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What to See in N.Y.C. Galleries Right Now

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QUEENS

Diane Severin Nguyen

Through Dec. 13. SculptureCenter, 44-19 Purves Street, Long Island City, Queens. 718-361-1750; sculpture-center.org.



Installation view of Diane Severin Nguyen's "If Revolution Is a Sickness," at SculptureCenter. Charles Benton

SculptureCenter

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These days, K-pop's ties to global capitalism are hard to miss. (Take McDonald's menu, which offers a Chicken McNugget meal endorsed by the Korean boy band BTS.) But the American artist Diane Severin Nguyen uses K-pop to look at something different: the impact of immigration and cultural exchange among countries with a Communist past.

The exhibition's main work, a video titled "If Revolution Is a Sickness," stars a Vietnamese-Polish protagonist named Weronika, who lives in Warsaw and eventually joins a local dance crew inspired by Korean idol groups. As they move and lip-sync to a song about revolution, Nguyen builds a case that K-pop has much in common with Soviet socialism. Which maybe isn't far-fetched: The genre's stars often live communally and perform choreographed acts. Casting her lead actress by searching for a Polish performer who shared her surname, Nguyen sought a doppelgänger from an alternate post-Cold War world. If your immigrant parents came inches away from moving elsewhere entirely, this game of "what-if" feels familiar.

In a back room at SculptureCenter, photos by Nguyen — flames, braided hair and unrecognizable gooey substances shot close-up — echo older feminist artists who explored abjection and bodily shame. Throughout, Nguyen merges cinematic melodrama with the homegrown feel of social media: the inexplicable listlessness of vloggers; reaction videos shot in bedrooms and public squares. If you like the unfiltered emotions and rough edges of the current media landscape, then Nguyen's latest work will appeal to you.

DAWN CHAN