

Wong Kit Yi *Futures, Again*
 P!, New York 8 March – 12 April

'I thank first of all God, and then my patrons, who have granted me everything.' So Giorgio Vasari rhapsodises in his conclusion to *The Lives of the Artists* (1550). Patronage is no less important to the contemporary artworld, and a bespoke model of it courses through the heart of Wong Kit Yi's exhibition.

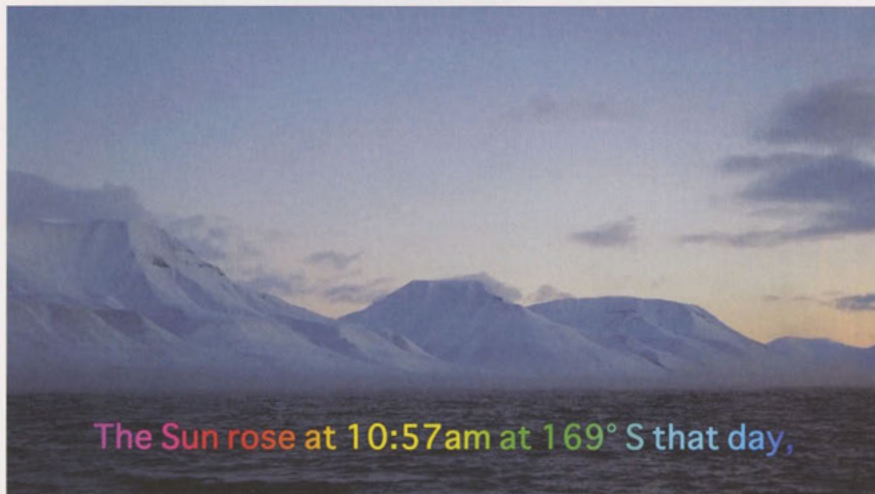
This layered show builds on *North Pole Futures*, which took place at P! during spring 2015. For that exhibition, Ali Wong, the artist's self-styled 'investment manager' and alter ego, offered collectors the chance to commission customised works of art in order to fund the artist's stint with the Arctic Circle Expeditionary Residency. Prospective patrons selected a colour, an esoteric English word and a date during Wong's residency when she would produce the tailored work. That autumn Wong sailed to the Arctic Circle for three weeks. In her current exhibition, she displays the fruits of this journey, including a new video, *A River in the Freezer* (2017), while also offering for sale the few remaining dates from 2015: the yet-to-be-commissioned memories from the residency. Should a collector acquire one of these unrealised pieces, Wong would produce a work that evokes the memories of both artist and patron.

Wong recruited fellow expeditionary residents – artists, scientists and writers – to help her execute *October 8, 2015, p.m. / Argus-eyed / Gold* (2015). Bracketed by eight smaller pictures, this piece's central photograph presents eight individuals as they form an outward-facing circle. Gazing out at the surrounding tundra, Wong's collaborators clutch gilt pinhole cameras. Producing the index of Wong's experience, these cameras have created the eight hazy landscapes that frame this work's central image above and below, revealing a black-and-white sense of isolation, absent humans. Other commissioned works, like *October 11, 2015, a.m. / Emmetropia / Forbidden Red* (2015), read initially as arresting, romantic and performative documents of the artist immersed in the natural world. On the fifth day of her residency, the captain of Wong's ship dropped her off on a small landmass so she could create a picturesque image, dramatically staged against the backdrop of pale-blue glacier. Here, the camera framed Wong as an intrepid explorer with a blazing distress flare grasped in her hand.

The artist's rich research-based practice fluoresces in *A River in the Freezer*, a video that nimbly cycles through themes of geologic time, the arctic and cheating death. A soothing male narrator discusses cryogenics while clips

of Cygnus Hyōga, an anime superhero who wields icy magic (and has a last name that means 'glacier' in Japanese), flash across the monitor. A biochemist explains the process of coring and studying ice samples. Rainbow-coloured singalong lyrics move viewers from scene to scene, switching between documentary and music video. Auto-Tune voices sing the idiosyncrasies of Longyearbyen, Norway, one of the world's northernmost settlements, where people cannot be interred – bodies buried in permafrost do not decompose, so the dead must pass to the afterlife further south. Addictive and enrapturing, Wong's ode to the subzero world underwrites her commitment to subject matter beyond novel economic models.

Futures, Again spotlights a tension some of us would prefer to ignore: the push-and-pull between the financial system in which art operates, and the weighty meanings ascribed to works of art. At one point in the video the narrator asks, "Who owns the right to harvest ice?" Paralleling this question, I think, "Who owns the right to acquire this art?" The answer to both of these is, ultimately, the same: whoever possesses the requisite capital. Wong's alluring take on the artist-as-entrepreneur is franchise-ready. *Owen Duffy*



A River in the Freezer (video still), 2017, HD video, sound, 25 min.
 Courtesy the artist and P!, New York