano is a perfect metaphorical space for creation: like geothermal pressures building-up deep inside the earth's crust, an idea rumbles around in the brain until it can't be contained any longer and shoots outward like an unstoppable fountain of water, a flow of molten lava, or powerful vibrations. As she has demonstrated through her painting, sculpture, video, and music, Hsiung's ideas result in wild dislocations from which new possibilities arise. Taking a delightfully destabilized view of nature (and that which is considered natural or "normal"), the artist constructs absurdist anthropomorphic scenes that convey comedy and tragedy in equal strokes, the natural disaster with the slapstick timing.

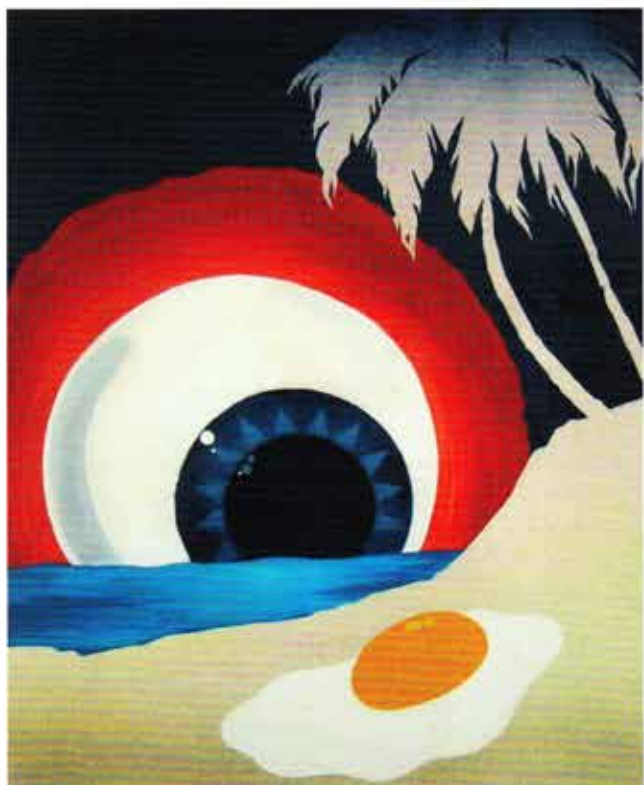
Hsiung's discrete style of anthropomorphism—the representation of inanimate objects with human qualities like body parts or clothing—developed during graduate school at Goldsmiths in London, when she often transposed illustrated eyeballs with the organic shapes of a landscape. *Overfiend (Beach)* (2003, below), the first major instance of anthropomorphism in her painting, depicts a great disembodied eye peeking over a horizon line. In the foreground, an egg is beached on an island, its yolk mimicking the spherical form of the eye. Here, the eye and the egg offered Hsiung formal and conceptual starting points for developing other animistic symbols in her surreal scenes. For example, in her thirty-five second video, *Screaming 4 Vengeance* (also made in 2003), Hsiung animated a pile of dog excrement with a screaming mouth that appears after the pile is stepped on by an unsuspecting passerby (played by the artist). While the superimposed mouth brings the turd to life with a comical presence, it also creates an orifice that the camera zooms

into as if being swallowed whole. It's a facetious move that cleverly complicates the normal circuit that we expect our food to travel (from being consumed to being expunged).

In early videos like this—as well as in the paintings she concurrently creates—Hsiung depicts a strange sort of disembodiment that superimposes orifices, oculi, and cavities onto the otherwise static pictorial space of a landscape. Sometimes futuristic or unfamiliar, these landscapes offer spellbinding *mise-en-scène* for the non sequitur subject matter that the artist draws from graphic design, commercial language, mural art, album covers, and from great artists and authors like Odilon Redon, Agnes Pelton, Yayoi Kusama, and Georges Bataille. Hsiung shifts easily between pervasive popular source material and the weighty influence of art history, allowing the weirdness of both to creep into her compositions. Her detail-oriented technique also sets her apart, as she employs a variety of materials and special effects in the service of her canvases and videos.

Hsiung approaches her materials with both studied confidence and playful experimentation. Many of her paintings from 2003 to early 2008 were made using spray paint over paper masks and stencils to achieve hard-edge forms that also had soft airbrush-like finishes. Working in thin layers, she was able to make oil-based enamel paint behave with the translucency of watercolor; in this manner, she could render drips, splatters and atmospheric brushstrokes to isolated areas of the canvas, as seen in a work like *Saint Perpetuum* (2007, on cover). The dynamic focus of *Saint Perpetuum*—a billowing puff of smoke punctured by a prismatic aperture and shot full of arrows like the body of some martyred saint—is depicted in Pop-y complementary colors that make each element seem to float on the surface of the canvas. Here, Hsiung is not interested in a modeled surface texture but rather in its cohesive flatness and she achieves this by adding a gloss finish over the entire canvas. By finishing her paintings with this slick cosmetic topcoat, Hsiung borders on overdoing them, but that's not necessarily a bad thing for paintings that are about excess. Hsiung's overworking of surfaces is a labor of love— a literal gushing over the art, the colors, the wild subject matter and the process of shaping a work from start to finish.

Yet toward the end of 2008, Hsiung's style began to change; partially a result of the economic downturn, the artist moved away from such strikingly large-scale canvases, choosing instead to paint on a more intimate scale. As the scale reduced, so too did the density of her compositions. Treating each composition holistically, Hsiung quietly returned to exploring very basic painting challenges like focused color relationships, and the rendering of light. In *Slow Creep* (2010), pink-infused beams seem to shine like headlights from a shadowy, mountainous field. Hsiung's artwork from this period can also be characterized by literal and figurative darkness.



*Overfiend (Beach)*, 2003, oil, enamel, and gold glitter on linen  
Collection of Max Wigram, courtesy of the artist



*Blue Hole*, 2010, oil-based enamel on canvas  
 Courtesy of the artist & Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles

The subject matter is less humorous, and more serious and subtle. The overall hues that Hsiung chose are tonally more muted, making the controlled use of neon and hot shades vibrate with a newfound intensity.

*Blue Hole* (2010, above), a relatively small canvas, is representative of this new body of work. Hsiung renders a perspective that seems to be looking simultaneously outward at a planetary body in space, and inward at an earthly crater or caldera. Its central form also recalls a cell with a nucleus, or even an eye (a return to that critical motif). The work hovers between representations of a microcosm and a macrocosm, yet it borders on abstraction. It retains the landscape iconography of much of Hsiung's early work, yet slackens the brushstrokes to create more expressionistic action within the picture. These loose gestures also allow the artist to render voids and oddities in the pictorial space, like the swirling golden droplet that is spewed from the hole taking some of the foreground with it. This defined void or lapse in the pictorial space appears to interrupt and complicate the tidy scene, and builds upon the early anthropomorphic interest in bodily openings and fissures.

Hsiung's video work has similarly shifted toward this new stylistic direction. Typically creating about one per year, the artist has long treated video as a practice that balances the gradual process of painting with something more immediate and reality-based. In these short, performative videos, Hsiung plays the role of a flummoxed protagonist encountering a world of uncanny objects—a smoking hamburger, exploding national monuments, a gurgling glass of milk, overbearing hot dogs—through which the familiar themes of tension and expulsion play out. These short pithy videos are also marked by their comic sound effects and music, but Hsiung's latest, *Volcanic Ash* (2010, right) marks a new culmination of her experimentation with sound.

*Volcanic Ash* (also a distinctly shadowy work) is an epic music video, marking the first time that Hsiung has

composed and performed music herself, as opposed to using prerecorded sound. Working with friends, she collaborated on the audio and visuals of the piece, creating a moody space where Hsiung (as a glam-rock bandleader) sings a refrain developed from a poetic manifesto she wrote for an earlier art project: "...Flesh-teriors, flocked with dust/Carnal cavities, lined with fluff/Guts resurfaced by geology/Pumice monsters on the loose/Ashy mutants copulate/Building a Volcanic Race..." Almost describing a previous decade of work, these lyrics speak directly to Hsiung's fixation with an imagined world grounded to a geological reality. From this climate, Hsiung's exceptional and perverse vision will continue to germinate, bubble-up, and spill over in a superfluous gush.

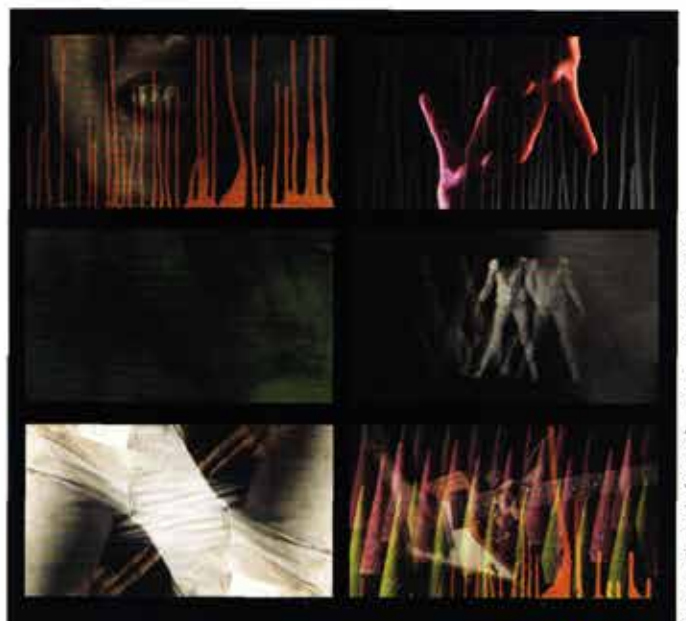
—Catherine Taft, August 2011

Catherine Taft is a writer and independent curator based in Los Angeles. She is also a curatorial associate and project specialist in the Department of Architecture and Contemporary Art at the Getty Research Institute, where she helped organize the exhibitions *California Video* (2008) and *Pacific Standard Time: Crosscurrents in LA Painting and Sculpture 1950–1970* (2011).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*This exhibition and accompanying brochure are made possible with support of the Vincent Price Art Museum Foundation. Many sincere thanks to each lender of artwork to this show, and especially to Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA. Catherine Taft's essay contextualizes Pearl's approach to art making over nearly a decade as well as the artist's distinctive perspective. VPAM staff members George Davis, Victor Parra and Marielos Zeka brought all elements of the show together with great enthusiasm and professionalism. Pearl embraced this space immediately and waited patiently for the re-opening of the museum; her work is a striking example of how and why Los Angeles has gained its world-wide reputation as the capital of contemporary art.*

Karen Rapp, director & curator, VPAM



*Volcanic Ash* (stills), 2010, digital video  
 Courtesy of the artist & Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles

# PEARL C HSIUNG

Pearl C Hsiung is a Los Angeles-based artist who was born in Taichung, Taiwan in 1973. She received her MA in Fine Art in 2004 and her Postgraduate Diploma in Fine Art in 2003 both from Goldsmiths College, London, UK. She earned her Bachelor of Arts from the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1997. Solo exhibitions include *Never Ends*, Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA (2010); *Eroto Erupto Infinito*, Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles, CA (2007); *To the Big Life*, Max Wigram Gallery, London, UK (2006); *Overfiend*, MW Projects, London, UK (2004); and, *Pearl C Hsiung*, Up River Gallery, Kunming, China (2003).

A selection of group exhibitions includes *New Art for a New Century*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA (2010); *Tilt*, Artist Curated Projects, Los Angeles, CA (2010); *OZ: New Offerings from Angel City*, Regional Museum of Guadalajara, Mexico (2009); *Bitch is the New Black*, Honor Fraser, Los Angeles, CA (2009); *Los Angeles: Aspects of an Archaic Revival*, Uschi Kolb, Galerie Haus Schneider, Karlsruhe, Germany (2009); *Beautiful/Decay Retrospective A - Z*, Kopeikin Gallery, Los Angeles, CA (2009); *Acclimatation*, The Centre National d'art Contemporain, Nice, France (2008); *Harlem Postcards: Spring 2008*, The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, NY (2008); *California Biennial 2006*, Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA (cat.); *Busan Biennale 2006: CAFE 1*, Busan Museum of Modern Art, Busan, South Korea (cat.) (2006); *Expander*, The Royal Academy of Arts, London, UK (cat.) (2004); *New British Painting: Part II*, John Hansard Gallery, Southampton, UK (cat.) (2004); and, *The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter*, China Art Objects, Los Angeles, CA (2000).

## EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Unless otherwise noted, all artwork appears courtesy of the artist & Steve Turner Contemporary, Los Angeles; (dimensions are h x w x d)

*Kickstart My Heart*, 2003  
Digital video, 40 sec.

*Screaming 4 Vengeance*, 2003  
Digital video, 39 sec.

*Strange Boys Make Strange Noise*, 2003  
Digital video, 3 min.

*Eye of the Beholder*, 2004  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
16 x 20 inches

*Let's Blow This Joint*, 2004  
Digital video, 1 min. 42 sec.

*Tidal Wretch*, 2005  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
84 x 68 3/8 inches  
Courtesy of the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA; Promised Gift of Paul & Lilly Merage

*Convalescentites*, 2006  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
12 x 9 inches  
Collection of Sinden Lee

*Heave Ho*, 2006  
Mixed materials  
Dimensions variable

*Hissure*, 2006  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
20 x 16 inches  
Collection of Matthew Luem & Ava Scanlan

*Oculus Sinister*, 2006  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
14 x 18 inches  
Collection of Scott L. Martin

*Thee End*, 2006  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
14 x 20 inches  
Collection of Chris Veit

*Know Me In Team*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
48 x 36 inches  
Collection of Eileen Harris Norton

*Hot Hands Fall*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
48 x 36 inches

*Monster Gusher*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
96 x 72 inches  
Collection of Steve Turner & Victoria Dailey

*No More*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
30 x 24 inches  
Collection of Demetrio Kerrison & Gianna Drake-Kerrison

*Regherkinating*, 2007  
Enamel, pencil, & paper collage  
10 x 8 inches  
Collection of Malik Gaines & Alex Segade

*Revenge, Big Revenge*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
12 x 16 inches  
Collection of Lyndon & Janine Barrois

*Saint Perpetuum*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
96 x 72 inches

*Zealophilic*, 2007  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
72 x 96 inches  
Collection of Paul & Lilly Merage; Courtesy of the Orange County Museum of Art, Newport Beach, CA

*Chilling Thrill*, 2008  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
30 x 40 inches

*Nyiragongo Leap*, 2008  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
48 x 36 inches

*Red Sky at Morning, Sailor Take Warning*, 2008  
Digital video, 2 min.

*Shecretes*, 2008  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
68 x 52 inches

*Shushaton*, 2008  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
20 x 16 inches  
Private Collection, Los Angeles

*Super Outbreak*, 2008  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
96 x 72 inches

*HELLO*, 2009  
Digital video, 3 min. 30 sec.

*Reach Arching*, 2009  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
40 x 30 inches  
Collection of Francine Wang

*Saxifrage*, 2009  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
16 x 20 inches

*Woah Is We*, 2009  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
20 x 16 inches  
Collection of Eileen Harris Norton

*Beach*, 2010  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
46 x 60 inches

*Blue Hole*, 2010  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
20 x 24 inches

*High Piqued*, 2010  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
64 x 64 inches

*Hourglass*, 2010  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
30 x 24 inches

*Kabloom*, 2010  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
40 x 30 inches

*Slow Creep*, 2010  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
60 x 72 inches

*Untitled (2)*, 2010  
Ink and enamel on paper  
15 1/2 x 19 inches  
Collection of Sabrina Alexis Smith

*Untitled (3)*, 2010  
Ink and enamel on paper  
15 1/2 x 19 inches  
Collection of Young Chung

*Volcanic Ash*, 2010  
Digital video, 6 min.

*Geysers*, 2011  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
12 x 12 inches

*Gush Buster*, 2011  
Oil-based enamel on canvas  
40 x 30 inches

*Untitled (7)*, 2011  
Ink and enamel on paper  
19 x 15 1/2 inches

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