

Candice Lin by Catherine Damman

Guided by the colonial histories of indigo and opium, Candice Lin's new installation, Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping, includes a feline temple, a spam-laden qigong video, and interactive sculptures the artist calls "tactile theaters."



'Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping,' 2021, hand-printed (katazome) and hand-drawn (tsutsugaki) indigo panels, steel bar, dyed rugs, glazed ceramics, epoxy resin, feathers, block-printed and digitally printed fabric (masks), bells, tassels, and miscellaneous small objects, dimensions variable. Photo by Ian Byers-Gamber. Courtesy of the artist, the Walker Art Center, the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts (CCVA), and François Ghebaly Gallery.

A river throttled with dead animals is described as a clogged intestine. A spotted infant's birth is explained by a woman's erotic fixation on her dog. Opium's pleasures are analogized as "walking through silk." Badly fermenting dye is chastised like an impetuous child.

The artist Candice Lin often annexes such hysterical phrases from historical accounts of colonial commodities like cochineal, tobacco, and indigo. For Lin, these mouthy fragments divulge the larger ascriptive classifications—race, gender, and the human itself—by which violence and power are asymmetrically meted. The artist detonates categories and sculpts from the shrapnel.

Lin's swollen and sprawling installations refuse straightforward description. They tend to respond to the commissioning site or institution, and they often grow, decay, or otherwise evolve over time. For *A Hard White Body* (2017) at the Bétonsalon in Paris, a bedroom made of unfired porcelain was moistened with water from the Seine and urine collected from exhibition visitors; in its iteration at the University of Chicago's Logan Center, *A Hard White Body, a Porous Slip* (2018), fragments of porcelain floated in liquid porcelain casting slip, icebergs in an ethereal sea. In *Pigs and Poison* (2021) at the Guangdong Times Museum in Guangzhou, China, Lin considered the interconnected global trade histories, both of addictive plants such as opium, and of laborers—the title's pigs invoke the epithet given to Chinese workers for their distinctive queue hairstyle. Featuring piss, cockroaches, and controlled rot, Lin's installations are sometimes grotesque, often hypnotically so.

Anticipating Lin's exhibition *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*, which will be at the Walker Art Center this year and at Harvard University's Carpenter Center for Visual Art in 2022, we spoke about intimacy, porosity, and the blowsy and unquiet histories to which Lin is singularly attuned.

—Catherine Damman

Catherine Damman
Tell me about *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*.

Candice Lin
It's a pretty big shift from what I've been doing in the last five years. *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping* is an installation with an indigo tent that, in conversations with the curators, Victoria Sung and Dan Byers, I call the "feline temple." The panels of indigo-dyed fabric have images made with rice paste printed with hand-cut stencils, squeezed through bottles, and painted with a brush. These are draped over a structure of metal bars inserted into ceramic figurative pillars. Inside the feline temple, you walk onto these painted rugs and there are ceramic cat pillows that you are invited to lay down and rest on. The exhibition also has an indigo fabric journal, which is a record of this pandemic time in the form of research anecdotes, personal notes, and snippets from the news that are sometimes obscured with fabric swatches of the different designs and techniques I was experimenting with.

There's also a video that has this cat-demon leading people through qigong exercises with some animated sequences. And finally, there are these works I've been calling "tactile theaters." One [*Tactile Theater (after Noguchi)*] is made of concrete, in reference to the Carpenter Center's architecture. The second one [*Tactile Theater (after Jan Švankmajer)*] is made using scagliola, an Italian technique I learned about from the artist Beaux Mendes. You mix hide glue with pigmented plaster and then you polish and wax it to look like imitation marble. The scagliola sculpture is meant to look like marbled meat. The tactile theaters are set on stands with two benches on either side, so that people experience the work by touching it while looking at each other. I read once that certain churches were made with a reddish marble to reference the body of Jesus Christ, a kind of surrogate presence of his earthly body. This tactile theater acts as a stone-flesh surrogate that people can interact with while getting adjusted to the idea of being able to touch each other's bodies. I also read N. K. Jemisin's Broken Earth trilogy when it came out and since then have had a burning desire to make stone-flesh sculptures.

CD
How did you decide to use indigo and what has the process of learning to work with that material been like?



'Sleeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping', 2021, hand-printed (katazome) and hand-drawn (tsut-sugaki) indigo panels, steel bar, dyed rugs, glazed ceramics, epoxy resin, feathers, block-printed and digitally printed fabric (masks), bells, tassels, and miscellaneous small objects, dimensions variable. Photo by Ian Byers-Gamber. Courtesy of the artist, the Walker Art Center, the Carpenter Center for Visual Arts (CCVA), and François Ghebaly Gallery.

CL

Indigo came up when I was researching cochineal, the insect that red dye is made from, for *System for a Stain* in 2016. I was thinking about the relationship between cochineal and other colonial commodities—porcelain, sugar, opium—but indigo seemed like too vast a subject to incorporate into that work. For the Walker and Carpenter show, I found myself wanting to work with tactile materials, so I proposed a project with textiles and ceramics. I had long been interested in the history of various types of indigo resist-dyed textiles—katazome, batik, adire. Indigo overlapped with my ongoing interests in materials tied to slavery and colonialism, as well as the medicinal uses of plants and the bacterial processes within fermentation. There's a lot of interesting language around the fermentation process in indigo dyeing. When the leaves are fermenting, they are kept under straw mats called "the bedcovers" and when it isn't fermenting properly, they say "the baby is sulky or angry."

CD

For many in the US, a ceramic pillow may not be recognizable as an item to sleep on, even though such objects have a centuries-long history in China and elsewhere. I want to ask you about the invitation to rest in the installation—and about cats. You have a cat named Roger, and cats appear throughout your work. Each ceramic cat pillow is very lifelike, seemingly with its own distinct personality.

CL

I love that Roger is getting famous. People I don't know ask me, "How's Roger?" Then I give them way too much info about everything he's been up to. (*laughter*) The ceramic pillows are surprisingly comfortable, even though they don't look it. I want to make one to have at home. The cat pillows have multiple meanings. One meaning comes from thinking about all the care work that animals have been doing during this time of isolation. But I also was thinking about this stereotype of the opium den, and the idea that the Chinese opium addict was recognizable because one ear was swollen from resting on these wooden or ceramic pillows. They called it "opium ear" or "cauliflower ear." I'm referencing histories of rest but also of intoxication.

I've been thinking a lot about toxicity and the way race is made toxic through associations with intoxication, and how racialized bodies are also disproportionately exposed to environmental toxicity. I was fascinated by these accounts of workers in British colonial indigo plantations in India becoming sick from being submerged in the indigo vat for hours and absorbing the substance through their skin. Indigo, which is medicinal, is toxic in too large a dose, and the dye vats also contained chemicals and stale urine and other ingredients. They would drink milk or take purgatives to get the indigo out of the body. So the cat pillows invite people into interspecies rest, intimacy, and ways of being together, but there's also this other more troubled reference embedded in them, and questions about comfort: Who gets to take comfort or be comfortable, and who does not?

CD

Let's talk about the video, *Millifree Work Weary TM Free Video (Qi Gong)* (2021).

CL

The video was created in Cinema 4D with the help of the artist Yotam Menda-Levy. We 3D-scanned a clay version of this cat-demon sculpture—I don't know why I call them cat demons. Some of their facial expressions look a little like these Tang dynasty ceramic tomb demons that the ceramic pillars are based on, but then as I sculpted the small versions, their horns and faces started to look more like cat ears and mouths. Anyway, the video is set in an



Installation view, Pigs and Poison, 2021, Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou. Courtesy of the artist, Guangdong Times Museum, and François Ghebaly Gallery.

apocalyptic California landscape, this barren desert, and there's an earthquake, and a version of the indigo temple emerges from beneath the earth, and this cat demon is in the temple doing qigong and stretching.

The work is based on this qigong video that my parents do every night and were trying to get me to follow, but I'm lazy so I only do it when I'm having a flare up of my ongoing back and shoulder pain. When I first conceived of *Millifree Work Weary TM Free Video (Qi Gong)*, there was so much online art being circulated that I thought it would be nice to have a short video you can follow along and move to.

As you're led through various poses and movements, texts pop up in the corner like a chat screen. They come from text messages between myself and my partner, Asher Hartman—these joke spam texts we sent each other after talking one evening about the increased spam we were both getting on our phones and email and how great some of the spam language was.

CD

How do you see the relationship between the clips and the text and the invitation to follow along with the qigong exercises?

CL

Part of it is just humor. I'm also speaking to the fact that even when we try to address our bodies and take care of them, we're inundated by the wellness industry selling us things or by other messages popping up and distracting our attention. It's hard to just slow down and be in our bodies.

Also, I was remotely installing my show *Pigs and Poison* at the Guangdong Times Museum when I was making this video, and maybe it's just part of Chinese institutional culture, but they had a group chat where they would ask me questions, and if I didn't respond right away, they would just start blowing it up with cat memes. And I would always respond to the memes—which were so good!—and then they'd be like, Oh, by the way, can you answer? It was so effective; I wish all institutions I work with would manipulate me with cat memes.

CD

Infinitely better than “Just circling back.”

CL

Some of them were so wild. I might put a few in the final version of this video.

CD

With the tactile theaters, there's again an emphasis on touch and an invitation to bring in the visitor's body.

CL

I first thought the tactile theaters would both be made of concrete, after visiting the Carpenter Center and learning that it's the only Le Corbusier building in the US. There are these benches on the ground floor of the building, and I decided to make the tactile theater almost seamlessly part of the architecture of the bench. And then people, mostly students who pass through there, are invited to sit on either side and touch it.

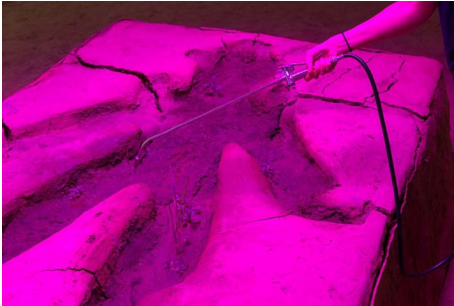
I was spending a lot of time with Roger, and I like the way he's sometimes looking at stuff, but he's not actually using his eyes to see; he's using his ears or his nose. His eyes have a kind of blankness because the other senses are being used. I wondered what would happen if, almost like a game board, this sculpture provided this mediation of touch, so that people are touching it as if they're touching each other, but they're not, and they're looking at each other, but with a kind of blankness because they are “looking” with their hands.

CD

Some parts of the sculpture look topographic; others seem related to human anatomy, with orifices like ears and mouths.

CL

The undulating or terraced forms on the sculpture are a reference to Noguchi's models for playgrounds. I read descriptions in Amy Lyford's biography, *Isamu Noguchi's Modernism: Negotiating Race, Labor, and Nation, 1930–1950*, of how he was imagining that children would roll around on these contoured landscapes and find ways to play with their bodies in environments that weren't based on prefabricated playsets. They would have a direct relationship to the site, which would be contoured and shaped to invite play. I thought that was beautiful, especially in relationship to his voluntary—at first—internment at the War Relocation Camp in Poston, Arizona, one of the Japanese internment camps. Noguchi submitted himself to be interned because he wanted to alter this barren desert landscape with its grid of barracks into a more pleasant environment. Of course, all of the plans he submitted proposing changes to the location were rejected. It just grabbed me in the gut, thinking about Noguchi imagining and longing for a gleeful body rolling around a grassy contoured hill during that time of utter desolateness.



Installation view, La Charada China, 2018, Hammer Museum, Los Angeles. Photo by Ian Byers-Gamber. Courtesy of the artist, Hammer Museum, and François Ghebaly Gallery.

CD

This leads me to the role of research in your practice. I'm curious about the specific references in the work—how they may resonate with visitors, or not. How do you think about that act of translation?

CL

I hope the works are generative enough that even if the viewer isn't interested in all the research, they can still get something out of it. With the two pieces we were just talking about, the references are in the titles, *Tactile Theater (after Noguchi)* and *Tactile Theater (after Jan Švankmajer)*. For my works that are heavily research based, I often have an audio or video piece with some of the historical facts told in a semi-fictionalized way that hopefully intrigues the viewer enough to learn more. The sculptural installation for all three iterations of *A Hard White Body* was shown alongside the video *The Beloved*, where a lot of anecdotes around porcelain and James Baldwin and Jeanne Baret were told in a narrative. But I try to tell these histories in nondidactic ways, to show that my interpretation of this history is just one subjective understanding. If there is a pedagogical moment, I'm also a learner in it. I research material processes that I want to learn about or histories I want to know more about, but it's not necessary that every fact I learned in my research get communicated. Art communicates in a way that is beyond language and history, and I want that material communication to have room to exist too.

CD

Bits of evocative, often metaphorical, language you discover in your historical research—such as the indigo being described as “sulky”—seem to be a starting point for you. Then, the work itself renovates those linguistic usages, puts them to new purposes.

CL

Michael Taussig has this great quote from his essay “Redeeming Indigo” that I copied into the journal that is part of *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*. He says, “The tongue remembers, but you do not. Life moves on while all around you lie the traces of lost eras, active in the present, hanging on the wall, covering the windows ... the couch on which you sit ... the dress you will wear ...” He's talking about how words for textiles like *damask* or *muslin* reference the specific places tied to their histories of production or trade—like Damascus or Mosul. It's interesting how often ideas for my artworks have come from certain phrases like the description of porcelain from an eighteenth-century British handbook describing its “pure white...hard, superior body” or the trade in “pigs and poison” which got me interested in learning about Chinese “coolie” labor history and how it was tied to the Opium Wars.

I sometimes feel like I am physicalizing elements that intrigue me from historical accounts, bringing them into a space where I—and others—can encounter them and renegotiate or recirculate their meaning.

CD

In many of the histories you're engaging, seemingly casual metaphors or absurd uses of language are in fact articulations of the period's brutal social arrangements. Your work reasserts what that malleability of language and material could be, and to what ends. I'm building up to the political imperative that undergirds your practice, even as you've said the work is not meant to be didactic.

CL

At its best, the material exceeds my understanding or develops in a way that takes on a meaning I didn't intend or even comprehend at the time. For example in the installation *A Hard White Body* at the Bétonsalon in Paris, I



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wanted to make a life-size bedroom out of porcelain based on James Baldwin's description in *Giovanni's Room* and the description of the ship cabin Jeanne Baret sailed around the world in. I thought with the misting system I hung above the sculpture, and a pump that kept things humid with distilled piss, herbal tea, and water from the Seine, that the sculpture would stay in a pliable wet porcelain state. The caretaking aspect was intentional in the work, but I didn't foresee all the "problems"—the way the porcelain cracked, dried out, turned yellow and stained from the tea and grew mushrooms. I realized only later that the work was enacting, in a physical way, a refutation of the eighteenth-century Europeans' fantasy that prized porcelain using the terms of white supremacy—its hardness, superiority, whiteness, and purity. The material itself refused this by turning yellow, by cracking, by being "contaminated" with other life—moss, mushrooms, bacteria.

Could I have made those as conscious decisions from the start? Certain aspects always escape my control. As the artist, you set up the scenario and make space for what you can't explain, and at its best, the work goes beyond you.

CD

What are the challenges of making the work that you do and then collaborating with an institution to present it to the public? How do you negotiate what to surface—and when—and what to leave open to uncertainty or opacity?

CL

When I think about the collaboration that happens when an institution is framing or making my work legible to a public, my hope would be that my work is presented in a way that opens up and makes available its specific narratives and the historical context. My apprehension is around what I see as a kind of reductive essentialism tying the artist's biography or identity into the work as a key to understand it, or as a justification that the artist has "the right" to address this subject. This kind of framing can flatten the multiplicity of meanings that could have been generated by the work.

For example, the piece I was doing around nineteenth-century Chinese indentured workers came out of my research on porcelain and different colonial objects of trade, thinking about the relationships between matter and mattering. But it can be reduced to this simplistic idea "Chinese American artist making work about Chinese history," when I'm actually interested in the slippages in race, gender, culture, species, animacy—moments where things are messy, intertwined, and uncategorizable. I'm not interested in making work about my lost Chinese heritage. I got interested in the figure of the Chinese coolie because of Lisa Lowe's nuanced and incredible book *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, where she talks about how the history of indentured Asian labor complicates our conception of freedom versus enslavement because it occupied this liminal space. I have always been interested in elements of history or materials that defy binaries.

With the indigo work I'm doing now, the patterns in the feline temple are drawing from many different cultural contexts. I've been looking at historical patterns that evidence moments where cultures coming together in trade or conflict create new technologies or imagery. During British colonial occupation of Nigeria, the traditional indigo adire eleko cloth changed from hand-drawn geometric designs—created by dipping a bird feather in cassava paste resist and drawing with it—to being stamped through a stencil cut in flattened tea tins that were exported from British colonial India, and sometimes using imported rice starch instead of local cassava as a resist. The use of these stencils changed how the imagery looked, and the British also brought in their own symbolism with the crown and the Union Jack

flag appearing in commemorative cloths celebrating different British kings and queens. Some of this imagery gets recirculated in altered forms after Independence to celebrate the power of Nigerian rulers with both local and British signifiers of power.

Japanese katazome prints also show influences from other cultures. A book from the nineteenth century describes a textile design with Roman letter-forms that come from Portuguese and Dutch trade monograms that are used as a design element. Another monogram shows a design with an asemic use of recognizable letters that are reversed or upside down and used as a graphic element. The author of that book, in the casual racism of the nineteenth century says, “any Jap wearing these clothes must think he is a superior being since he is covered in symbols that no one, not even himself, can read.” It’s a historical example kind of like when people nowadays get tattoos of Chinese or Japanese characters that they later find out mean “dog” or “noodles” or are just completely nonsensical. The designs I chose to recreate or change and adapt into my indigo textiles reference specific historical patterns where these moments of intercultural symbolism emerge.



'A Hard White Body, A Porous Slip', 2018, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, Chicago. Photo by Robert Chase Heishman. Courtesy of the artist, Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, and François Ghebaly Gallery.

CD

Both the adire and katazome patterns bear the imprint of histories, often violent, that put people into proximity with one another, as in colonialism. Yet that very contact can also be a site of interaction or cultural production that exceeds the colonial project. I imagine that must be hard to describe at the level of the exhibition pamphlet, given its complexity.

CL

Yeah, I feel like it’s something I still haven’t figured out how to talk about. I’ve always been interested in these moments of translation or mistranslation—these moments of cultural contact that create other forms of imagery or materials or technologies, or that utilize existing imagery or tools but give them alternate meanings or uses. Unfamiliar and exotic things can take on allure and power because of their alterity, and then that gets co-opted into new forms that belong to neither one culture nor another.

CD

While your interest in nonhuman animals is not reducible to the question of cultural intermixing, I wonder whether it allows you or the viewer to suspend that potential investment in authenticity or origin. The various creatures put the visitor into a realm that—I hesitate to use a word like *fantastical*—but it’s different than exploring these histories through say, portraiture.

CL

I often use the word *mythological* to describe my imagery, by which I mean the moment when myths emerge as a way of reckoning with or imagining things that exist beyond our known order of the world. The figures in my drawings on the indigo panels and rugs mix human and non-human elements. These kinds of monsters and chimeras emerge in historical moments of cultural exposure to unfamiliar environments, like the dog-faced men or one-legged sciapods that use their giant foot to shade them from the sun, as described in the fourteenth-century book *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*. The nonhuman animals and a scrambling of species in my imagery is a way of positing other hierarchies or ways of conceiving the world.

In *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*, the ceramic pillars that hold up the tent have multiple human faces with little dog-leopard creatures coming out of the chest and arms, as well as snakes and frogs. These ceramic pillar figures reference the Zhenmushou tomb guardian demons that were these human-animal hybrids during the Tang Dynasty. But they also reference

George Psalmanazar, who was this European guy, probably French, who pretended to be from Formosa (present-day Taiwan) in the early eighteenth century. He wrote a whole pseudo-ethnography of Formosa where he talked about language and cultural habits, and he would perform aspects of being Oriental, which involved eating meat spiced with cardamom or sleeping upright with a candle so people could see a shadow outside his bedroom and know that he was foreign because he didn't sleep lying down. He also performatively consumed opium tincture, which he then got addicted to.

He looked, by all historical accounts, blond and blue-eyed, so it was this moment when racial difference was not so phenotypically described but could be believed through performing different cultural habits in eating and sleeping. He had a wide audience, including the bishop of London. He said his skin was lighter than other Asians that previous explorers had met because he was from the upper castes who all slept underground. So there's a murkiness around race and class and how these translated into visual signifiers in the body. His fake ethnography is pretty amazing to read. And the imagery that he drew for it is mind-boggling.

I've been making work about Psalmanazar since 2015 because he continues to fascinate me. My ceramic pillar figures come, in part, out of his drawing of the idol of the devil that had baby boys sacrificed to it in his invented idea of Formosa. I'm fascinated by what Asiatic otherness looked like in his imagination, what body gestures and habits were required to enact an idea of racial performance. I'm also intrigued by how his own class position and struggles with vagrancy and homelessness led him to seek power, attention, and financial security in racial passing as it was understood at the time, and how different that understanding of race was in the eighteenth century than it is now. It would be such a simplistic and anachronistic thing to frame this historical figure within a rubric of appropriation, but I also haven't quite figured out how to talk about it yet.

CD

Your work engaging this historical figure is not necessarily celebratory, but *critique* doesn't fully describe the mode of relation either.

CL

Yeah, I'm not interested in critiquing him as this white, French cultural appropriator of Asian culture or in correcting his Orientalist imagery with something "authentic" that I, with my identity as the child of parents who were born and raised in Taiwan, am somehow privy to. But I am interested in his performance of race and how this is happening in the early 1700s. At this same time, across the ocean in Europe's colonies (particularly, I was reading about the legal cases in eighteenth-century New Spain), multiracial people begin to appear in court cases contesting the right to freedom or property or citizenship, and you see this shift in the language used in the legal arguments. It shifts from being about a purity of blood to being about a purity of race. You see very clearly how race is invented as a social structure of control that emerges from the plantation system to naturalize and validate slavery.

CD

The eighteenth-century *casta* paintings, produced, ostensibly, to categorize and control various modes of racial intermixing in the colonial Americas, seem relevant here. What seems at its surface to be all about the rigidity of the taxonomy in fact reveals itself to be incoherent.

CL

In 2006 and 2007 I made a series of drawings looking at those *casta* paintings. I was so interested in how they attempt to grid out a racial hierarchy but quickly devolve into anxiety to the point that there are racial categories

like “hold yourself in midair” or “I don’t understand you” as well as categories with animal names like *lobo* (wolf), *cochino* (pig), and *mulatto* (mule).

CD

So many of them are anxiously interested in phenomena that we would now probably describe as albinism or vitiligo—when a child’s surface appearance doesn’t seem to “mix” as anticipated. The exception to the category often seems to be of greater interest than the maintenance of the categories themselves.

CL

My colored-pencil drawings inspired by the *casta* paintings were pulling from these moments of befuddlement. There was this early theory of the origin of race which blamed what was called maternal fixation. The example was this woman who fixated on her dog; she loved him too much or too erotically. He was a brown and white spotted dog, and when her child was born with brown and white spotted skin, they blamed this on her excessive love of her dog. So you had this improper erotic attachment to a nonhuman and you got this race-based punishment. I drew things like that. In my drawing the woman was in love with her black umbrella.

There was also a theory that a black spot in the fingernail or on the underside of the penis would grow bigger and bigger until the whole person was a different race. But then there was also a fashion during the same period for wearing artificial moles and dark spots made of velvet or dyed black mouse fur. So in another drawing of mine, a woman’s face is peppered with black moles that are also, when you look closer, small animals. The *casta* paintings undercut their own imperative. They were made to soothe anxieties and show Spaniards back home that the colonies did have a system for classifying and controlling racial mixture, but they proved the absurdity of such classification.

CD

Those anxieties have not disappeared. Histories of racialization are processes of domination and extraction, but they seem always shot through with deep fears about the porosity of the body—its vulnerability to being transformed from the outside. You’ve made similarly charged invitations to the people who encounter your work: contributing their own piss in *A Hard White Body*, or experiencing the possible effects of the antiandrogens in your collaboration with P. Staff, *Hormonal Fog* (2016–ongoing). Your recent work with scent seems especially relevant here.

CL

In thinking about tactile materials, I was also thinking about scent in relationship to touch and how both these senses during the pandemic became loaded with a contaminating force, the idea that you could breathe in the virus. In fact, all my work is preoccupied with the body’s porosity to another body, to one’s environment, to other species that live inside or alongside us. I had begun researching medieval theories around disease and miasma back in 2018 for *Pigs and Poison* before COVID, although it was informed by epidemics like SARS. I was also looking at outbreaks of plague in the early twentieth century that were blamed on Chinese and other Asian citizens whose right to live and work in the US was being contested around the same time with laws like the Page Act of 1875 and the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. I had originally proposed to have an herbal tincture based on medieval plague remedies that would be vaporized from inside the ceramic pillars. That’s why a lot of the ceramic figures have holes in their mouths and eyes, to let the mist out. But in light of COVID, it felt a bit on the nose, and I’m also trying to move away from making installations that are difficult to maintain or overloaded with too many elements.



Installation view, *A Hard White Body, a Porous Slip*, Bétonsalon, Paris, 2017. Photo by Aurélien Mole. Courtesy of the artist, Bétonsalon, and François Ghebaly Gallery.

But I am still interested in scent and am creating a demonic smell for my project at the upcoming Prospect New Orleans triennial. This idea is based on medieval European theories that disease was caused by a demonic smell rising up from hell and could be fought by covering the body with another demonic smell. At Prospect.5, I will be creating ceramic sculptures of swamp creatures made from the clay dug near Saint Malo, Louisiana, thought to be the first Asian-American settlement in the US started by Filipino indentured laborers or slaves conscripted during the Spanish Manila galleon trade who jumped ship in Louisiana en route to South American colonies. They were joined by Chinese indentured coolie laborers and fugitive slaves.



Installation view, 'A Hard White Body, a Soft White Worm', Portikus, Frankfurt, 2018. Photo by Helena Schlichting. Courtesy of the artist, Portikus, and François Ghebaly Gallery.

The history of Saint Malo as a multiracial fishing village and maroon settlement formed by a disparate group of people eking out a living on an unstable, marginal terrain interests me in ways that feel related to the intercultural mixing that is present in the indigo panels. The clay sculptures of frogs, crocodiles, and snakes will be splayed open, holding a scented wax and lard mixture in their body cavities. The use of lard comes from historical descriptions of the Mississippi River being so polluted with animal carcasses and offal that it became gelatinous. The state tried to structure how slaughterhouses were allowed to operate, and that led to the Slaughterhouse Cases, marking the first use of the Fourteenth Amendment—which was designed to protect emancipated slaves. But here it was misused by white butchers objecting to having to share space with Black butchers and butchers of other races. I was looking at the way human rights were being articulated, and how whiteness and citizenship were being legally defined and contested in ways that were intertwined with these nonhuman animal presences, physically and rhetorically. Earlier work from *Pigs and Poison* used lard as one of the materials in reference to nineteenth-century indentured Chinese workers being pejoratively called pigs.

The lard in my works for Prospect.5 employs the enfleurage technique, infusing fat with the scent of delicate flowers. I will infuse lard with the smell of shrimp, fish, and other decaying animals that Roger kills and that I've been saving in my freezer. This perfumed fat will be poured inside of the ceramic sculptures of swamp creatures. People will be invited to dip their finger into this oily, waxy mixture and rub a little on their neck or wrists like a perfume. I like the idea that visitors will exude this protective demonic scent of decay that also suggests new forms of life and survival.