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# Radical Exposure

Photography is often described as a passive media—a recording of things that happen before the lens. But for many contemporary artists and photojournalists, it is a field of active investigation and exploration. *ArtAsiaPacific's* May/June issue spotlights artists who have sought to bring suppressed histories and historically marginalized groups into the light, in order to bridge societal divisions. Our cover Feature, by contributor Cleo Roberts-Komireddi, is anchored in a group exhibition held in Dubai at the Ishara Art Foundation, “Growing Like A Tree,” curated by Indian photographer Sohrab Hura, who gathered the works of South and Southeast Asian photographers, collectives, and organizations, foregrounding their affinities and mutual support. “While relations between states may be weighed down by antagonism, the common experience of heightened surveillance and censorship has bred a sense of solidarity among many ordinary citizens that cuts across borders,” Roberts-Komireddi writes. Examining the practices of the Burmese all-female Thuma Collective, Kaali Collective and Chobi Mela in Bangladesh, and Nepal’s photo.circle and Nepal Picture Library, she sets out to examine how a surge in majoritarian politics is driving photo-activism, archiving initiatives, and collaboration between collectives across the region.

Our second Feature spotlights Los Angeles-based multimedia artist Candice Lin, whose touring solo exhibition “Pigs and Poison”—currently at Guangzhou’s Guangdong Times Museum—historicizes the Covid-19-heightened scapegoating of Asians during pandemics, starting with the questionable attribution of the Black Death to Mongol troops in the 14th century. Probing the boundaries within and between species has long been of interest to Lin. Whether in her 2013 sculpture of a human-turned-cockroach or the sarcophagus that she designed in 2019 to encase the corpses of her and her future cats, she has focused on “non-humans and the dehumanized, creating projects that cross past with present and future, self with other,” writes managing editor Chloe Chu.

Rounding out the Features section, in *Up Close*, the editors examine three projects in which artists propose ways of overcoming societal divisions: Sarah Choo Jing’s installation about the yearning for human contact during lockdown, *Zoom, Click, Waltz* (2020); Mika Tajima’s latest monumental sculpture in rose quartz, *Pranayama (Monolith, E, Rose Quartz)* (2020); and Minouk Lim’s installation at the Gwangju Biennale of over 1,370 walking sticks, or “wounded healers” as the artist calls them. For *Inside Burger Collection*, writer and curator Marie Muracciole interviews Lebanese-American artist Simone Fattal.

The Profiles section details the works of Abdullah M. I. Syed, whose practice is rooted in a “poetic resistance” that, as Susan Acret describes, “advocates for community building, family, the home, and inner transformation over pressures

to attain wealth, power, and privilege.” Profiled by Kerstin Winking, Agung Kurniawan likewise orchestrates healing through community, in his roles as artist and founding curator of Yogyakarta’s Kedai Kebun Forum. Meanwhile, guided by the question of “What histories are embedded in the ground on which human civilizations were built?” Ayoung Kim traces the ever-shifting borders that have divided and brought us together, as associate editor Ophelia Lai details.

In *Essays*, deputy editor HG Masters surveys the nearly 12-year-long run of the alternative space Arrow Factory, which resided in a 15-square-meter storefront in Beijing, and looks at the diverse approaches artists adopted to connect directly with the public.

In *Dispatch*, we hear about the intergenerational support between citizens and artists fighting for democracy in Myanmar. Elsewhere in the issue, Chicago-based artist Aram Han Sifuentes, in *The Point*, argues that “the US voting system perpetuates systemic racism and White supremacy” and seeks ways to remediate this with art. For *One on One*, Haig Aivazian, artist and artistic co-director of the Beirut Art Center, outlines how the interdisciplinary and Orientalist approach of 19th-century French painter Eugène Delacroix has posed “persistent problems that [he has] continued to find productive” in his own practice. In *Fine Print*, lawyers Juyoun Han and Patrick K. Lin dissect how Section 230 of the US Communications Decency Act allows social media platforms the freedom to decide how and what content to ban. This has in turn impacted the free expression of artists using these digital spaces, which are moderated by AI with little distinction between context and content.

Lastly, for *Where I Work*, contributor Daphne Chu visited the Taipei studio of animator Zhang Xu Zhan, who utilizes folded joss paper, customarily burned as offerings to one’s ancestors, in his stop-motion videos. Chu writes, “There is a great weight of responsibility that comes with the institution of traditional culture . . . But for Zhang Xu, as an artist, he finds it much more intriguing to combine life experiences, tales, and mythology to create universes that are ambiguous, or in his own words, placed in the *zhongjian*, the intermediate.” Whether researching folk traditions like Zhang Xu does to incorporate into his artworks, revisiting the worldviews humans held in past centuries, or assembling archives of images that tell little-known histories in places still deemed peripheral, artists keep memories and communities alive in the light of the present.



ELAINE W. NG

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# EAT ME



CANDICE LIN



BY CHLOE CHU

Two years ago, in perfect health and aged 40, Candice Lin decided to sculpt her own sarcophagus. Formed from terra-cotta, two striped cats sit atop the ceramic receptacle designed for her corpse; one is perched on a pillow, with a paw resting protectively on a statue of the seated artist swaddled in a blanket. This mixed-species band of tomb sentries—inspired by Etruscan coffin sculptures and Tang dynasty Chinese funerary pottery—is a projection of Lin and her feline companions at the time of her death. Beneath the figures, composting worms already inhabit the dirt-filled casket. Imaging the inevitable return of Lin's body to the earth, the installation *Future Sarcophagus* (2020) is a memento of the finitude and fleetingness of a single life, as much as it is recognition that our existence and afterlives are sustained by entangled agents.

Radically contrasting pandemic-heightened fears of viruses, bacteria, and other non-human or dehumanized lives, the self-portrait epitomizes the practice of the Los Angeles-based multimedia artist. Throughout her career, she has created projects that cross past with present and future, self with other, while layering diverse references spread across disciplines, from the theories of evolutionary biologists to colonial trade histories. In collapsing divisive barriers, however, Lin does not elide the inequalities that subsist between beings. From the beginning of her career, she has examined the frameworks that have determined our lopsided social structures. Her early works, created shortly after she attained her graduate degree in new genres from the San Francisco Art Institute in 2004, are focused on how the categories of race, class, and gender overlap, rather than function independently, to produce political asymmetries between groups and individuals.

In one of these pieces, Lin took an intersectional approach to Victorian British society. The installation *Wigan Pit-Brow Women* (2006–12) comprises cut-out ink-and-watercolor vignettes spread across a wall. The top components feature White women pinned, chained, or assaulted by figures in hooded black robes and masks. At the bottom, these cloaked characters mine lumps of coal, some personified with protruding ivory limbs and faces, from a pit. While the surface layers illustrate the victimization of White women, the levels beneath picture White femininity as a precious and sought-after resource (an evocation tied to Lin's own admitted, conflicted feelings in questioning her attraction to White women, and the internalized racial bias such connotations of beauty, desire, and Whiteness



*Failed Matriarchy*, 2009, watercolor and ink on paper, 77.5×112 cm. Photo by Joshua White. Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

reveal). Her exploration of the compounded ways in which White women are objectified, while given a perverse kind of value over women of color, stems from her studies of the relationship between 19th-century British aristocratic diarist Arthur Munby and the servant Hannah Cullwick, who were clandestine lovers of over 50 years. One of the couple's fetishes was recreating Munby's sketches of female laborers at collieries in England by dressing Cullwick up as a miner, darkening her face with soot, and photographing her. Cullwick's willing participation and privilege, seen in her ability to slip in and out of the racialized role, are double edged: she at once catered to the desire of a White man by personifying a subject deemed "unbecoming" within the matrix of race, class, and gender; and resisted the legitimacy of his conceptualization of social "lowliness" by manipulating its signs, performatively demonstrating its artifice.

In its consideration of what Lin calls the "tensions within the female gender, across races," *Wigan Pit-Brow Women* is focused on White femininity and its dual aspects of subjugation and privilege. A counterpoint to the installation is Lin's watercolor *Failed Matriarchy* (2009), which extends the same racial concerns but shifts the focus to the position of Indigenous, Asian, and ambiguously mixed-race women. In the painting, women face off in a jungle clearing, hurling coal at each other while some sit nonchalantly in front of thatched huts, watching the brawl; in the distance, dead bodies are strung from trees. Visually, the tableau borrows from 16th-century paintings and engravings of the New World by artists such as John White and Theodor de Bry, as well as Western anthropological descriptions of Indigenous peoples. In these materials, Indigenous women are typically portrayed as one of two archetypes, observes researcher Carole A. Myscofski in her essay "Imagining Cannibals: European Encounters with Native Brazilian Women" (2007): "The first is of the innocent maiden, a naive, naked, and vulnerable woman, whose nudity is open to the penetrating eye of the European male. She is the passive follower, the willing slave, and the conquerable virgin land. The second is the resistant woman warrior; she is the savage cannibal, the unknowable other, and the unyielding wilderness." *Failed Matriarchy*, then, foregrounds the latter, but does little to overwrite the stereotype of savagery.

The same could be said for the rest of *The Sexual Life of Savages* (2008–09) series, named after Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski's seminal 1929 book on British New



*Birth of a Nation*, 2008, watercolor and ink on paper, 112 × 132 cm. Photo by Joshua White. Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

Guinea. For example, rendered in watercolor and ink, *Birth of a Nation* (2008) features a sacrificial rite unfolding next to the impending bludgeoning of a woman, an orgy, an old man eating a baby's fingers, and a figure performing cunnilingus in the bushes. One might find this unexpected for an artist who is well aware of the "hyper-sexualization of Indigenous, Black, and Asian people," in her own description, and who acknowledges that the early Western anthropological delineations of Indigenous communities are troubled. "The founding narrative of anthropology—the physical and mental superiority of White men—is about the most fantastical (and least believable) narrative there is," Lin said in a 2014 interview with *Flash Art*, before touching on her approach to her references: "I'm interested in the way in which an anthropologist's own anxieties and projections are bound up into the texts themselves . . . I also love to read anthropology as a kind of science fiction. The anecdotes in anthropology texts produce such haunting, rich images in my mind. I don't concern myself with their truth value."

Eschewing subversion, *The Sexual Life of Savages* instead soups up the drama of these colonial accounts, veering them into mythic and hallucinatory realms with lurking demons and chimerical creatures weaving in and out of action-packed scenes. Lin's choice to amplify and thus implicate herself in these twisted stories and images of the New World brings to mind the participant-observation method famously advocated by Malinowski, who asserted that anthropologists should immerse themselves in the communities of their inquiry for extended periods "to grasp the native's point of view, his relation to life, to realize his vision of his world." This puncturing of the separation between self and other is an instance of psychological anthropophagy, and is precisely what engenders the "anxieties and projections" clouding Western analysis of the colonies. In her introduction for "Cannibalia," a 2015 exhibition mounted by Kadist Art Foundation in Paris that included *The Sexual Life of Savages*, curator Julia Morandeira Arrizabalaga offers a similar explanation for the source of "savage" tropes in anthropology: "Cannibalism had more to do with thought and imagination than with the actual act of eating, and always named or referred to other things. Cannibalism was associated with a voracious and gluttonous femininity, the image of the lustful old witch, and the colonial masculine tension between the desire of eating and the fear of being eaten." An uneasiness likewise underpins Lin's nightmarish visions—one that arises from the task of metabolizing the legacies of colonialism while one is consumed by them.

The intertwining of predator and prey emerges as a more distinct theme in *Metamorphosis in Space (human size cockroach)* (2013). A giant silver-painted papier-mâché insect is



Installation view of *Metamorphosis in Space (human size cockroach)*, 2013, papier-mâché, paper clay, joint-compound, paint, wood, mattress, sheets, 107 × 184 × 90 cm, at "The long-lasting intimacy of strangers," Galeria Quadrado Azul, Porto, 2013. Courtesy the artist; Galeria Quadrado Azul; and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.



Photos of *Subtleties and Warnings: Power and the Edible Grotesque*, 2014, a ten-course banquet at Delfina Foundation, London, on January 29, 2014. Courtesy the artist; Delfina Foundation, London; and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

placed on a bed, alluding to Franz Kafka's novella *The Metamorphosis* (1915), in which the protagonist awakes one morning to find that he has been turned into "monstrous vermin." Lin explained to me that, for her, the storyline is rooted in the rising anti-Semitic sentiments of Kafka's time, and the German-Jewish writer's concerns of "what/who counts as family and as kin, and what/who is verminous and disgusting and must be killed or thrown out of the house." Unlike actual cockroaches, Lin's sculpture has three gaping vagina-esque openings on each of its two sides—added features nodding to the *Coridromius* bugs, a genus whose copulation practice is known as "traumatic insemination," and involves the male forcefully piercing the female's body cavity. Over the centuries, the female insects have adapted by growing external paragenitalia, protecting themselves. Happening upon this case study in her research on coevolution, a theory forwarded by biologist Lynn Margulis, Lin said in our conversation that she was struck by the "violent example of how we have new forms of life because of the interactions between two genders, two types of cells, or two types of species that try in some way to control or co-opt the body of another. I was interested in that contradiction between the violence and the possibility of coevolution."

All living creatures are familiar with fornicating, feeding, and fighting—negotiated processes of giving and taking that result in domination and/or synthesis. No project better coalesces these primal drives than *Subtleties and Warnings: Power and the Edible Grotesque* (2014), a heady ten-course banquet that Lin served to 30 guests at London's Delfina Foundation on January 29, 2014. The first course, provocatively titled *A Different Kind of Hunger*, was a sugar-paste bird spiked with whiffs of "a pheromone derived from male sweat." The smell was based on a product by sexual-lubricant makers Bodywise, whose tests showed that the pheromone "had a dominating effect, causing an avoidance of scented chairs (except in menstruating heterosexual women)," Lin detailed on the menu. Playing to the purpose of medieval English banquets as spectacles that shocked, dazzled, and ultimately forged loyalties between the host and guests, she primed attendees for submission using the odor, "opening the orifices for all the monstrosities to come." Among these "monstrosities" was a rat-shape meatloaf (*Eat Your Disease*), chickens baked in clay sculpted to resemble a pair of "very important men" (*Koch Brother's Beggar's Chicken and Sticky Rice*), and quiches with aphrodisiac worms and ants (*Rebellion and Sex*). Plate after plate, Lin implored diners to surrender their stomachs, while pushing them to the edge between seduction and repulsion, asking them what is grotesque and what is desirable. Reportedly, no one fled or turned the tables on Lin that evening.



Installation view of *A Warner for Survivalists: White Gold*, 2016, cockroaches, tank, sugar, gum tragacanth, edible pigments, glucose, candied fruit and leaves, 45 x 45 x 160 cm, at "A Body Reduced to Brilliant Colour," Gasworks, London, 2016. Photo by Andy Keate. Courtesy the artist.



Detail of *System for a Stain*, 2016, wood, glass jars, cochineal, poppy seeds, metal castings, water, tea, sugar, copper still, hot plate, ceramic vessels, mortar and pestle, Thames mud, jar, microbial mud battery, vinyl floor, dimensions variable, at "A Body Reduced to Brilliant Colour," Gasworks, London, 2016. Photo by Andy Keate. Courtesy the artist.



Installation view of *System for a Stain*, 2016, wood, glass jars, cochineal, poppy seeds, metal castings, water, tea, sugar, copper still, hot plate, ceramic vessels, mortar and pestle, Thames mud, jar, microbial mud battery, vinyl floor, dimensions variable, at "A Body Reduced to Brilliant Colour," Gasworks, London, 2016. Photo by Andy Keate. Courtesy the artist.

Two years later, she returned to London with a project that built on her research of the Medieval English gastronomic phenomena of “subtleties”: foods that aren’t what they look like, typically made of sugar. Displayed in “A Body Reduced to Brilliant Colour,” her solo show at Gasworks, was a standing vitrine holding 18 cockroaches alongside a sugar sculpture of a porcelain china vase. There is a cruelty to *A Warner for Survivalists: White Gold* (2016): after generations of being baited by sugar, cockroaches have learned not to feed on sucrose. Thus, under Lin’s captivity, the critters were asked to undo decades of indoctrination and evolution in order to survive.

“A Body Reduced to Brilliant Color” also spotlighted *System for a Stain* (2016), which marked Lin’s deepening engagement with non-human agents in colonial trade histories. The installation comprises an upturned bust of Robert Fortune, the Scottish botanist who stole tea-manufacturing secrets from China; a copper siphon distillation system; porcelain vessels; and a hose. The carmine liquid that flowed through these components incorporated cochineal insects, as did the hexapod-like exterior of two of the ceramic containers. The Aztec peoples had long used ground-up cochineal for red dyes before Spanish conquistadors enslaved them and started exporting the colorant from Mesoamerica to sell in Europe in the 16th century. Lin’s acrid, fermented solution, which also contained other substances related to the colonization of the Caribbean and China—namely tea, sugar, and opium poppy seeds—ultimately spilled out in an adjacent space, begriming the ground with blood-red puddles. A mechanism for “refinement” that instead produces a mess, *System for a Stain* tugs at the strings that bind humans, animals, and goods, while reviving histories of violence and theft through living, morphing matter.

The translation of unstable histories into capricious objects was likewise central to Lin’s subsequent touring exhibition “A Hard White Body” (2017), where she embedded marginalized pasts into unfired porcelain. At Paris’s Bétonsalon, the main titular installation began its life as 1,000 kilograms of porcelain shaped into a bed, based on the setting described in novelist James Baldwin’s book about a queer relationship, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956). Strewn around the bed were other unfinished ceramic elements such as an atlas referencing the travels of Jeanne Baret, who cross-dressed as a man and sailed around the world on colonial expeditions as an assistant to her lover, the naturalist



Installation view of *A Hard White Body*, 2017, stoneware urinal, pipes, distillation system, bricks, buckets, water from the Seine river, urine, plants, porcelain, wood, plastic sheets, misting system, dimensions variable, at “A Hard White Body,” Bétonsalon, Paris, 2017. Photo by Aurélien Mole. Courtesy the artist; Bétonsalon; and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.



Installation view of *A Hard White Body*, 2017/18, distillation system, bricks, urine, plants, porcelain, wood, cardboard, books, photographs, paper, used clothing, dried plants, glass jars, hot plate, kettle, pitcher, silk worms, heating wire, dimensions variable, at “A Hard White Body, a Soft White Worm,” at Portikus, Frankfurt, 2018. Photo by Helena Schlichting. Courtesy Portikus.



*Refined by Fire*, 2018–21, wall paintings, bone black pigment, 485×950 cm. Courtesy the artist.

Philibert Commerson. Aside from the rhetoric imposed on Baldwin and Baret—Baldwin was feminized and called a “White man in a Black man’s body” by fellow writer Eldridge Cleaver, while Commerson described Baret as having “strong broad shoulders [and] sun roughened skin,” exemplifying again the imbrication of race, class, and gender in social stratification—what aligned these figures was that they could only be glimpsed in the archives. As Lin told *The Seen* journal in 2018, “In the case of Baret, she has no archive; there is a notebook in Commerson’s archives at the Museum of Natural History in Paris that is perhaps written by Baret but there is no way to confirm this. In Baldwin’s archive, which just became partially accessible to the public in April 2017, there continue to be restrictions upon what can be seen or reproduced.”

At later iterations of the show, at Frankfurt’s Portikus and Chicago’s Logan Center for the Arts, Lin showed fragments of the bed: a fitting homage to history as an ongoing process with multiple, shifting pieces. Silkworms were introduced to the presentation at Portikus, where they defecated, cocooned, transformed into moths, and died on the porcelain chunks, defying colonial-era merchants’ praise of porcelain as being “‘pure white,’ ‘superior,’ and ‘impervious to staining by foreign products such as coffee or tea,’” as Lin relayed to *The Seen*. In the 19th century, biologist Louis Pasteur had in fact used porcelain as a filter for bacteria, including in his study of a disease that plagued silkworms in the French countryside; the same technology was later employed to examine the tobacco mosaic virus. A drawing of tobacco leaves fading from a green vitality to a decayed yellowness, placed near the central installation, was linked to the Spanish phrase “the tobacco has become mulatto,” which was used in 19th-century Colombia and is “the earliest identified recorded descriptor for viral infection,” according to researcher Jih-Fei Cheng. Human profiles are hidden in the edges of the leaves.

From its conception, the field of virology has coevolved with racialized rhetoric and the material histories of colonialism. Lin’s realization prompted her to double down on her interrogation into how notions of disease and impurity have been tinged with racial politics. Her findings culminated in “Pigs and Poison,” her latest exhibition, which commenced its tour at New Plymouth’s Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in August 2020 and has made its way to Guangzhou’s Guangdong Times Museum, just as hate crimes against Asians, spurred by Covid-19, are rampantly escalating across the globe. At the show, a life-size wooden trebuchet, *A History of Future Contagion* (2019), flung balls of oil, wax, lard, and bone-black pigment against a gallery wall. The installation reimagines



*Chinatown, Honolulu, 1900, 2020*, oil, encaustic, and lard on birch panel, 45.5 × 61 cm. Photo by Paul Salvesson. Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.



*Measuring Pigs in the Desert, 2020*, oil, encaustic, and lard on birch panel, 45.5 × 61 cm. Photo by Paul Salvesson. Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.

the advances of Mongol troops who supposedly launched diseased corpses into the Black Sea citadel at Caffa in 1346, and who were blamed for seeding the Black Death in Europe. The work testifies to the long history of scapegoating Chinese and Asiatic bodies around pandemics.

Bone-black pigment reappeared as a subject in *Refined by Fire* (2018–21), a black-and-white mural of workers toiling in sugarcane fields as plumes of smoke billow above them. The image draws from an 1873 report on indentured Chinese laborers in Cuba. To deter workers from committing suicide, the bodies of “coolies” were desecrated and burned with dead livestock. The resulting lime and bone charcoal would be used to refine the sugar, making it whiter. Meanwhile, the painting *Chinatown, Honolulu, 1900* (2020), of soldiers standing guard as houses are lit aflame, illustrates the treatment of Honolulu’s Chinese residents during the 1900 outbreak of the bubonic plague. “Their homes and neighborhoods were often burned and they were subjected to violence, similar to now. This is not a parallel that I expected; it’s kind of a really saddening and haunting one,” said Lin during our conversation, reflecting on the latest wave of anti-Asian violence in the United States.

And yet, in “Pigs and Poison,” the line between perpetrator and victim is permeable. One of the show’s reminders was intended for Chinese immigrants in the US “who have forgotten their own history and are trying to repeat the same rhetoric that they were subjected to earlier in time,” in Lin’s words. Specifically, she had in mind her parents’ friends, who supported former president Donald J. Trump and his construction of the wall along the US-Mexico border. She raised the fact that “a precursor for a lot of the laws governing the border between US and Mexico” were formed in the 19th century to exclude “our race of people.” Chinese immigrants seeking to navigate the Chinese Exclusion Act even dressed up as Mexicans to traverse the border, as recorded by US immigration inspector Marcus Braun in 1907. In the painting *Measuring Pigs in the Desert* (2020), Lin addresses these issues. Enfolded anthropologist Jason De Léon’s proposition to use hogs as surrogates for the people who perished while crossing the Sonoran Desert, the surreal work features a pig in a t-shirt and jeans, standing with a ruler in hand over a pig carcass. As the image underscores, the dehumanizer and the dehumanized share the same guise. They are one and the same.

In Lin’s psychedelic dreamscapes, the skins that envelope us are porous, reflecting a truth we seem to have strayed from: there is a piece of you in me, and a bit of me in you.