

Large Text

Where have I arrived?

Curated by Sherry Chunqing Liu

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University of Toronto Art Centre

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Works by Lotus Laurie Kang, Brubey Hu, and
Patrick Cruz

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This exhibition is produced as part of the requirements for the MVS degree in Curatorial Studies at the John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape, and Design, University of Toronto.

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Where have I arrived?

This polaroid of a couple of green plants on the balcony of my childhood home in Xiamen, China, somehow became one of my only remaining pieces of documentation of that house. I carried it with me throughout my time in Canada, even when I moved east across the country for school. Most of my polaroids depict people. Usually, they depict me and my loved ones. This image, however, only captures a few potted plants on iron railings against a dark background. Yet, when I see it, I remember that it was only a test run, that it was a photograph I snapped upon opening a new box of polaroid film, that the photo was in fact taken during the day, that the plants were mainly taken care of by my grandma, and that the inscription, “2015 Balcony of Xiamen Home,” was a later addition, a caption I put down in black ink by the time I was in Canada and had begun to fear I would forget the year the image was taken. This spontaneous capture of a little corner of that familiar yet distant home evokes a much larger diaspora space, one that extends beyond my spatial memory of that home. Where is this mental space to which I have arrived?

Sociologist Avtar Brah defines “diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora)” as a conceptual category that “includes the entanglement, the intertwining of the genealogies of dispersion with those of ‘staying put.’”¹ In the reconciliation of such “entanglement,” diasporian subjects, as scholar Sara Ahmed describes, take up unfamiliar spaces with their bodies to inhabit what “might come to feel like home.”² In this exhibition, artists Lotus Laurie Kang, Brubey Hu, and

Patrick Cruz render palpable the personal and untranslatable feelings in moments of longing and disorientation that emerge from their inhabitation of “diaspora space.”

I. Food/Kitchen

The stainless steel mixing bowls in Kang’s *Mother* might be familiar to those who have spent time in the kitchen. Yet this familiarity is challenged when we discover the unusual colours and textures of the food items “floating” in tinted “liquids” in the bowls. This defamiliarization represents Kang’s view of diaspora space; born and raised in Toronto in a Korean household, she speaks to a kind of diasporic haunting that relates to generational and embodied memories. Hu’s *Leftovers and Euphemism* 残余与委婉 draws inspiration from her experience at the kitchen counter with her mother. The use of simplified geometric shapes and the projection of light echoing between the sides of canvases render the scene more abstract, allowing audiences of different backgrounds to project their own reality into the work, evoking Brah’s statement: “The diaspora space is the site where the native is as much a diasporian as the diasporian is the native.”³

II. Translation

Presented in Hu’s artist book *Returning, Dreaming & Talking* 回与梦呓 is a collection of poetry the artist originally wrote in Chinese to reflect on her hybrid identity, travels, and memories. Hu had this collection translated into English by a professional translator and then had her family and friends translate the poems *back* into Chinese. How, she wondered,

would information, meaning, and emotion “evaporate” between the three versions? Cruz’s large-scale paintings derive from his 2021 exhibition *si mabait at si malihim, mga agam agam sa kuro kuro*, a Filipino title intentionally left untranslated. When asked about the meaning of the title in an interview, Cruz responded: “Sometimes there are just things that you can’t translate.”⁴ The array of mixed media in his works conveys a sense of hybridity and paradox; our efforts to unpack the layers of expressions might lead us to states of confusion, loss, resonance, or reflection.

III. Body

Cruz’s work takes a playful approach to the entanglement of the migrant body and the diaspora space. Paintings hung from the ceiling fill the gallery at uneven angles, forming a labyrinth-like space where bodies become part of the work as they maneuver through it. Kang attends to the traversal of food in and out of our bodies to reflect on our heritage and embodied knowledge as they relate to our conscious memory. Inspired by the writing of Trinh T. Minh-Ha, Kang also explores the idea of “mother” through stories of her grandmother (whom she has never met) passed down by her father, as they relate back to her “encoded” body, like seeds inheriting memories from their mother seed.⁵

On arrival, Ahmed writes:

“Diasporic spaces do not simply begin to take shape with the arrival of migrant bodies; it is more that we only notice the arrival of those who appear ‘out of place.’ Those who are ‘in place’ also must arrive; they must get ‘here,’

but their arrival is more easily forgotten, or is not even noticed.”⁶

As you enter these diaspora spaces, you might also gently whisper, “Where have I arrived?” For now, I leave these spaces to you. I leave them, of course, untranslated.

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1. Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (London: Routledge, 1996), 238.
2. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 10.
3. Brah, *Cartographies*, 205.
4. Carlito Pablo, “Artist Patrick Cruz finds echoes of past amid maze of images,” accessed December 27, 2022, <https://www.straight.com/arts/artist-patrick-cruz-finds-echoes-of-past-amid-maze-of-images>.
5. Lotus Laurie Kang, “Inheritance | Seed Woman | Possession,” *This Long Century*, accessed March 17, 2023, <http://www.thislongcentury.com/laurie-kang>.
6. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 9-10.

About the Curator

Sherry Chunqing Liu is a curator, writer, designer, and artist based in Toronto and Vancouver, Canada. Born in Xiamen, China, she moved to Canada in 2013. She holds a BA in Architecture and is currently a Master of Visual Studies candidate at the University of Toronto. Her recent exhibitions include *Morris Lum: Those Unforgotten* (2022–23) and *Clinic into the Future* (2022). Sherry's curatorial practice focuses on community engagement and site-specificity with consideration to social issues. Her work has been published and featured on U of T News, The Varsity, Richmond News, Demo Magazine, The Strand, and more. (sherryliu.ca)

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Public Programming

Opening Reception: MVS Studio Program and MVS Curatorial Studies Program Graduating Exhibitions

Wednesday, May 3, 6pm–8pm

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