

Candice Lin's Cat Demons Will Heal You

By Rachel M. Tang, March 11, 2022

The artist's exhibition at Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Cambridge, MA, explores pandemic isolation, anti-Asian violence, toxicity and virality



Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping, 2021. Photo: Julia Featheringill. Courtesy Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Cambridge MA

Outlines of a cat's pawprints on the floor guide us towards a video of a feline demon who in turn entices us to join in the healing practice of qi gong. The demon's body undulates to the cadence of steady breath, emphasising the preciousness of respiration, while frenetic internet memes infect the surface of the screen like a virus. This counterintuitive frantic slowness permeates Los Angeles-based artist Candice Lin's multisensory exhibition, due perhaps to the

ongoing pandemic conditions of anxious labour in which it was made.

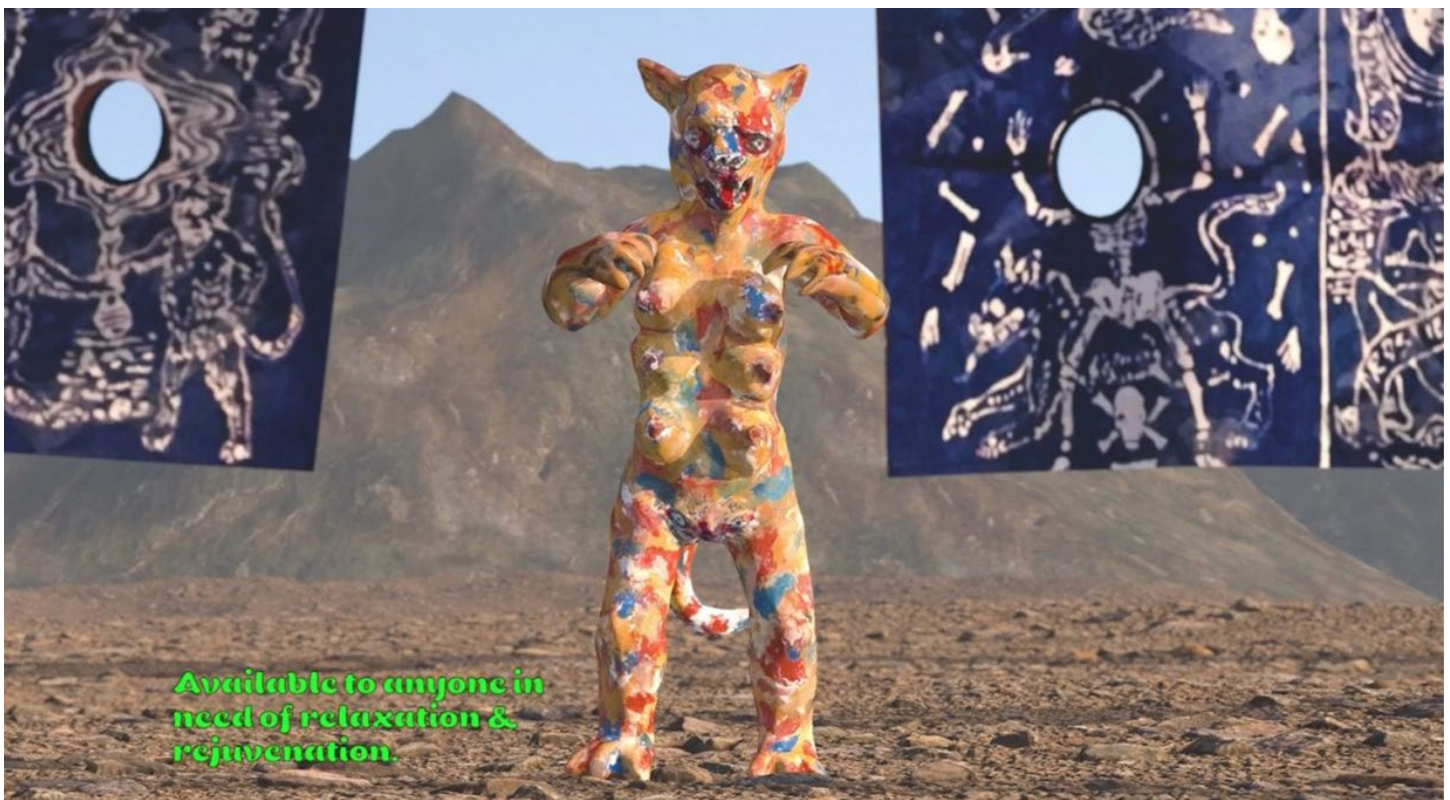
Glazed ceramic cats, whom we are invited to rest our heads on, gather underneath a temporary indigo shelter fortified by Tang dynasty *zhenmushou* tomb guardians. Rescued from mere cuteness by its irreverence, another animated feline narrator muses from a small TV. The dreamy blue textiles that hang overhead

are laboriously ornamented with *tsutsugaki* and *katazome* designs, stencilling techniques using glutinous rice paste to draw dye-resists in indigo textiles. The show's title comes from the process of fermenting indigo, a medicine, dye and colonial commodity that doubly recalls our emotional environment of pandemic isolation and loss.

Sitting humbly at the back of the gallery, though it feels the centrepiece of the show, is Lin's *A Journal of the Plague Year (Cat Demon Diary)* (all works 2021). Flipping through its pages (visitors are encouraged – indeed expected – to touch the works on display), one finds visual rhymes that echo throughout the space: for instance, between an ink wash drawing of a COVID-19 testing tent and Lin's sacred tent of respite. Interposed between cat portraits and textile samples, a drawing of a protest against anti-Asian

violence, accompanied by Lin's flirtations with the grotesque, reverberates against racialised associations between Asian bodies, toxicity and virality.

Lin's emphasis on the haptic returns in the form of concrete, corpulent *Tactile Theaters* that mimic the winding, Le Corbusier-designed Carpenter Center. Boundaries are dissolved as hands graze contours made by other hands across the room from a verdant dividing curtain, while animal-human hybrids look on. At its outset, the installation commits to surveying an expansive ecology of intimacies amid crisis, while simultaneously blurring lines. Yet these porous boundaries and connections are made most clear in its smallest moments, moments where Lin allows us to laugh, to shudder, to touch – to feel something.



Millifree Work Weary™ Free Video (Qi Gong), 2021, video animation (colour, sound), 20 min.
Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles & New York