

PRESSBOOK

Paul PFEIFFER

Art Asia Pacific

December 2015



From Current Issue

[EDITOR'S LETTER](#) Close Encounters

[REPORTS](#) Brisbane

[PROFILES](#) Aarnout Helb

[FEATURES](#) Bangladeshi Women Artists

[REVIEWS](#) Dinh Q. Lê

[REVIEWS](#) Aki Sasamoto

[WHERE I WORK](#) Shirazeh Houshiary

[FINE PRINT](#) Art Law Self Help: Contracting without a Contract

[Table of Contents](#)

[Web Exclusives](#)

[Archive](#)

[Subscribe](#)

P
R
E
V



N
E
X
T

Installation view of "Three Figures in a Room" at Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2015. Photo by Joyce Yung. Courtesy Paul Pfeiffer and Galerie Perrotin, Paris/Hong Kong.

THREE FIGURES IN A ROOM PAUL PFEIFFER

WEB REVIEW BY ELLIAT ALBRECHT
GALERIE PERROTIN

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P
R
E
V

N
E
X
T



PAUL PFEIFFER, *Caryatids (Hatton)*, 2015, still from digital video loop. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Perrotin, Paris/Hong Kong.

P
R
E
V

N
E
X
T

Predicted to be the highest-grossing boxing match of all time, the much anticipated face-off between high-ranked boxers Floyd Mayweather and Manny Pacquiao was dubbed with an equally monumental nickname, the "Fight of the Century." Pay-per-viewers around the world tuned in to watch the long-awaited match in May 2015, but ultimately found the fight disappointing due to Mayweather's defense-oriented strategy and Pacquiao's difficulty in landing punches. Nevertheless, it was a historic media spectacle; the fight garnered USD 410 million in revenue and was watched by nearly half of all households in Pacquiao's native Philippines.

"Three Figures in a Room" at Galerie Perrotin in Hong Kong is Hawaii-born, New York-based Paul Pfeiffer's first solo exhibition in the city and consists of a media installation based on the match between Mayweather and Pacquiao. A video projected onto both sides of a large screen in the center of the darkened main room shows all 12 rounds of the fight as it was broadcast, save for one major alteration: all background noise has been omitted from the footage. The music, crowd and announcers have fallen silent and all that remains is the sonically-magnified sounds of the two fighters' exerted bodies moving about the ring and their gloves brutally meeting flesh. Devoid of excess noise, the fight's original frenzy has been reduced to that of a hushed golf game. The boxers' absolute focus seems to be shared by the audience in the arena, which observes in rapt silence, in a far cry from actual events.



Art Asia Pacific
25 December 2015
Elliat Albrecht

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Installation view of "Three Figures in a Room" at Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong, 2015. Photo by Joyce Yung. Courtesy Paul Pfeiffer and Galerie Perrotin, Paris/Hong Kong.

The pared-down soundtrack was produced by "foley" artists, a term for experts in film or television who create sound effects. The foley artists, using noise-making props such as slabs of raw meat and their own bodies, recreated the sounds of every breath, footstep and punch onscreen. A video in an adjoining room of the gallery shows them at work in the studio, slapping the meat on the ground and grunting at their microphones.

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In addition to the audio, Pfeiffer has also manipulated the fight footage so that the boxers occasionally fade away and disintegrate into clouds of moving, shimmering color. This partial erasure wryly points out the qualitative similarities between spectacles and mirages: fantastical from a distance, but often nothing substantial when looked at up close. A third room in the gallery contains the work *Caryatids* (2015), a series of small, tabletop video installations which shows looped videos of boxers being punched in slow motion. In these, the attacking opponent has been digitally removed and the receiver of punches is alone in the ring, repeatedly recoiling from the blows of an invisible force, shifting the focus from victory to defeat. Deeply interested in the conditions of perception, Pfeiffer's careful deconstruction of the videos is a comment on the spectacle-obsessed culture's relationship with the body and celebrity. He is fascinated by the way athletes function (or perhaps more accurately, perform), when inundated with bright lights, shouting crowds and flashing light bulbs. Under such intense pressure and the eyes of millions of onlookers, the boxer's subjecthood is forsaken for objecthood, as their near-naked, exhausted bodies become a site of saturated observation. By distilling the fight to its bare elements, Pfeiffer challenges his viewers to look beyond the spectacle and confront the complicated implications of seeing.

While the title of the show refers to a 1963 triptych by the painter Francis Bacon, "Three Figures in a Room" also acknowledges the participatory role of the viewer. This is emphasized by an interesting curatorial choice seen in the exhibition. Due to the positioning of the projector in the gallery, when one approaches the installation, their shadow appears on the screen inside the ring along with Mayweather and Pacquiao. This literal immersion into the surreal spectacle is Pfeiffer's astute way of reminding us that the complex act of looking is also a form of participation.

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PAUL PFEIFFER, *Caryatids (Pacquiao)*, 2015, digital video loop. 5" LCD screen in custom 3D-printed, painted resin shell, media player, 14.4 × 17.8 × 12.7 cm. Photo by Joyce Yung. Courtesy the artist and Galerie Perrotin, Paris/Hong Kong.

"Three Figures in a Room" is on view at Galerie Perrotin, Hong Kong, until January 9, 2016.