

# LUBOV



**THOMAS LIU LE LANN**  
*Best Western*

September 28–November 10, 2019

Reception: Saturday September 28, 6–9pm

**Hans Ulrich Obrist:** Do your sculptures portray existing people?

**Thomas Liu Le Lann:** Yes, I write biographic essays of the boys (men) I meet, linking them to my sculptural work. I title each piece with their first names.

**HUO:** Who is the main character?

**TLLL:** Yes, he was my lover. The exhibition *Best Western* will attempt to tell a story about him. Specifically, about the night that we shared together in a room at the Best Western Hotel in Hong Kong.

**HUO:** How is this going to work? Will there be an exact reconstruction of this hotel room? With the minibar, the T.V., the table?

**TLLL:** Not really, it will be far from being a millimetric reconstruction of the room. The exhibition space already looks like a bedroom. Therefore, I'm going to place the hotel's neon lights and my luggage inside it. It will be a small scene that occurs within the room rather than reconstructing the hotel room itself.

**HUO:** What's the importance of writing for you?

**TLLL:** I don't draw. I write a lot. I only draw sewing patterns, and sometimes I make scribbles in my sketchbook. My research and ideas pass through the writing of my stories and poems.

**HUO:** What influences your writing?

**TLLL:** In my younger years I took inspiration from Marguerite Duras, specifically *Un barrage contre le Pacifique*, *Le Ravissement de Lol V. Stein* and obviously *l'Amant*. Later I read Paul B. Preciado, Guillaume Dustan and then Hervé Guibert, *Voyage avec deux enfants* and *Le Mausolée des amants*, these authors and their writings are fundamental to me.

**HUO:** I am not familiar with Guillaume Dustan. Can you tell me about him?

**TLLL:** He is undoubtedly the only author to have addressed certain subjects in his own way and who reflected an intense period in Paris. His success in France, if we can call it a success, is also strongly linked to his media appearances and the Prix de Flore he received for *Nicolas Pages*. One of his books, *In My Room*, has been translated into English and published by Ramaya Tegegne. In his writings, he discusses his relationship to the H.I.V. epidemic, contamination, bareback sex, and relapse. He also documented club life, backrooms and gay bars in Paris, many of which have disappeared today. He expressed a strong position against a certain moralism, which caused a scandal and turned him into a pariah in opposition to the morality of that time.

**HUO:** In your work, some objects and figures keep reappearing. You told me earlier that they were portraits? What is the role of these figures?

**TLLL:** Paul Clinton called them "Soft Heroes," since then I have called them that way. They are passive figures. They are objects, and they are objectified, fetishized, and very tired of being visually treated like that. They are in their almost depressive attitude.

**HUO:** Yes, that's what I think as well, and the "Soft Hero" is a deconstruction of the Hero, isn't it?

lubov.nyc  
info@lubov.nyc

(347) 496-5833

5 E Broadway, #402  
New York, NY 10038

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**TLLL:** Yes, that's right. When we hear 'Hero,' we imagine things, people, but we must no longer think about that. We have to think of our Soft Heroes. This reminds me of Guy Hocquenghem and what he describes as the "power of passivity." He argues that to weaken patriarchy, anal penetration is a subversive act. So, passivity is the power of men. Therefore, these men who engage in anal penetration may be or would become soft heroes. It's a beautiful vision.

However, to go further, we can imagine communities of completely passive men, who do not practice penetration. I'm talking about an image; not a solution.

**HUO:** Concerning your exhibition ShowDown at M.B.A.L. Le Locle, you made Kalashnikovs. Where do these Kalashnikov sculptures come from?

**TLLL:** The rifles were made of padded vinyl. The material is fetishistic and soft, including fake fur that falls off. These weapons are powerless like the phallic representations of Tetsumi Kudo. They are also harmless weapons—toys, penetrable, and with the possibility of sexual insertion.

**HUO:** Is all your work autobiographical?

**TLLL:** In short, yes; it's mainly about me, who travels and sleeps with men. These stories are also punctuated by science fiction.

**HUO:** Is *Best Western* only about that specific night at the hotel? Or as in *Nouveau Roman*, does it also concern the objects in the room?

**TLLL:** Yes, it was a room with a view of the bay. My lover and I drank beer and smoked sitting on the bed; there were smells, a tapestry...

**HUO:** And what happened to this character? Have you kept in touch? Does he know about it?

**TLLL:** He works in finance in Hong Kong. We don't talk to each other anymore. Yes, he knows about it. All of the people I had the opportunity to write about have read the texts for validation. The names, places, and details were changed during the writing.

**HUO:** Do these exhibitions represent new chapters in your novel? Alain Robbe-Grillet has always told me that he uses invitations as a pretext to write sections of his book. For instance, he has to write about a painter; but in his head, it is the first chapter of a novel. Could you imagine that every exhibition you do is a new chapter in your book?

**TLLL:** Yes, I think there are always elements that play again and again in different situations. It can also be read as a novel with various scenes. The idea for *Best Western* is to go from chapter to chapter by rebuilding, rewriting, and further developing the text and simultaneously creating new exhibition projects.

August 30, 2019. Zürich.

**Thomas Liu Le Lann** (b. 1994) is a multidisciplinary artist whose work focuses on attempting to invalidate masculinity and highlight the progressive characteristics of softness and passivity. He represents both his fiancé's and his own uncertain body and gender through sculptural works, paintings and autofiction poems. In his recent work, the artist has introduced the figure of the "soft hero," which seeks to support the deconstruction of the dominant heroic model and its bulky representations. He has had exhibitions, among others, at Xippas Gallery (Geneva), VinVin (Vienna), Mikro (Zurich), Take Festival (Vienna), Extramentale (Arles), Centre d'Art Contemporain (Yverdon Les Bains), BNP Paribas Foundation (Geneva), Musée des Beaux Arts (Le Locle), Maladie d'Amour (Grenoble).

For any inquiries, please contact [info@lubov.nyc](mailto:info@lubov.nyc)

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