

# ARTFORUM

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## Fiona Tan

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Contemporary film and video artists often try to develop a different approach to filmic time than that typically employed in conventional action-driven cinema. Fiona Tan is one of them. Walking into her latest exhibition, one first saw a small monitor that showed a pair of feet hovering above a field of grass. This color video functioned as a little teaser for the black-and-white film projection with which it was paired, together forming one work, *Lift* (all works 2000). The film showed the artist floating through a park suspended from a bunch of balloons, surrounded by bare trees. Tan was hanging from these balloons rather more like a parachutist than like a balloon traveler. Although the film was constructed of various shots of her from different angles, the result was hardly dynamic. Time seemed to be suspended as one watched Tan going nowhere, flying purely for the experience of being suspended from the ground. Tan uses balloons as means not of transportation, but rather of flotation.

Historically, balloon travel is associated with modern imagemaking through Nadar, who photographed Paris from the air; balloons thus helped to free the camera eye and give access to new sights. Of course, film has also been associated with new means of transportation ever since the Lumieres' *Arrival of a Train at a Station* (1895), and a number of more or less famous cinematic balloons might be cited as antecedents of Tan's film. But Tan, like many contemporary film and video artists, shows images that are deliberately undynamic. In this she returns to "primitive" cinema; after all, the Lumieres' films usually had a mostly stationary camera, and the individual shots of Tan's film tend toward the static as well. The use of black and white contributes to the feeling of being out of time, as does the absence of sound.

In the back room of the gallery there were two monitors; each showed a still image, a freeze frame from a video. One of these was of a child in a park holding a red balloon practically

her own size—which is the size of the balloons that carried Tan in the film. The other one showed a child with a red cap holding a string that undoubtedly has a balloon attached to it as well, though it is out of view. Tan’s use of bright red balloons in these stills (and also in her attempt at balloon flight in *Lift*) brought to mind Albert Lamorisse’s 1956 children’s classic *The Red Balloon*, a short film about a lonely Parisian boy who “befriends” the eponymous plaything. But whereas the boy and the balloon in Lamorisse’s film roam through the city, the children and their balloons in Tan’s stills are completely frozen. They are suspended in time, like Tan’s work. As alluring as this is, one wonders whether there can be any development from here—whether this diluted temporality allows for any notion of a future.

—Sven Lütticken