

**Fu-On Chung**  
*Fumbling Calamities*

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Fu-On Chung  
*Fumbling Calamities*  
31.10.18–24.11.18

I look at the painting and my tongue stays firmly inside my mouth.

My look is greedy enough, my eyes roving around the canvas, hungrily searching for something I could never describe. I look at the painting and my tongue stays inside my mouth. It does its own thing in there, roaming the damp halls between teeth and cheek, finding a word to thrust against my front teeth, dissipating in pools of saliva when my mouth stays closed, not ready to utter, still just looking.

The painting is violet. I think about the times I've closed my eyes and seen patterns of light swirling against the purple-black of my eyelids. I think about the protein in the human retina that allows us to see in the dark, a pigment called *visual purple* which filters green-blue light so the world after dark looks mauve. I try think how to describe the forms that swim across the purple painting, and I keep coming back to the word *lozenge*, as in *pink lozenges that glow, that seem to be emerging from within a dark bruise, that are perhaps the only healthy cells left in a cluster of the dead and the dying*. Fresh saliva secretes into my mouth in anticipation. I have no lozenges to suck, I am just looking at a painting.

The mouth is a place of superlatives. Your jaw muscles are the most powerful in your body, your tongue the most flexible smooth muscle. Even the enamel on your teeth is the hardest substance your body can produce. Your mouth contains more nerve endings than almost anywhere else in your body, and this can make everything that happens there feel like the very best, or the very worst. Eating chocolate mousse, its texture so light and unctuous, the way it sweetly coats your tongue. Sucking on a smooth candy disc. Crunching through the crisp shell of a deep-fried wonton. Cutting the roof of your mouth on a crusty baguette, the ragged rawness colouring the rest of your day. Getting a flake of almond skin wedged between your molars, your tongue straining to dislodge something no bigger than a grain of rice that has somehow swollen to what seems like the size of a planet, impossible to ignore.

It's not that I think these paintings need to be experienced with tongue and lips, licked and sucked, teeth mashing against the canvas grain. It's more that I suspect lushness and excess could have the same affects across visual and oral forms, and that the language surrounding the oral – voluptuous, fleshy language – seems peculiarly appropriate for these paintings that feel liquid, that swill and swallow.

For Fu-On Chung's paintings give us sensations, not answers. They are the spoonful of chocolate mousse inside your mouth, not the recipe, nor the bowl sitting in front of you. They are theatrical, exuberant, more than you're usually given. But in their exuberance they are also enigmatic, swirling sensuality offering nothing concrete to grasp onto. It is in this soup of ambiguity and excess that I search for something to hold, and it is here that I find the body, or rather, see *into* the body. I look at *Storming the Palace* and see into my gut, or into my skull where the grey matter has turned sky blue and synapses are firing orange. A pink lozenge glows in the centre and it looks to be a way out (or a way in, depending where you're going), an orifice where the light comes in to reveal that our insides are rainbow.

I look at the painting and I open my mouth.

Lucinda Bennett 2018



**Fu-On Chung** is a Melbourne-based New Zealand artist. He is a current MFA candidate at the Victorian College of the Arts. He holds a BVA with first class honours from AUT University, Auckland (2013). He was a founding member and co-director of GLOVEBOX Artist-Run Gallery in Auckland 2015-2017.

Selected exhibitions include; *Under Control*, Two Rooms, Auckland, 2018; *Swirling Dream-Wreck*, Blue Oyster, Dunedin, 2017; *Slow-Burning*, MEANWHILE, Wellington, 2017; *Lumbering Towards Victory* (solo), GLOVEBOX, Auckland, 2015; *Drinking from the Fire Hose*, Artspace, Auckland, 2012.

**Lucinda Bennett** is an Aotearoa-based freelance writer and visual arts editor for online journal The Pantograph Punch.

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