

*Four Thieves Vinegar*  
Sydney Shen

Opening reception Saturday, October 21st, 2017 / 7-10pm  
On view through November 25th

*Four Thieves Vinegar* — known variously as *vinaigre des quatre voleurs*, *acetum quator furum*, Vinegar of the Four Thieves, Forthave's Vinegar — is a prophylactic against bubonic plague, fabled to have been developed by thieves in France during one of several major historical plague outbreaks to protect from infection by the corpses they plundered.

**OUR PLESANCE HEIR IS ALL VANE GLORY,  
THIS FALS WARLD IS BOT TRANSITORY,  
THE FLESCHE IS BRUKLE, THE FEND IS SLE;  
TIMOR MORTIS CONTURBAT ME.**

—William Dunbar, c.1505

*Don Ferrante della Marra reported in 1632 that Gesualdo was “assailed and afflicted by a vast horde of demons that gave him no peace for many days on end unless a quartet of young men, whom he kept specially for the purpose, were to beat him violently four times a day, during which operation he habitually smiled.”*

*Tomasso Campanella confirmed della Marra's contemporaneous version in another way in his Medicinalium juxta propria principia of 1635: “The Prince of Venosa, one of the best musicians of his age, was unable to go to the stool without having been previously flogged by a valet kept expressly for this purpose.”*

*These beatings can thus be readily interpreted as therapeutic massages intended to alleviate intestinal difficulties, which contemporary medicine had no other means of classifying or treating. At the same time they could just as easily be read as a manifestation of an exorcism, intended to rid the body of demons. Such self-injurious practices derivative of both cultural and psychological sources, Crayton explains, could have a quite specific function to help such “hollow” people feel alive. (Watkins, 2010, p.59)*

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**Sydney Shen** (b. 1989) lives and works in New York and studied at The Cooper Union. Solo exhibitions include *Interstate Projects*, Brooklyn; *Motel*, Brooklyn; *Holy Motors*, Hong Kong; *Roberta Pelan*, Toronto.

Select recent group exhibitions include *Aike-Dellarco*, Shanghai; *Minibar*, Stockholm; *Weekends*, London; *Hester*, New York; *Springsteen*, Baltimore; *Fused Space*, San Francisco; *Derek Eller Gallery*, New York; *Et Al*, San Francisco; *American Medium*, Brooklyn; and *Sydney*, Sydney.

Forthcoming projects include *A Maior*, Portugal; and *Gesualda*. Shen is co-author of *Perfume Area*, a book of prose published by Ambient Works, New York.