Catalina Ouyang

Through Dec. 6. Lyles & King, 21 Catherine Street, Manhattan; 646-484-5478, lylesandking.com.

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Catalina Ouyang's "otherwise, spite: 1. whores at the end of the world / 2. from every drop of his blood another demon arose (1829-1840)," from 2020, various materials. Catalina Ouyang and Lyles & King

Catalina Ouyang's art falls into a category you might call the sculptural grotesque. Her work, which often features isolated or exaggerated body parts, evokes a kind of surreal humanity: She recently showed a nearly 19-foot-long bench shaped like a woman with breasts running down the torso. She heightens the sense of otherworldliness by employing unusual materials, including horse tibias and cigarette butts.

I love this style for its intriguing blend of the familiar and strange. But Ms. Ouyang's exhibition at Lyles & King stands out within the category because of its conceptual complexity. Entering the gallery's backyard, you step through the looking glass into a space dense with allusions to literature, history, anthropology and more.

Without knowing or understanding them all, you can still pick out a central theme: the forms of violence perpetrated against bodies identified as feminine. This is encapsulated in the centerpiece, "otherwise, spite: 1. whores at the end of the world / 2. from every drop of his blood another demon arose (1829-1840)," which reimagines a 19th-century colonial drawing showing an attack by a group of Indian thugs. Ms. Ouyang's tableau depicts a figure with an abstract, red face and a horse skull in its head — a reference to a guardian of the underworld in Chinese mythology — kneeling over a mutilated woman. The figure presses the woman's neck against the edge of a well and holds scissors to her eye — a chilling scene with an aura of mystery. Looking closely, the woman's mouth appears to form a slight grin. She knows something we don't. In that, there may be some power. *JILLIAN STEINHAUER*