

## 500 WORDS

## Lisa Tan

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Left: View of "Lisa Tan," 2010. Right: Lisa Tan, *Les Samourais*, 2010, still from a color video, 3 minutes 36 seconds.

For her exhibition at FDC Satellite in Brussels, Lisa Tan is presenting *Les Samourais*, a new work based on Jean-Pierre Melville's classic 1967 film. Exploring themes of isolation, history, relationships, and the everyday, all central to the artist's previous work, the show is open through May 15 and coincides with Art Brussels, which runs April 23–26.

I WAS ATTRACTED to the restrained qualities of Melville's *Le Samourai*: The color palette is really narrow and nearly monochromatic and there's hardly any dialogue. He was very resistant to making his films in color, but by 1967 black-and-white was not marketable. You can tell Melville really hated the transition to color. Even the small bird, the pet of the protagonist, was chosen for its drabness. It's a gray-brown female bullfinch; the males have pink-orange feathers.

I learned that the bird died in a fire that burned down Melville's studio when he was almost finished shooting *Le Samourai*. It's a minor thing, but the thought stayed with me as I began to research the fire with the help of a young woman who lived in the Thirteenth, where the studio was located in Paris.

In our correspondence, I learned that this person had moved from the States to France to be with her lover. At the time, she was spending her days alone waiting for him to return from work each day—which reminded me of the bird in Melville's film. In return for taking photographs of different sites in Paris, I mailed her items she requested. For taking pictures of where Studios Jenner once stood, I sent her a couple jars of peanut butter; for pictures of Marché aux Oiseaux, the bird and flower market that has taken place every Sunday for the past two hundred years near Notre Dame, she asked for Neutrogena face wash and Lipton French onion soup. We became pen pals over the next year and are still good friends.

I was thinking about this project as a memorial for the bird—this insignificant creature—and I was also interested in a theme of bonding, foreshadowed by death. So after a while I thought, why not just add another bird? Melville's *Samourai* is built around ideas of solitude, isolation, and detachment, so it's a very simple gesture to foil the film. By adding a bird, it not only alters the film but also modifies an occurrence in history, albeit fictitiously. It's messing with the master's work and is a bit mischievous in that way.

The installation of the show turned out black and white, which I like. Also, the gallery is the size of a bedroom, so it mimics the intimacy of the film. The room has two windows, which are very similar to those in the opening scene of the assassin's apartment. The armature that the video is projected upon comprises standard light stands that reference Melville's studio and also keep the proportions of the bird's cage. There is a photograph of the front and back pages of *Le Monde* from the day the studio burned down. These are hung on either side of the space, which might imply the pages in between.

I grappled with the story of my relationship with the young woman for a long time and decided not to include it in the final work. I reconciled the fact that as a story it's nice for me, but it probably doesn't have any interest for a wider public. Many of my works have this element: a narrative that speaks to some lived resonance in my life, but I need to edit the work so that it transcends my own experience. I consider it a process of distillation. To some degree, I tend toward a spare visual presentation and create a veneer in the finished work to mediate the overly sentimental content. The hope is that this creates more entry points for the viewer.