

SAM LEE | GALLERY

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Deb Diehl, Jane Gotts, Phung Huynh, and Alexandra Wiesenfeld: Portrait in Phase
Brand Library Art Galleries
1601 W. Mountain Street, Glendale

By Julia Schlosser

The Brand Library's group exhibition *Portrait in Phase* brings together four artists whose work examines the nexus between portraiture and the passage of time. Despite, or perhaps because of, the traditionally maligned nature of kids as "fine art" subject matter, these artists chose to portray children. Given the inherent temporality of childhood and the mutability of memory, their depictions of children are uniquely suited vehicles to examine the myriad ways that time can impact cultural representations of the individual.

Phung Huynh juxtaposes bulbous body parts, tiny tufts of hair, and fetishized genitalia with lotus blossoms and koi in her lush, uncomfortably "Orientalized" portraits of highly stylized Asian infants. Huynh's babies exist outside of time and are not meant to grow and change with its passage. Instead, they comment on ways that aspects of Asian culture are frozen into timeless, stereotypical visual "bites," easily consumed by an eager Western audience.

At her son's daycare, Deb Diehl photographed little girls who, as part of their group game-play, staged elaborate mock deaths and "post mortem" viewings for themselves. The resulting images reveal the societal mechanisms that immediately begin to imprint young girls with the constant need to be looked at. Alexandra Wiesenfeld's surreal depictions of children stranded in landscapes littered with incongruous elements further articulate the vibrant narrative scenarios that children create from the details of the grown-up world swirling around them. Her images emphasize the profound differences in the ways that adults and children perceive time.

Diehl's second piece, a silhouetted self-portrait video projection, which comments on the voracious desire of the nineteenth-century middle class to acquire representations of themselves, and Jane Gotts's terse, tightly composed likenesses both draw heavily on traditional portraiture for their meaning. Portraits implicitly remind us of the passage of time, and the works in this show expand and draw on that relationship in provocative and nuanced ways.