One Place and Another:
Worldmaking in Asian Canadian Contemporary Art

by
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Abstract

The interdependent dynamics of diasporic migrations and settlement are the focus of this dissertation, which rethinks the exclusion of Asian Canadian art from studies of art in Canada. While the arts have always been central to the formation of Asian Canadian communities, the exclusion of Asian Canadian art reflects an epistemological, political, and cultural bias. Earlier studies of art and diaspora in Canada have attempted to correct this exclusion through focus on incorporating works by Asian Canadian artists into existing disciplinary and institutional structures while questioning whether the construction of “Canada” itself remains a relevant site for knowledge production. This dissertation moves beyond questioning terms of representation and inclusion to instead investigate the work that Asian Canadian contemporary art enacts and the worlds that are constructed in the process of artists’ engagements with diasporic histories and articulations of culture and memory. If multiculturalism is the dominant framework in Canada for understanding racial and cultural difference in overlapping national and global contexts, this dissertation thinks through more generative globally-oriented and locally-situated worldmaking practices evoked in pairing the terms “Asian Canadian” and “contemporary art.”

To examine the work that Asian Canadian contemporary art enacts, I theorize worldmaking as a situated action involving objects, stories, and landscapes of more than one place. It is this dynamic of one place and another—of simultaneous dwelling and displacement—that connects installation and media works by Dipna Horra, Karen Tam, Howie Tsui, and Jin-me Yoon analyzed in this study. By investigating specific sites—be it the spaces where their works are exhibited, or landmarks linked to community and/or
personal stories, histories, and memories—the artists enact worldmaking by historicizing spaces of diasporic dwelling (rendering them important art-historical sites), recounting the multi-temporality of diasporic time, and expressing resonant experiences of migration, settlement, and emplacement. I argue that by viewing the site as a nexus for worldmaking in diaspora, we can conceive the capacity of Asian Canadian contemporary art to stress a shift away from Canadian art as a site of national identity formation to a processual understanding of Canadian art as a site that is continuously evolving.
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INTRODUCTION:

Situating Worldmaking with Objects, Stories, and Landscapes

*Migration is the situation of our time. Although there has never been a world without migration, suddenly it seems as if the whole world is on the move.*


*Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed; being mobile is not necessarily about being detached.*


On a snowy January evening in 2018, the Carleton University Art Gallery is abuzz with visitors attending a guided walkthrough of *Fierce Passengers* (2018), an immersive, site-responsive installation by Bangkok-born and New York-based Thai Canadian artist Linda Sormin (fig. 0.1). Filling the gallery’s double-story exhibition space, *Fierce Passengers* imagines a migratory structure of feeling emerging from the uncertainties of moving upon and dwelling within the shifting grounds and unstable times in which we live. The installation resembles the cargo hold of a large passenger ship, a vessel that has facilitated both voluntary and coerced migrations throughout history.¹ Viewers are invited to journey

¹ The image of a ship evokes Paul Gilroy’s historiography of movement and his discussion of the slave ship as a localized political and cultural system that facilitated broader connections, circulations, and violence between empires. Slave ships are pivotal to his work in *The Black Atlantic*, where he argues that slavery facilitated the emergence of modernity and associated ideas about race and nationhood. Gilroy conceptualizes the Black Atlantic as a “counterculture of modernity”—a resistance to the tenets of European reason that employed the horrors of imperialism to bring about the global dispersion of Africans. *The Black Atlantic* emphasizes politics, cultural forms, and knowledges that work in opposition to this normative construct of modernity, creating a means through which to shape and care for a common world.

For Asian diasporas, ships also evoke site-responsive micropolitics of movement, especially the histories of indenture and the exclusionary violence of bordering regimes. Lisa Lowe reminds us in *The Intimacies of Four Continents* that the fates of enslaved Africans and indentured labourers from Asia were intertwined, undergirding the construction of Western liberalism and its political philosophies concerning emancipation through state citizenship, its promises to economic freedoms, and the civilizing force of education. These systems of thought continue to inform our highly mobile present and much intellectual work has been done to unsettle how their reliance on racial difference continues to obstruct relational world-making endeavours. See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).
along a wooden platform that leads into the belly of the ship. Angular, fractured ceramic forms impede their path, bending and coiling into massive tangles. Many of these forms rest on plinths, while some seem to emerge from large chunks of raw Leda clay, the material that underlies the city of Ottawa and its surrounding area. An unstable material that liquifies when subjected to stress, Leda clay causes landslides and massive sinkholes. The clay connects the installation to the geology of the unceded Algonquin territory upon which it is situated, imagining a place of arrival constituted by sets of shifting relations. As viewers continue into the cargo hold, they encounter a trove of objects—such as a coffee mug with a family crest, a ceramic soap dish, a porcelain
maneki-neko (beckoning cat), and a bottle of expired soy sauce—stored in the ship’s skeletal frame like discarded treasures, remnants from former lives lived elsewhere, brought to rest in this transient space (fig. 0.2).

The artist begins her walkthrough of the installation by explaining the process that brought these objects to live in this way as reimagined cargo. During her two-week residency in the gallery, Sormin put out a call to the Carleton community for donations of objects that convey experiences of change, transition, or immigration. The call was interpreted broadly. While some participants loaned items passed down through generations, like a cherished yixing ware teapot transported via a family member’s migration from China, others provided items that evoked personal moments of transition
and change, such as a hospital gown worn during one participant’s life-altering surgery. Sormin explains that she was compelled to think about how these objects were carried through different circumstances—how they held meaning and how this meaning was transformed when the objects were recontextualized as part of an art installation.² Stories carried by the donated objects-on-the-move are complemented by the artist’s ceramic sculptures that similarly produce new meanings each time they are exhibited. During her talk, Sormin demonstrated how, upon assembling an installation in a new place, she activates each sculpture by either molding and firing new components or chipping away at existing forms. Her ceramic sculptures have been recycled and reused many times in different configurations and locations. Their resulting jagged and perpetually unfinished appearances allude to this experience of movement and change and the ability of objects to gather relations and stories through new iterations and use. In much of her body of work the artist realizes both the personal, experiential feeling of movement and change and the world-historical forces that propel shifts in population, whether voluntary or forced.

Acting in response to the sites in which she exhibits her work, Sormin’s art practice emphasizes constant improvisation and accumulation. Her sculptural works present the site as a nexus through which to embody history, forge relations, and foster community, modeling what art critic Lucy Lippard has regarded as the “the psychological need to belong somewhere,”³ even if that somewhere is transitory. Sormin’s impetus to reflect upon transitional experiences through the migrations of objects and the spaces they

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constitute around themselves resists the destruction of material worlds brought on by colonialism and global capitalism. Whereas objects are often violently divorced from their owners and circulated through networks of imperial plunder and globalized trade, here objects are brought along to provide comfort and a tie to moments before, during, and after the migratory event. The loaned objects work in concert with the abstract sculptures and the Leda clay to form a landscape in constant flux—activated by the stories that accompany the objects and ceramic forms as well as by the bodies of visitors moving through the installation, contemplating and interacting with their surroundings. *Fierce Passengers* attests to how, as migrants move and resettle, they enact practices of dwelling and community maintenance across multiple bordered zones. Staging precarity, flux, and a desire for the familiar, the installation demonstrates that a *world* is not something to be traced or mapped, as art historian Monica Juneja suggests. Distinguishing between “globe” and “world”—terms that are often used interchangeably in contemporary art scholarship—Juneja suggests that a world is temporal, environmentally situated, and embodied. In other words, a world is “something we carry while traversing the globe and negotiating its scales.”

*Fierce Passengers* models the dynamic functions of site-responsive artworks and their ability to co-create worlds that trouble bounded conceptions of the nation and the globe in our moment of transcultural globalization. The interdependent dynamics of movement and settlement, or “uprootings” and “regroundings” to borrow terms from Sara Ahmed, Claudia Castañeda, Anne-Marie Fortier, and Mimi Sheller in their volume on

contemporary art and migration,⁵ are the focus of this dissertation, which rethinks the study of art in Canada by theorizing the worldmaking capacities of artworks that shed light on the settler nation’s diasporic entanglements. Prompted by Sormin’s investigation of how objects, stories, and landscapes reframe precarity—an investigation that, as Sormin explains, is informed in part by her childhood experience of moving to Canada from Thailand⁶—I examine site-responsive installation and media works by self-identified Asian Canadian artists who likewise practice worldmaking in diaspora as a process that shapes—and is shaped by—one place and another.⁷ Throughout this dissertation, I think through worldmaking as a situated action; a tactic that constitutes histories and relations embodied by and through a site, and an analytic for grappling with entanglements between the nation and the globe in Asian diasporic art practices. Taking a cue from Kobena Mercer’s work on Black diasporic art, I examine how practices of worldmaking “open up a wider horizon for understanding diaspora culture’s complex histories and future possibilities,”⁸ especially what it means to build relations, to share space, and to co-inhabit time. Works by artists Karen Tam, Howie Tsui, Dipna Horra, and Jin-me Yoon analyzed in this dissertation imagine objects, stories, and landscapes as mobile and yet grounded forms that complicate the ways in which expressions of diasporic culture, history, and memory are visually represented. As I will elaborate

⁷ “One place and another” is a riff on art historian Miwon Kwon’s study of site-specific art, which offers a critical framework for examining site specificity (in its many forms) as an intervention into the unstable relationships between identity, location, and globalization. I engage more closely with her work starting on page 27 of this introductory chapter. See Miwon Kwon, One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2002).
further in this introductory chapter, I turn to their works because they enact forms of collectivity and belonging against formulaic prescriptions of diaspora as an identity category. Their works propose site-responsive art as a practice that destabilizes diaspora’s characterization as an adaptive form of transnational and transcultural social organization, reinforcing an experiential account of diaspora as a process “not of absolute othering but rather of entangled tension.” This conceptualization of Asian Canadian contemporary art as worldmaking enables a critique not only of the exclusion of Asian Canadian art from histories of art in Canada but also a rethinking of global migration as part of the story and construction of Canadian art. Like Sormin’s Fierce Passengers, the works analyzed in this dissertation co-create worlds through the politics and poetics of migration and settlement and they question how experiences of diaspora gain visibility in moments where everything is on the move.

Art as Worldmaking between Diaspora, Nation, and Globe

This dissertation is not a comprehensive survey of Asian Canadian art history and it does not seek to entrench definitions of what constitutes Asian Canadian contemporary art, an impossible task in light of the diverse and complicated histories and demographics of Asian diasporic communities in Canada. Instead, I present a thematic and reflexive

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9 For example, William Safran’s widely cited essay from the early 1990s noted that the concept of diaspora had been restructured through studies of transnational and postcolonial migration as a metaphoric designation for dispersed populations that, in general, have retained connections to each other through the operative memory of a shared homeland and its “myths of return,” even if return was not possible. See William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies 1, no. 1 (1991): 91.
10 James Clifford, Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 250.
11 According to Statistics Canada, in the 2016 census roughly 6.1 million people in Canada reported ethnic and cultural ties to nations in Asia, reflecting approximately 17.7% of Canada’s total population. China, East India, and the Philippines were among the 20 most commonly reported nations of origins in census data. Moreover, between 2017 and 2019 roughly 63.5% of new immigrants to Canada were born in Asia (including the Middle East). These numbers help illustrate the diversity that a term like “Asian Canadian”
analysis of the selected site-responsive artworks to argue that worldmaking is a productive conceptual structure for imagining how the works of Asian Canadian artists co-create worlds, moving beyond what Mercer has referred to as the “burden of representation,” or the expectation that racialized artists must cast themselves as spokespersons for a monolithic culture. While writing in the early 1990s, Mercer’s critique of contemporary art institutions and their neoliberal models of inclusivity has remained pertinent, for it exposes how asymmetrical relations to power determine sliding terms of visibility and inclusion within nationally and globally-oriented institutional practices and intellectual discourses. Elaborating on Mercer’s critique, Monica Juneja insists that visibility alone is no longer the issue facing racialized and non-Western artists as they continue to be featured prominently in exhibitions boasting a “global” or “planetary” scope. As the global market for their works continues to boom, scholarly critique has shifted toward laying bare the conditions and discursive structures that make visibility possible.

For Asian Canadian artists, visibility starts with a set of assumptions—bodily attributes and observable habits and behaviours—that render Asian Canadian subjects

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paradoxically visible and invisible within a dominant white settler culture and history.\textsuperscript{14}

The paradox of being both visible and invisible reinforces Asian Canadian art’s liminal position as art expected to only speak to issues of identity and cultural difference. In her study of Asian Canadian literature, art, and visual/media cultures, Christine Kim highlights the limits of this burden of multicultural representation, arguing that it “makes difference visible as it attempts to homogenize it.”\textsuperscript{15}

Examining the social intimacies and emotional resonances carried by works of art, she positions Asian Canadian culture as a public-making endeavour, one that undoes reified understandings of what constitutes visibility within a construction of cultural identity that continues to signal complicated histories of colonialism (between Canada and Asia as well as within Asia itself). A national multicultural framework is quick to fill in the gaps produced by a history of exclusion, but it does not go far enough to think through artworks that grapple with more diverse subject matter and formal structures. Whereas a top-down, market-driven conception of the globe renders diasporic art as a form that maps circulations of identity, culture, and capital,\textsuperscript{16} a similarly conceived construction of the nation relates parameters of what constitutes a nation’s art to parameters that determine desirable and undesirable citizenship. Both constructions of the nation and the globe flatten relational thinking and obscure how terms of “being visible” are always in various states of becoming. It is


therefore critical for methods of art history to move beyond articulating artistic engagements with one’s culture and history as part of an identarian process. The new burden, Juneja suggests, “now lies with art history to sharpen its conceptual tools and create a [critical] language to provide [identity practices] with a disciplinary anchor.”

My conceptualization of Asian Canadian contemporary art as worldmaking offers a way to engage with multiple burdens of art history between the nation and the globe by suggesting that meaning in diaspora is made against the grain of representation.

My concept of worldmaking as a situated action and a practice of co-creation is informed by Pheng Cheah’s theorization of world literature as “an active power in the making of worlds,” both as a site of worlding (in other words, the coming together of a world) and an agent that produces and intervenes in practices of worldmaking.

According to Cheah, world is a temporal category. The perceived unity and permanence of a world is “premised on the persistence of time” and reliant on knowledge structures that produce their own views on observable phenomena. This conceptualization draws from phenomenology, in particular from the work of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, who likewise rejects the idea of a world as a spatial container. Critiquing Western theories of representation, Heidegger breaks down the early twentieth-century accepted ontological premise of the Weltbild, or “world picture,” that measures the world as an entity distinct from the subject. He theorizes instead a relational concept of being-in-the-world, one in which matters of ontology, ethics, history, and art are not separate domains, but thoroughly enmeshed, manifesting moments of being (Dasein).

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19 Cheah, *What is a World?*, 2.
Heidegger, art does not simply represent phenomena, but rather produces understanding and calls for practical involvement with things-in-the-world.\textsuperscript{20}

Regarding world in temporalizing terms, Cheah deconstructs how certain disciplines have attempted to picture the world as a totality. For world literature—which is commonly understood as a classification for non-Western literatures that circulate beyond their nations of origin—a temporal rethinking of world subtends spatial models that trace uneven exchanges between centres and peripheries and that measure a text’s value based on how far it travels from its source.\textsuperscript{21} Writing against world-as-object, Cheah asserts world literature’s normative function as a formal structure for ethical response and relational engagement. An “ethicopolitically committed world literature”\textsuperscript{22} reasserts literature’s purpose as a form that co-constructs meaning. The intellectual stakes in conceptualizing art as a form that likewise co-constructs meaning are substantial, for this reflects how art functions as a force of change and as a form that can challenge accepted approaches to its interpretation. Studies of diaspora and art benefit from these deeper questions concerning the role of art. By rethinking art’s ontological capacities, studies of diaspora and art can probe how diasporic artists deconstruct terms of difference often affixed to their works by underscoring relational engagement with knowledges, histories, and memories. My analysis posits what this kind of relational engagement looks

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\textsuperscript{22}Cheah, \textit{What is a World?}, 34.
\end{flushright}
like—and what it does—through formal structures opened up by Asian Canadian contemporary art.

I am also informed by Juneja’s critique of Cheah in her theorization of art history as a transcultural worldmaking endeavour. Art history, Juneja argues, is “both a site and an active participant in the production of knowledge,” operating alongside “other sites and institutional practices such as curating, collecting, [and] displaying.” Juneja likewise offers a philosophical and disciplinary investigation of world, examining how it has been conceptualized in art history by tracing connections between the nineteenth-century German intellectual project of Weltkunstgeschichte (“a history of all times and peoples”) and contemporary efforts to “globalize” the discipline. Grappling with world primarily as a spatial category, Weltkunstgeschichte “was intended to equip art history with a series of aesthetic categories and explanatory methods that would be able to encompass a new and ever-increasing diversity of objects the discipline was confronted with” as it continued to expand and take on the study of artifacts and artworks produced outside of Europe. This centre-periphery model has been the subject of critique over the past few decades, as evidenced by many studies of non-Western modern and contemporary art which have effectively endeavoured to “decenter” (Ming Tiampo), “reworld” (Michelle Antoinette), bring about “worldly affiliations” (Sonal Khullar), and “multi-site” (Reiko Tomii) art’s histories. These studies align with Juneja’s theorization

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24 Juneja, “Art History, Transculturation, and World-Making,” 464. Weltkunstgeschichte developed alongside the shift between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to repurpose art history as a scholarly, scientific discipline rather than a practice of connoisseurship.
because they also understand art history as multi-temporal and multi-sited. Notably, they each carry out transcultural critique from a locational perspective, uncovering global entanglements through artworks produced in one or multiple sites (in other words, within specific nations, regions, cities, or other localities). For Juneja, art history worlds a world by examining the “specific dynamic[s] between distance and proximity that [operate] within individual and different historical periods and at different sites across the globe.”

Whereas Cheah advances a position against spatialization, Juneja acknowledges the risks in advocating for approaches to art history that ignore the sites through which artworks are made, circulated, and exhibited. She argues that a disregard for the site risks de-historicizing locational encounters formed through asymmetrical power relations, commonly characterized in art historical studies as paradigms of “transfer,” “affinity,” or “exchange.” Temporality alone does not account for ongoing processes of re-territorialization that are taking place “in the wake of dissolving borders and media connectivity.” Nor does temporality alone confront liberal paradigms of multiculturalism that reduce study of diverse visual cultures and art forms to a politics of representation. Space and time are interconnected, as geographer Doreen Massey has shown: both are axes along which we experience and conceptualize change.

As a transcultural worldmaking endeavour, art history shows that location continues to matter as it intersects with belonging in time.

Bringing together discourses on art history, migration, multi-temporality, and an understanding of place as unstable, through my conceptualization of Asian Canadian art I address views on diaspora that likewise posit its transculturality by celebrating its “stateless power”\(^\text{30}\) and its ability to mold “flexible citizens”\(^\text{31}\) whose migrations and settlements stress the paradoxes of identity and belonging—or not belonging—between places. In understanding art as worldmaking, this study thinks through the complex ways in which issues of identity and belonging shift as they are co-constructed from and within simultaneous places, echoing Stuart Hall’s argument that diaspora engenders “discursive production of new interstitial spaces” that are “symptomatic of the wider consequences of global connectedness and disjuncture.”\(^\text{32}\) Worldmaking does not endeavour to map how Asian diasporas in Canada are reflected within the national imagination nor within wider discourses on Asian migration. Instead, worldmaking reinforces diaspora as a subjective condition, one that as Lily Cho suggests, “brings together communities which are not quite nation, not quite race, not quite religion, not quite homesickness, yet they still have something to do with nation, race, religion, [and] longings for home which may not exist.”\(^\text{33}\) A multi-temporal and multi-locational theory of worldmaking undermines constructs of diaspora as community constituted through unidirectional movement between a “sending” and “receiving” nation. It highlights that diasporic communities are in fact complex social imaginaries shaped by residual movements between interconnected times and spaces. By analyzing the worldmaking capacities of the selected artworks, this


dissertation highlights the challenges involved in expressing culture, history, and memory within and among globally dispersed social imaginaries as they continue to negotiate their relationships to multiple geopolitical formations.

About Situatedness

Before outlining how this dissertation builds upon existing scholarship on Asian Canadian art, it is necessary to address how and where I am situated, for situatedness is key to worldmaking. As a scholar and the daughter of white settlers and immigrants with English, Scottish, and German ancestry, I think with the artists in my study as an interlocutor, a participant in an ongoing and multifaceted dialogue. This dissertation evolved through embodied “slow looking” at artworks, through critical study of curatorial essays and exhibition reviews, and through interviews and email chains. Two of the artists in this dissertation are also engaged in their own scholarship (though research informs all of the artists’ works discussed here) and I have cited their published writing. By dialoguing with and alongside the artists and their works, I identify themes and concerns that connect Asian Canadian artists, critics, and scholars while also highlighting the many disconnections and conflicting positions they occupy as individual creators and thinkers.35

34 See Shari Tishman, Slow Looking: The Art and Practice of Learning Through Observation (London and New York: Routledge, 2018). Slow looking is a pedagogical practice that has recently been applied by museum educators to encourage sustained embodied observation of artworks. Slow looking resists the impetus to speed through the museum in order to hastily “see everything.” I employ slow looking as a methodology for visual research, taking the time to look at and describe works of art as a way to dialogue through them.

35 This sense of dialoguing with is a critical point raised by Asian American art scholar Margo Machida in her concept of “oral hermeneutics,” which she theorizes as an approach that engages with artists and their works as well as with the works of critics, scholars, and other cultural producers invested in the social world-making capacities of art. As Machida explains, “when [artists’] works are placed in the public sphere, these images, together with the producers’ insights, have the potential to act as both a mirror and a critical lens through which Asian Americans and others in this society can more carefully and forcefully apprehend the times we share” (xvii). Dialoguing is a practice of acknowledgement and co-construction, a way of
Written primarily on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin nation, near the banks of the Kitchissippi or Great River, this dissertation dialogues with the selected artworks in a place where visual reminders of the nation state and its colonial power are ever present. I was able to view most of the selected works, except for Karen Tam’s installation, at local venues: the installations by Dipna Horra and Howie Tsui were shown at the Ottawa Art Gallery (Horra’s installation was shown before the gallery moved to its new address at 50 Mackenzie King Bridge) while the videos by Jin-me Yoon were exhibited in an online format by the Carleton University Art Gallery in the summer of 2021. My situation in Ottawa has prompted the questions I ask about the works and informed how I think about the worlds they co-construct. How do these works reveal the ways in which the selected artists imagine their own situatedness within or outside of a Canadian settler framework? How do they each work through different experiences of diaspora that align (or misalign) with the interests of federal institutions directly involved in colonizing Indigenous lands here while also sharing a stake in the extraction of putative homelands in Asia? From this grounded perspective, I am interested in how the artists each push back against established parameters of “Asian Canadian” in their works: how they examine experiences of being part of an Asian diaspora in Canada while also questioning assumptions about these experiences. Employing practices of site-responsive imagining, the selected artists trouble constructions of the Canadian nation state while also revealing how the concept of an Asian “homeland” is itself tenuous.

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Troubling Diaspora, Nation, and Globe in Asian Canadian Contemporary Art

My study of Asian Canadian contemporary art moves between Asian Canadian studies, Canadian art history, and Global Asias. Each of these fields maintains what Asian American literature scholar Tina Chen refers to as “structural incoherence,” tensions embedded within their discursive structures that can be harnessed to productively intervene in how each field pictures a world. For instance, Canadian art history has been consistently framed as an impossibility because it focuses on practices of artmaking in an imagined geography too vast, too polarized between regions and languages (specifically, between Anglophone and Francophone conceptions of nation and culture), and too diverse. Asian Canadian studies likewise grapples with the impossibility of Canadian nationalism. Poet and scholar Roy Miki embraces the instability of a term like “Asian Canadian,” suggesting that it exposes how the racialization of subjects “other than” Canadian “unravels the nation’s internal seams.” This kind of structural incoherence is fruitful, according to Chen, who pushes against the conception of Global Asias as the study of Asian globalization. Bringing Asian area studies, diaspora studies, and Asian American studies into critical dialogue, Global Asias harnesses the many disparate ways that Asia is imagined and reimagined within the worlds inhabited, studied, and created by Asian diasporas. I am interested in how approaches that emphasize the instability of supposed bounded concepts can be mobilized through studies of Asian Canadian art, which I position at the intersections of Asian Canadian studies, Canadian art history, and

38 Tina Chen, 315.
Global Asias. If multiculturalism is the dominant framework both in Canada and within other liberal democracies for understanding racial and cultural difference in overlapping national and global contexts, I wish to think through more generative globally-oriented and locally-situated practices evoked in pairing the terms “Asian Canadian” and “contemporary art.” How might these practices help destabilize the marginalizing logics of multiculturalism and institute strategies or forms of relation based on being-in-the-world? In turn, how might we conceive Asian Canadian contemporary art as a marker of historical entanglements, mutual identifications, and care for shared worlds?

The history of Asian Canadian art is largely a history of Asian Canadian cultural activism and a record of how artists have continued to complicate constructions of Asia, Canada, and diaspora. Though its history spans more than a century, Asian Canadian art has long been excluded from studies of art in Canada. This history has only become more visible through the development of a critical field built primarily by engagement with parallel studies in Asian American art history and the interdisciplinary field of Asian

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39 This longer history encompasses a number of cultural activities, including (but not limited to) the establishment of Cantonese opera theatres in late nineteenth-century British Columbia; the commercial studios of Chinese Canadian photographers like Chow Dong Hoy and Yucho Chow (both were based in British Columbia: Chow in Vancouver and Hoy in the frontier town of Quesnel); the practice of Japanese Canadian photographer Senjiro Hayashi, founder of Hayashi Studios on Vancouver Island; and the production of handicrafts by Japanese Canadian women incarcerated during the Second World War. For more on Cantonese opera in BC, see Elizabeth Lominska Johnson, “Evidence of an Ephemeral Art: Cantonese Opera in Vancouver’s Chinatown,” BC Studies 148 (Winter 2006): 55-73. Nisei (second generation Japanese Canadian) artist Aiko Suzuki mentions the handicraft work of Japanese Canadian women in an interview with Xiaoping Li. See Aiko Suzuki in Xiaoping Li, Voices Rising: Asian Canadian Cultural Activism (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 107-117. See also Faith Moosang, First Son: Portraits by C.D. Hoy (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1999) and Larissa Lai, “The Look of Like: Shooting Asian/Indigenous Relation,” in Migration, Regionalization, Citizenship: Comparing Canada and Europe, eds. Katja Sarkowsky, Rainer-Olaf Schultze, and Sabine Schwarze (Wiesbaden: Springer VS Wiesbaden, 2015), 181-194 for research on Chow Dong Hoy’s photography practice, and a recently published monograph, Catherine Clement et. al., Chinatown Through a Wide Lens: The Hidden Photographs of Yucho Chow (Vancouver: Chinese Canadian Historical Society of British Columbia, 2019) for more on Yucho Chow.
Canadian studies, which has had to overcome its own burdens of belatedness, the result of a lack of dedicated ethnic studies programs in Canadian academic institutions. Examining histories of migration and the contemporary politics of the multicultural settler state, scholars, artists, and activists have traced a progressive historical trajectory beginning with an era of exclusion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and moving through the formation of civil rights and cultural movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s. As Asian Canadians increasingly gained visibility in the academy and in the contemporary art world, scholars have refocused longer trajectories of historical presence by highlighting new terms through which to think about Asian settlement in Canada beyond the lens of exclusion. The cultural, sociopolitical, and generational effects of federal policies used to disenfranchise Asian migrants, such as the Chinese Immigration Act (1885-1923), the Chinese Exclusion Act (1923-1947) the “continuous journey” rule (1908), the forced evacuation, relocation, and internment of Japanese Canadians (1942-

40 For more about how these trajectories have converged, see Alexandra Chang and Alice Ming Wai Jim, “Asian/Amercis: Converging Movements,” Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas 1, no. 1-2 (2015): 1-14.
41 See Christopher Lee, “The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies,” Amerasia Journal 33, no. 2 (2007): 1-17 and Robert Diaz, Takashi Fujitani, Allan Punzalan Isaac, Christine Kim, and Casey Mecija, “Critical Race Studies Now: Teaching Anti-Asian Racism within and outside of Institutions,” forthcoming in Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas 7, no. 3 (2021). I read Lee’s essay in conversation with this recent roundtable moderated by Robert Diaz for Scholar Strike Canada. The roundtable outlines critical overlaps in the formation of Asian American and Asian Canadian studies around teaching issues concerned with anti-Asian racism. Both texts address the critical work that Asian Canadian studies performs and the potential work it can do with and without institutional support. A number of programs have opened in Canada since the publication of Lee’s essay, including the Asian Canadian and Asian Migration Studies program at UBC (which Lee currently chairs), the Global Asia Program at Simon Fraser University, and the Minor in Asian Canadian Studies program at the University of Toronto. The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto has also established undergraduate and graduate programs for training in anti-racist pedagogies.
42 For example, historian Henry Yu’s conceptualization of a Pacific-oriented Canada in relation to an Atlantic-oriented Canada, which he insists opens up ways to understand Asian settlement as intrinsic to the development of the Canadian nation state. His broader work traces the historical interconnections between Asian migrants and Indigenous nations in British Columbia. See Henry Yu, “Conceiving a Pacific Canada: Trans-Pacific Migration Networks Within and Without Nations,” in Within and Without the Nation: Canadian History as Transnational History, eds. Henry Yu, Karin Dubinsky, and Adele Perry (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 198-222.
1949), and the Temporary Foreign Worker Program established in 2002, are well documented by scholars who argue that these targeted immigration and containment laws have directly affected the formation of Asian Canadian communities over time. Less acknowledged is how legislated racism—connected to the construction of Canada as a white settler state—has impacted artmaking within Asian Canadian communities.

The exclusion of Asian Canadian art from the discipline of Canadian art history reflects an epistemological bias. Since the mid-twentieth century, Canadian art history has remained a nationalist project focused on naturalizing the authority of the settler state through the liberal ideal of the solitary artist-genius, a figure possessing advanced skill and artistic integrity, imbued with the spirit of the nation. Early efforts to define the parameters of artmaking in Canada were shaped largely within an intellectual climate dominated by (primarily Anglophone and male) white settler artists and focused on developing “an autonomous cultural tradition” that could withstand international influences (particularly the influence of the United States). Anne Whitelaw has illuminated the close ties between canon formation and nation building in her analysis of Anglophone scholar J. Russell Harper’s *Painting in Canada: A History*, which was published in anticipation of the 100th anniversary of Confederation. Billed as the first

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national history of art in Canada—a massive undertaking as one of the first efforts to survey Anglophone and Francophone milieus—with *Painting in Canada*, Harper attempted to chart a coherent linear timeline for the progressive development of Canadian painting starting from the seventeenth century. As Whitelaw notes, Harper moved away from conventional modes of critique based on connoisseurship to instead situate the artist as “an historical figure whose relevance to the history of art simultaneously frames his position as an actor in the nation’s history.” This positioning of the artist as an agent of history crucially bolsters the liberal nation-making aims of the Canadian settler state. Thus, who remains excluded from this intertwining of Canadian art-making and history-writing is equally important as who has been included. The fact that Harper’s study focuses solely on white settler artists illustrates that art critics and scholars in Canada did not consider all artists to be capable agents of liberal nation making. Exclusionary immigration laws rendered Asian migrants outside the nation’s liberalizing framework, thereby prohibiting them from obtaining status as full citizens. Such structural limitations deeply impacted how the works of immigrant artists were perceived. Despite working in a range of artistic styles and media, their works did not fit within the narrow framework of what constituted Canadian art—a construction increasingly dependent upon the artist’s ability to represent and/or reflect upon so-called Canadian forms and subject matter.

Scholars and curators in Canada have incorporated works by Indigenous and racialized artists into existing disciplinary and institutional structures while simultaneously questioning whether the construction of “Canada” itself remains a relevant site for knowledge production. Despite ongoing calls for expansion and

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46 Whitelaw, 20.
47 Jessup, Morton, and Robertson, 9.
decolonization, much of this work falls short of fundamentally challenging the colonial construction of “Canadian” as a political moniker. Alice Ming Wai Jim identifies a tension between efforts to globalize (a term she identifies as a shorthand for studying the works of non-white and non-Western artists) the study of art in Canada and to reify Canadian art’s nationalist origins. A critical site-based approach, Jim suggests, traces the many competing viewpoints that exist when contrasting different scales of regional, national, and global constructions of art. Responding to sites of art-making thus highlights “processes of place-identity formations and the concomitant agency of these culturally interrelated nodes of activity and action.”

Erin Morton echoes Jim’s call for establishing a more fundamentally heterogeneous approach to studies of art in Canada, positing that unsettling Canadian art history’s “white settler national text” requires “a multitude of tactics drawn from anti-racist, decolonial, feminist, and queer, trans, and Two-Spirit methodologies for unsettling dominant ways of seeing and knowing the world.” Without critically unpacking the twinned aims of canon building and nation building, additive approaches to the study of art in Canada reproduce the same structures of settler colonial violence that tied artmaking to the nation’s liberalizing agenda.

The fact that there was no term used to highlight collective forms of Asian diasporic identity during nascent stages of nation and canon building in Canada underwrites the lack of acknowledgement of a longer history of Asian diasporic art in this

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48 Alice Ming Wai Jim, “Dealing with Chiastic Perspectives,” in *Negotiations in a Vacant Lot: Studying the Visual in Canada*, eds. Lynda Jessup, Erin Morton, and Kirsty Robertson (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2014), 75-76. The “site” Jim examines in her essay is Quebec. She focuses specifically on how the works of non-white and non-Western artists are perceived differently in Quebec, where the national art “text” encompasses preserving Francophone identity and culture. Jim highlights why it is necessary to take the particular cultural politics of a place into consideration when attempting to study how such politics interact with the study of art in a global framework.

country. The term “Asian Canadian” was not established until the 1970s in conversation with the nation’s slow embrace of cultural pluralism as a result of immigration reform.\(^{50}\) “Asian Canadian” was formulated at this time as a political identification—part of a wider activist project to shine a light on myriad histories and community formations. Xiaoping Li writes that Asian Canadian cultural producers in the 1970s were worked largely through three interrelated political concerns:

1. to reclaim suppressed ethnicity and to forge new identities; 2. to project an Asian Canadian identity into the mainstream society as a way of intervening in the nation-building process, and 3. to participate in a transnational struggle for equality and justice and construct new identities against the backdrop of Asian diasporas.\(^{51}\)

The practice of naming was imperative for mobilizing against white supremacy, for articulating recognizable forms of subjectivity, and for claiming a history that could combat the cultural erasure and racist exclusion of Asian migrants and Canadians of Asian descent. Writer and scholar Larissa Lai shows that by the 1990s the term “Asian Canadian” was re-conceptualized as both a descriptor and a critical framework used by artists and activists for the purposes of articulating a discursive consciousness—a method for building coalitions—rather than an essentialist identity marker.\(^{52}\) As a noun and an adjective, “Asian Canadian” could thereby be deployed to critique evolving terms of transnationality between global cultural production on the one hand (especially, in light of

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the so-called rise of Asia within global capitalist markets) and the situated politics and constructed time/space of the settler nation state on the other.

Witnessing an increased interest in Asian Canadian cultural production, Miki wrote against the many ways that cultural works by Asian Canadians could be co-opted to further the settler state’s agenda of official multiculturalism, which was put in place to promote equity and diversity.\textsuperscript{53} Adopted as federal policy in 1971, multiculturalism in Canada developed from the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, a federal committee appointed in 1963 to examine relations between Anglophone and Francophone communities and to implement strategies to bolster bilingualism within Canadian society at large. While the commission recommended greater commitments to preserving the rights and freedoms of racialized and religious minority groups—as well as to balance Francophone and Indigenous rights—multiculturalism was implemented largely as a symbolic recognition of cultural difference and diversity rather than a systemic overhaul of social and economic policies at the federal level.\textsuperscript{54} Since the 1970s Canada has cultivated an identity as a deeply tolerant and benevolent pluralist nation, a place where inclusion, as a state-mandated practice, is reinforced on multiple levels in culture and in politics.\textsuperscript{55}

Responding to these logics of multiculturalism to enfold global diasporas within an emerging national identity, Miki resisted a practice of reading and promoting Asian

\textsuperscript{53} See Miki, \textit{In Flux}.


\textsuperscript{55} Eva Mackey, \textit{The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada} (London and New York: Routledge, 1998). Mackey writes about how the institutionalization of multiculturalism has shaped popular conceptions of Canadian identity. In particular, she examines the subjective construction of whiteness as a unifying and mainstream Canadian national identity, arguing that this construction underlies how multiculturalism as a federal policy rewrites racism, exclusion, and erasure through its regard for “inclusion” and “tolerance” of the “other.”
Canadian cultural works as signs of a progressive nation that has overcome its shameful colonial past. While the goal of the Asian Canadian movement of the 1970s was to give a name to a diasporic consciousness and to promote the visibility of Asian Canadian identities and histories, by the 1980s and 1990s strategies of making visible were expanded as activists challenged terms of cultural and political belonging in Canada more broadly, building coalitions and solidarities with Indigenous, Black Canadian, and other transnationally-situated groups in recognition of not only their shared struggles but also of the challenges in mobilizing around agendas that may be in conflict or in tension. Writing in the mid-1990s, critic and scholar Monika Kin Gagnon questioned the need for identifiable forms of racialized subjectivity, arguing that rather than searching for “signs” of Asianness within the contemporary landscape of Canadian art, cultural work about diaspora should “involve recognizing the extent to which political positioning within celebratory, marginalized economies may inhibit consideration of all the sides and manners in which cultural exclusions and dominations occur.” Working alongside anti-racist and anti-colonial cultural producers, Asian Canadian artists produced ground-breaking exhibitions and cultural events, each assembling different social actors (such as artists, curators, and critics), artworks, and positions on constituting Asian Canadian culture as an aesthetics and a politics. Group exhibitions such as *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* (1990-91) (fig. 0.3) curated by pioneering video and performance artist Paul Wong, *Self Not Whole: Cultural Identity and Chinese Canadian Artists in Vancouver* (1993) curated by Karin Lee and Henry Tsang, and *Visions of Power* (1991) a

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56 Miki, *In Flux*, 57.
Figure 0.3: Brochure for *Yellow Peril: Reconsidered* public programming at Gallery 44, Toronto, ON, 5 November, 1990. Artexte, dossier 351. Photograph by the author.

The ‘80s and ‘90s generation of artists, activists, and scholars analyzed the many ways in which multicultural policies and ideologies continued to uphold white supremacy despite claiming to provide measures to protect communities against discrimination and cultural erasure.59 It was through the languages


59 This work is ongoing. Toronto-based artist Deanna Bowen notes that documenting these conversations taking place amongst Canadian artists from historically marginalized communities remains an urgent task, for the truly boundary pushing work continues to be “primarily documented as minor accounts within broad histories focused on white mainstream artists” (473). Her edited volume, *Other Places*, grapples with many burdens of representation shouldered by racialized artists, in particular the burden to reflect their communities’ histories and experiences and the burden of visibility attached to genres and formats of media
of activism that Asian Canadian artists created spaces in which to examine the intricacies and urgencies of relation-making in diaspora.

The study of Asian Canadian art has thus had to overcome not only Canadian art history’s “white settler text”, but also the transnational colonial and imperial foundations through which this text was written: in other words, the larger global contexts that inform the mechanics of racialization, culture, and identity underscoring Canada’s place in the world as a minor empire. Christine Kim uses the term “minor empire” to characterize Canada’s role in the world as a former British colony currently under the influence of US imperialism. As Kim suggests, as a minor empire Canada continues to be shaped not only by these imperial scripts, which have played a part in constructing settler colonial terms of nationhood, but also “by its own imperial desires and versions of Orientalist discourses.”

Tyler Shipley furthers this construction of Canada’s minor imperialism, drawing connections between Canada’s colonial project—the destruction of Indigenous histories, economies, cultures, and ways of knowing—and Canada’s transnational relationships, including its diplomacy programmes. Shipley’s argument that the legacy and logic of Canadian colonialism “runs through the entire history of Canada in the world” is critical for a project dedicated to rethinking the story and construction of Canadian art. It offers a reminder that the white settler text is not just a framework, but a specific political ontology. The formal structures of Asian Canadian contemporary art offer methods for approaching this task to deconstruction, or reworlding (a practice put

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art such as photography and video. See Deanna Bowen, ed., *Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada* (Toronto: Media Arts Network of Ontario, 2019).

60 Christine Kim, 20-21.

forth by Gayatri Spivak), the minor imperial and white settler ontologies of Canadian art.

My proposal to read Asian Canadian contemporary art as a practice of worldmaking thinks alongside the many calls within Asian Canadian studies, Canadian art history, and Global Asias to account for what Miki refers to as “the complicities of subject positioning that both produced and are produced in relations of power.” I probe how the production and study of Asian diasporic art in Canada is compounded both by settler colonial modalities of racialization and nation building—which Iyko Day has effectively traced in her work that reformulates the settler/Indigenous binary as a triangulated dynamic between Indigenous, white settler, and racialized migrant populations—and by global currents of the contemporary art world: its markets, its critics, and its terms of representation. On this matter, worldmaking envisions more complex positionalities and relationships historically left out of canon building endeavours. The dynamics between Indigenous and racialized migrant populations are the focus of recent work in Asian Canadian studies and in Global Asias, which have examined the roles Asian migrants have played in furthering settler nation building on Indigenous lands in North America and in the Pacific. Much of this work posits how, as

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63 Miki, *In Flux*, 60.
Day suggests, “Asian [diasporas] can engage in a politics and poetics of relationality.”66 Crucially, Day warns that a “relational turn” in the study of Global Asias risks conceptualizing relationality as a “settler move to innocence”, a practice that Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue reinforces thinking about decolonization in the abstract.67 I understand Day’s critique of the so-called relational turn, however I posit that relationality understood as a form of embeddedness, of recognizing one’s emplacement within structures produced through force-relations is key for a worldmaking practice seeks to unsettle the distances between Indigenous nations and migrant communities produced through colonialization. I engage more with what relationality as embeddedness might look like from an art historical perspective in Chapter 3. I signal this critique of relationality here as a way to push thinking about the ontological aims of Asian Canadian contemporary art as worldmaking further. If Asian Canadian contemporary art is to produce more complex positionalities, an important step is to find common ground with the work of Indigenous resurgence.68

Asian Canadian contemporary art therefore “re-worlds”69 a world through the contingent experience of diaspora as simultaneous dwelling and displacement. It undermines the inscription of a colonized space (Canadian art history) and critically reshapes it by envisioning the multiple ways that Asian diasporas constitute themselves, which do not always align with established constructions of diaspora, the nation, or the

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69 Spivak, 243-261.
homeland. Through worldmaking, the artists in my study underscore how histories of migration and the complex positioning of Asian diasporic subjects within overlapping settler colonial national and global imperial frameworks have produced contingent identifications with multiple times and places.

**Worldmaking and Site-responsive Artworks**

The title of this dissertation, “One Place and Another: Worldmaking in Asian Canadian Contemporary Art,” riffs on the title of art historian Miwon Kwon’s book, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002). In her book, Kwon conceptualizes the aesthetics and politics of site-specific art, viewing site specificity as “a peculiar cipher of art and spatial politics” in light of debates concerning identity and the transcultural public sphere. Whereas the “after” in Kwon’s title suggests successive rather than simultaneous connection—appropriately reflecting her critique of how the “site” shifted from a sedentary concept in the 1960s to a nomadic concept in the 1990s—the “and” in my title elucidates interconnective senses of place through the lens of diaspora. Thinking successively, Kwon’s conceptualization of the site takes into consideration its experiential, social, and institutional transformations. She understands the site expressed in contemporary art as a nodal space that often continues to participate in global capitalist structures of the art world even while aiming to resist or critique them.

My conceptualization of worldmaking as a response to a site or to a place builds on Kwon’s tracing of the aesthetics, sociability, and political agency of site-specific art, especially her interest in its potential as a form “countering both the nostalgic desire for a retrieval of rooted, place-bound identities on the one hand, and the anti-nostalgic embrace

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70 Kwon, 2-3.
of nomadic fluidity of subjectivity, identity, and spatiality on the other”—both sides of the nation/globe coin. In focusing on artists who engage with notions of the site, I do not call to ground identity or to re-embrace sedentariness to counter mobility. Rather, I evoke the site to think through the simultaneity of diaspora—in other words, as both sedentary and mobile—and to consider what it means for Asian Canadian artists to construct worlds within and between multiple sites of displacement, settlement, and a transitory in-between.

The concept of site specificity grew out of minimalist and conceptual art practices of the 1960s and 1970s. As Kwon writes, artists focused primarily on a phenomenological understanding of the site, which could be recognized formally through works that incorporated physical attributes—such as the actual earth or the surrounding architecture—of a particular location. Though enmeshed in the local, site-specific art was unconsciously global, encompassing parallel movements in different regional and cultural contexts and across specific artmaking sites—from Sekine Nobuo’s *Phase—Mother Earth* (1968) produced for the First Open Air Contemporary Sculpture Exhibition in Suma Rikyu Park, Kobe, Japan, to Robert Smithson’s *Spiral Jetty* (1970) constructed at Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah. Over time, site-specific art practices were destabilized and mediated through a number of more tenuous and capacious approaches to thinking about the site as a field of relations; no longer a stable, grounded place, but a locus for addressing specific histories, debates, audiences, and communities. Since the 1990s, site-specific artworks have become “unhinged” as Kwon suggests, “both in a literal sense of a physical separation of the artwork from the location

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71 Kwon, 8.
72 Kwon, 38-41.
of its initial installation, and in a metaphorical sense as performed in the discursive mobilization of the site in emergent forms of site-oriented art.” Artists who identify as part of a diaspora have played prominent roles in the turn toward staging the discursive functions of the site. Key works include Emily Jacir’s *Memorial to the 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed, Depopulated, and Occupied by Israel in 1948* (2001), which, taking the form of a family-sized refugee tent, is a memorial to the loss of site, and Isaac Julien’s *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007), a poetic rumination on how the movements of those forced to leave a place impact the transitory landscapes between departure and arrival (in this case, between North Africa and nations in the European Union). As Saloni Mathur notes in her introduction to *The Migrant’s Time* (2011), many artists grappling with issues of diaspora address the site and related concerns with dwelling not solely as a spatial problem—highlighting the differences between a “here” and a “there”—but also as a “temporal maladjustment,” an overlap of past and present. Invoking subaltern studies scholar Ranajit Guha’s terminology, Mathur highlights how art about diaspora often signifies a “diachronic approach to society as a historically intertwined space” by addressing the many temporalities of migration—feelings of being both out of place and out of time.

Responding to Kwon’s expanded framework on the site and how it is expressed in contemporary art practices, artist and scholar Gillian McIver emphasizes the difference

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73 Kwon, 30.
74 Stitched onto the tent are the names of every village that was destroyed or occupied by the Israeli Army in 1948. Jacir invited members of the Palestinian diaspora to help her stitch these names, a process that took over three months and that transformed the work into a collaborative community-based site of memory and exchange.
76 Mathur, ix.
between site-specific artworks that employ the site as a frame for works exhibited outside the institutional space of the gallery, and site-responsive artworks that that explore the “re recuperation/reintegration of places of former social or infrastructural use which have been abandoned and forgotten, closed to the public.”77 While McIver focuses more on performative works produced in post-industrial spaces, her distinction between site specificity and site responsiveness is useful, for it acknowledges the struggle for access in a differently stratified and globalized world, emphasizing how looking at a particular site can help ground questions about larger social and political structures. London-based artist Tiffany Singh also makes an important distinction between site specificity and site responsiveness, determining that a “site response in art occurs when the artist is engaged in an investigation of the site as part of the process in making the work.”78 The act of investigating a site is key. Investigations take into account not only physical geography, but also the history of the site and how this history is imagined or expressed in overlapping narratives. Whereas site-specific works may be grounded to a time and place—though as Kwon notes, grounding terms are very much in flux, especially as artworks engaging with a locality have become increasingly mobile as travelling installations and exhibitions79—in site-responsive works the site is encountered materially (in terms of the use of or reference to objects or existing spatial structures) and discursively (in terms of the work’s aesthetic, social, or narrative functions). I distinguish site responsiveness from site specificity in order to account for the relationships between

79 Kwon, 31.
a work of art and its socio-historical or political environment, which are always in the process of being worlded.

Some of the artists examined in this dissertation investigate a space where their work is exhibited, incorporating material and discursive elements of this space into the finished work, while others investigate landmarks (natural or manmade), community stories, and/or memories attached to a particular place as a way to reflect upon continual change. In the former distinction, both the work and the site are continually reconfigured: such as in installation works by Karen Tam (examined in Chapter 1) and Dipna Horra (examined in Chapter 2). In the latter distinction, the site travels as the work is exhibited in new configurations and in different regional contexts: such in an animated scroll installation by Howie Tsui (examined in Chapter 2) and in a series of video works by Jinme Yoon (examined in Chapter 3). Site-responsive artworks transform the site into a critical environment through which to witness processes of macro world-historical forces, micro forms of subjectivity and relation-making, and their mutual inflections. By drawing attention to the ways in which sites are embodied and how they change, the artists in this study acknowledge how what happens here and now is deeply entangled—affectively, materially, and symbolically—with what happens elsewhere and then.

Building on Kwon’s tracing of the sociability and political agency of site-specific art, I position the site as a nexus for shaping the social and the political in Asian Canadian contemporary art, for mediating history, culture, and memory in diaspora, and for thinking through worldmaking as a multi-temporal and situated practice operating in one place and another. I resist thinking successively, in this regard, because the past is always entangled in the present in the same way that “here” is always entangled with “there.” The “after” in the formulation “after another” reinforces hierarchical aims of colonial
worldmaking, evoking how, as Adom Getachew reminds us, colonization was not experienced “as exclusion from but as unequal integration into [an] international society” formulated by European dominance.\textsuperscript{80} The “and” in the formulation “and another” recognizes past and present terms of simultaneity and acknowledges how sites are not entirely bound to their political significations, but not completely divorced from them either. My analysis therefore underscores how numerous responses (material, discursive, or geohistorical) to the construction of the site complicate how we think about diasporic, national, and global terms of (art) history, place, and belonging.

\textbf{Chapter Outline}

Chapter 1 focuses on the historical site of a diasporic artist’s studio, examining art and social worlds made with and through objects. Objects are often approached in art history as things studied, consumed, and transferred between cultures and across time. Scholars in material culture have called for a consideration of the sensuous and conceptual complexities of objects, not just as things in the world but as things that make worlds by shaping relationships between viewers and other objects in their orbits.\textsuperscript{81} My investigation into the use of objects in site-responsive artworks starts from the idea that objects have social lives, as Arjun Appadurai has theorized.\textsuperscript{82} While a social theory of objects resists the multiple burdens of representation placed upon an object, it does not completely deny the object’s connections to “the related worlds of collection, criticism, auction, appraisal,


and commodification.”

Rather, a social theory of objects underscores how the object becomes an instrument of representation as it moves through these worlds. A social theory of objects offers the object’s materiality as a “hazy border” that constructs the relationships between “things and the persons whose social life they enrich and complicate.” In understanding objects in this manner, I question what materiality can tell us about a site and its aesthetic engagements over time.

Through objects, Chapter 1 takes up in more detail the historical conditions of Asian Canadian art outlined in this introduction, critically addressing its absence and unpacking how material being-in-the-world impacts the writing of Canadian art’s histories through divergent and yet interrelated “positional lenses on the past.” I examine this sense of difference and interrelatedness by analyzing Flying Cormorant Studio (For Lee Nam) (2014-2017), a site-responsive installation by Chinese Canadian artist Karen Tam. Flying Cormorant Studio directly engages with the disciplinary parameters of Canadian art history, questioning what kind of art gets to count as “Canadian.” This work relates to Tam’s wider body of mixed media installations investigating sites where race, culture, and identity converge within the racializing frameworks of the Canadian settler state. The installation is a reconstruction of the art studio of Lee Nam, one of the earliest Chinese Canadian ink painters. Active during the 1930s, Lee’s body of extant works has not been discovered in its entirety, yet knowledge of his art practice is confirmed through the writings of white settler artist

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85 Morton, 8.
86 Tam’s research on Lee Nam is ongoing. In an email correspondence from September 2021, she shared with me news that an ink painting of birds thought to be the work of Lee had been located by a Victoria-based collector. The painting was still in the process of being appraised as this dissertation was being completed.
Emily Carr, who befriended Lee at a critical moment in her career. Speculating on the friendship forged between Carr and Lee, Tam turns to Carr’s description of the objects in Lee’s studio to situate the ink painter in a specific time and place—the city of Victoria’s Chinatown in the 1930s—and imagine how the artist would have habitually used this space to weather the hostile settler society in which he lived. Tam emphasizes the experiential formation of the diasporic artist’s studio, staging racially- and culturally-coded décor items and furniture, Lee’s ink painting tools, and artworks on loan from Canadian museum collections, and artworks borrowed from the personal collections of contemporary Chinese Canadian ink painters. I argue that by imagining the social lives of these objects, Tam reframes immigrant spaces generally considered peripheral to the nation as important sites of Canadian art history. Requiring viewers to tap into their haptic senses, Tam goes beyond simply incorporating a marginalized artist like Lee within an already constructed institutional history of art in Canada. By bringing the private space of Lee’s studio into the public space of an art gallery, she proposes instead the potential for objects to historicize spaces of diasporic dwelling and to disentangle the imperial legacies of Canadian art and museums. *Flying Cormorant Studio* challenges superficial knowledge of art and Chinese immigration, offering a history of Chinese Canadian ink painting built through community relations—between artists, family members, and teachers and their pupils. Producing alternate points of connection, the diasporic artist’s studio offers a site through which to theorize the historical stakes in interpreting and conceptualizing Asian Canadian art’s worldmaking capacities.

Chapter 2 shifts focus from objects to stories. Stories are likewise significant to the study of the visual: as subject matter for works of art, and more recently, as narrative
techniques continue to inform the production of visual media, particularly video art.\(^{87}\)

German philosopher Hannah Arendt has shown that stories narrate our object worlds, permitting the establishment of one’s narrative identity and the forging of communities.\(^{88}\)

Though not writing from an art or literary perspective, Arendt’s concern with storytelling as a form of worlding is useful for theorizing how methods of narration—through oral and visual storytelling—shift seemingly grounded constructions of art, its ontological aims, and its socializing potential. In Chapter 2, I examine site-responsive works by two artists who turn to methods of storytelling in their works to restage the site of “home” as a contingent place—as a site of memory, story, and diasporic critique. My analysis focuses on how the artists incorporate oral and visual storytelling techniques from a number of art genres and media to narrate diaspora’s multi-temporality (its “lived time”) and to question the presumption that “grounded homes are not sites of change, relocation, or uprooting.”\(^{89}\)

Through storytelling, the artists grapple with a sense of belonging in diaspora against an atemporal construction of a putative diasporic homeland and that further resists representation within the linear and totalizing “settler time” of the Canadian nation state.

The artists examined in this chapter each identify as a member of a “double diaspora,” a subjective positioning that emphasizes diaspora’s multiplicity.\(^{90}\) I argue that it is from this

\(^{87}\) See Mieke Bal, *Narratology in Practice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), which expands on the scholar’s work on theories of narrative with analyses on the narrative strategies of visual media.


\(^{89}\) Ahmed, et. al., 1.

\(^{90}\) “Double diaspora” is a concept theorized by David A. Wacks in his research on the works of Sephardic Jewish writers from the thirteenth to sixteenth century. It has been taken up in a number of scholarly works that examine diasporic communities that have undergone at least two successive migrations, including Indians who immigrated to Canada, the US, or the UK from Africa or the Caribbean and diasporic Africans who moved from Haiti to resettle in Canada or France in the twentieth century. See David A. Wacks, *Double Diaspora in Sephardic Literature: Jewish Cultural Production Before and After 1492* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015). The following scholars have also examined doubleness, multiplicity, and minor communities in a number of diasporic contexts: Ien Ang engages with Chinese identities in diaspora as a person of Chinese descent whose own history spans sites in Indonesia and the Netherlands, see Ien Ang, *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living Between Asia and the West* (New York:
subjective positioning that the artists each approach storytelling in their works as relational and provisional belonging, a strategy of worldmaking between times and places.

I examine storytelling as worldmaking first through my analysis of Retainers of Anarchy (2017), an animated installation by Hong Kong-born and Vancouver-based artist Howie Tsui. In Retainers of Anarchy, Tsui evokes a disputed (and disappeared) site—the Kowloon Walled City—through a retelling of the legends and stories of its former residents. The installation is realized by reimagining the narrative worldmaking properties of a traditional format in Chinese art: the handscroll. In Tsui’s monumental reconfiguration of the scroll, scenes depicting happenings within and beyond the Walled City move in and out of focus with the use of a digital algorithm that randomizes the selection of vignettes and the sequence of the narrative. Translating the storytelling functions and methods of the scroll across media, the artist subverts its intimate politics and poetics first through the installation’s scale (when exhibited in a physical space, the installation measures approximately 3.4 by 25 metres) and second through its randomized visual narrative. References to Song dynasty landscape paintings and twentieth-century martial arts films set in Hong Kong further push against the burden of representation by situating the Walled City as a metaphor for a diasporic critique of the Chinese government and its treatment of Hong Kong. I suggest that Retainers of Anarchy is an

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important development in Tsui’s body of work, which has for the most part focused on
telling the stories of Chinese diasporas in his current home in Vancouver. *Retainers of Anarchy* calls into question the historicizing and spatializing borders implied by the term “Asian Canadian contemporary art,” for it does not speak directly to an experience in
Canada but rather examines how diasporic storytelling re-visions the imagined boundaries of a homeland. My analysis unpacks this Asian Canadian worldmaking outside of Canada, demonstrating how *Retainers of Anarchy* builds from earlier works in which the artist underscores the historical ties between Hong Kong and the city of Vancouver.

Meanwhile, in her installation *Avaaz* (2010), Nairobi-born and Ottawa-based Punjabi Canadian artist Dipna Horra stages a non-descript “home” with sparse furnishings: a kitchen table, a tea trolley, and a window suspended from the ceiling of the exhibition space. Sound recordings—the clattering of tea cups and saucers, the low rumble of a storm brewing outside the window, and disembodied voices singing and speaking over each other in English, French, and Punjabi—emerge from speakers retrofitted within these objects, adding an experiential texture to this reconstructed home. Through *Avaaz*, Horra evokes a practice of oral storytelling crucial to her memories of gatherings wherein elder family members would reminisce together, transferring their experiences to their children. Horra ritualizes and co-narrates her family’s story about immigrating first to Kenya in the late nineteenth century and then to Canada in the 1970s (a few years after the passing of the 1967 Immigration Act) when the artist was a small child. The sound recordings played on a loop within the space of the installation produce a rich and complex soundscape that highlights the invisible power dynamics lingering beneath the banal surfaces of a home, connecting Horra’s family story to other stories in a centuries-long global narrative of Indian migration conditioned by the politics of
movement within the British Empire. Like Tsui, Horra reconfigures the temporal frame of her storytelling medium to narrate the dense and contradictory experience of belonging in diaspora. Her experimental medium enables her to draw out a relational experience of time through the phenomenological properties of sound. According to art historian Brandon Labelle, sound art plays with the way we perceive sound as a durational phenomenon, highlighting how it multiples the experience of a site in which it is contained by making the site “appear beyond any total viewpoint.”

With *Avaaz*, Horra renders both the home-in-displacement and the diasporic homeland as sites where belonging is dictated not by the state but by intergenerational sounds of memory and story. Both of the artists in this chapter embrace stories as things that are carried, things that weather memory and connections to places of departure and arrival on personal, political, and aesthetic registers. They each offer the home as an imagined site that opens up alternative frameworks through which to conceptualize and to trace Asian Canadian art histories.

Finally, Chapter 3 traces worldmaking with and through landscape, a genre of art with a long and storied history. More than simply a translation of the physical space and character of the land into art (mediated through the artist’s eye and/or brush/shutter), landscape represents a reconstructed version of the natural world that says more about human relationships with it than accurately describing its form. Landscape has transformed over time into an agent of power, a means through which to express mastery over and possession of nature. In the context of a settler state like Canada, landscape

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performs double duty as a tool to dispossess and reclaim stolen Indigenous lands. With these functions of landscape in mind, Chapter 3 examines its potential to underscore rather than to obscure overlapping histories of migration, settlement, and emplacement. I analyze three site-responsive video works by Korean Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon: *Other Hauntings* (2016), a two-part series set on Jeju Island, South Korea, *Long View* (2017), set on Vancouver Island, Canada, and *Living Time* (2019), set on Hornby Island, Canada. Conducting comprehensive, on-the-ground research into the histories of the sites where she films, Yoon critically reflects upon immigrant relations with land and place, using the camera to produce embodied connections between these transpacific sites. The human subjects featured in these works—typically portrayed by family members and friends—encounter their non-human surroundings by performing specific gestures, like walking, digging, and dancing, that bring forth knowledge that they each carry in the process of finding a place to stay put. Their gestures commune with landmarks (like a sand mound) and abstract forms (like those captured with the artist’s handheld camera, which she repeatedly shakes) that appear throughout this body of work, serving as residual markers of time and place. Throughout these works the artist uses advanced formal techniques, such as montage-style editing, split screens, and overlays of degraded footage sourced from archived films, to emphasize this associative worldmaking and to rethink the representational claims to land often constructed through the genre of landscape. My analysis rethinks the visuality of the genre of landscape—and what it signifies in the context of Canadian art history—with the visibility of diasporic bodies, in particular, the impetus in studies of Asian diasporas to make subjects visible as a strategy counteracting terms of exclusion from the settler nation. Yoon’s video works trouble the terms that make both landscapes and diasporic subjects visible. Her landscapes produce imagery that
abstract and obfuscate the land, rendering it a form with which to imagine how specific sites resonate in diasporic memory. I argue that it is through this sense of resonance that Yoon feels for colonial hauntings, diasporic erasures, and soundings of place and history that defy the politics of the visible and that destabilize the possessive logics of both the landscape and her lens-based medium. Her video works produce a formal language of the landscape that can engage with spatial ruptures caused by displacement and deterritorialization while also interrelating transpacific sites of Asian diasporic settlement.

Viewing the site as a nexus for worldmaking, this dissertation turns to Asian Canadian artists who enact site responses with objects, stories, and landscapes as a way to historicize simultaneous spaces of diasporic dwelling, to recount the multi-temporality of diasporic time, and to reflect upon interrelated experiences of migration, settlement, and emplacement. The selected artists think through the site by implementing objects, stories, or landscapes, enacting worldmaking with forms often enmeshed within art historical representations of particular times and places. In their works, the artists emphasize the instability of these forms. Insisting that instability provides fertile ground for encountering the relationships between national formations and global social imaginaries, my analysis aims to rethink Canadian art through the lens of global migration, resisting a common narrative of Canada as a multicultural, benevolent nation. Investigating the work that Asian Canadian contemporary art does, rather than what it represents or stands for, moves beyond the structural binary of inclusion/exclusion and instead shifts focus to an aesthetics and politics of one place and another.
CHAPTER ONE:

Worldmaking with Objects:
Re-visioning Asian Canadian Art Histories in the Work of Karen Tam

*Hand-crafting and hand-writing, found objects and found stories—they intersect and overlap. Here on a page, there in the space of the museum. Restless, unruly, and temporary in the midst of the permanent collection.*

Linda Sormin, “Love Notes to Buddhas: Are you land or water?”

*Objects are [...] more than singular things; they are understood as social signs. Each object can be seen as a nexus of encounters, a focal point for societal values.*


Probing the historical conditions for Asian Canadian contemporary art, this chapter thinks through the site-responsive properties and worldmaking potential of objects. I examine an installation by Montreal-based artist Karen Tam in which she situates the historical presence of Lee Nam, one of the earliest known Chinese artists working in traditional media in Canada. Tam resists the impetus to simply insert Lee, an historically marginalized artist, into existing narratives of Canadian art history that have either completely ignored or relegated to footnotes works by diasporic and Indigenous artists. Instead, she seeks to affirm Lee’s significance as a diasporic artist, staging material traces of his ink painting practice as evidence of a larger tradition of ink painting connecting diasporic artists in Canada to their contemporaries in China and elsewhere in the world. Tam reads across migratory histories and concepts of art to re-construct an historical narrative, to engage the structural reasons for Lee’s absence from Canadian art history, and to examine the potential to write Asian Canadian art histories beyond the framework of corrective inclusion.

My analysis of Tam’s installation starts from the position outlined by art historian Lenore Metrick-Chen in the second epigraph of this chapter. Facilitating encounters,
objects are more than “singular things.” They construct social meanings by brokering relations, assembling networks, and re-orienting the art worlds in which they are produced. In Tam’s art practice, specific artworks and cultural artifacts coded as “Chinese” are reconfigured as social objects attesting to the worldmaking capacities of sites of immigrant life, such as Chinatown restaurants and housewares shops. Tam reconstructs these sites in the public space of the museum to question how they are made Other, recreating them as “spaces of cultural blending, interactions, and misunderstandings”, responsive to both the institutions in which they are exhibited and the viewing publics they seek to address. The aesthetic functions of the objects in her installations are entangled with the historical and social meanings they elucidate and the relationships they co-construct when situated in a specific time and place.

The history of Asian Canadian art is connected to transpacific histories of immigration and to the many practices of nation building that sought to affirm the white settler heritage of Canadian peoples and institutions. It is also inextricably linked to Western imperial perspectives on Asian peoples, cultures, and objects, which have marked waves of hostility and curiosity throughout history. Although settler colonies in the Americas became sites of cultural exchange, prospering from the sixteenth century onward as a result of global trade networks, the commercial desire for objects such as East Asian porcelain, ink paintings, calligraphy, and woodblock prints did not reach its apex in North America until the late nineteenth century—at the same time that

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immigrants from East Asia were themselves barred entry from Canada and the United States. In the context of the US, Metrick-Chen argues that systemic racism and exclusion are interrelated with the centuries-long consumption of Asian art and imported goods, insisting that the perceived exoticness of specific aesthetic objects and imagery bolstered constructions of racial Otherness. The meaning of art and its social function in service to nation building “became one of the sites at which competing ideas of ethics and power struggled for hegemony.” Exportsf from Asia projected “wealth and prestige [into the] domestic, public, and religious lives” of white settlers claiming home on stolen Indigenous lands. As North Americans developed an insatiable taste for objects from Asia, the presence of immigrants from different places in Asia undermined settlers’ desires to position themselves as the worthy inheritors of imperial power. Imperial claims to land and culture were solidified as newly established encyclopedic museums began collecting and displaying cultural artifacts from Asia, reframing specific objects as masterworks requiring the expertise of Western collectors and curators to preserve their historical value. Despite the well-documented popular interest in Asian things, histories of art in Canada and the US rarely speak of them unless they influenced a particular canonical artist’s work. Studies of imperial relations between Asia and the Americas are often conspicuously left out of histories of American and Canadian art.

96 The Chinese Exclusion Act became federal law in the United States in 1882, three years prior to the passing of Canada’s Chinese Immigration Act, which put into effect a federally mandated “head tax”.
97 Metrick-Chen, 2.
98 Carr, Made in the Americas, 24-25.
Regarding both the practice of nation building and the disciplinary construction of Canadian art history, the effects of Orientalism cannot be understated. More than a discriminatory attitude, Orientalism is colonial worldmaking, an ideological positioning of Asia as the West’s timeless and contrasting image produced and supported by institutional practices and vocabularies built upon enduring power structures.\(^{101}\) Constituting an Other that can be dominated, and cultures that can be restructured, conquered, appropriated, and consumed, Orientalism accentuates the logics of settler colonialism and racial capitalism, dispossessing Indigenous nations and migrants of their material worlds, aligning Asian bodies with abstract forms of labour. Ariella Azoulay suggests that when subjects “are forced to abandon their habitual practices and their objects are expropriated and recognized—or misrecognized—as art by experts, they become susceptible to the whims of their colonizers”.\(^{102}\) Operating through the triangulation of Orientalism, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism, the worldmaking practices of Canadian institutions denied the coevality of artworks produced in Asia from artworks produced by European settlers in the West,\(^{103}\) thus removing Asian art from histories of art in Canada, and establishing the structural and social barriers that made it difficult (and at times even impossible) for diasporic artists to develop and sustain professional art practices.

As Azoulay has shown, art history operates through the degradation of material worlds enacted through force-separation. Practices of extraction, assimilation, and the construction of liberal citizenship—removing objects from their communities and forcing

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entire populations to adopt the landscapes and stories of the colonizer—shaped the
conditions through which modern nations (and their museums and academies) emerged as
institutions defining and assessing what constitutes a work of art. In the process of being
appropriated, removed from their environments and communities, and supplanted within
institutional systems tasked with caring for cultures not their own, objects became
“artworks” and the study of art itself became “a way to avoid engaging with the world
shared with others”. 104 Nation building in Canada likewise operates through a force of
separation by arranging subjects into distinct classes of “desirable” and “undesirable”
 bodies, ascribing the right to inhabit history to some but not to others. 105 The recovery of
minor objects and histories has increasingly become a dominant practice through which to
broaden the study of art and to re-vision constructs of the nation in order to reflect
competing claims to history in a more equitable way. While recovery has helped alter
understanding of the past, it often falls short of critically unpacking the terms through
which minor objects and histories become “minor” in the first place: through opposition
to and difference from a dominant discourse typically posited “as a powerful and
universalizing force that either erases or eventually absorbs cultural particularities” and
that demands “assimilation, incorporation, or resistance.” 106 Focusing on objects from
nations once located at the peripheries of empire, minor art histories reflect the world-
destroying force relationships that rendered artworks by non-Western, diasporic, and
racialized artists as out-of-step with the colonial time of Western modernity. Terms of

104 Azoulay, 60.
difference from the colonial centre determined inclusion within the nineteenth century’s cosmopolitan project of Weltkunstgeschichte, as Juneja notes, which as the cosmopolitan “precursor” to global art history, attended to the study of art from elsewhere in the world by framing artworks within siloed, self-contained geographic units, “suppressing the plurality of agency and the circulation of objects, forms, and practices.”

Recovery-via-expansion assumes that art is a universal endeavour and that the same frameworks and methods used to study objects produced in one context can be applied to the study of objects produced everywhere.

The idea that objects possess social lives and that their meanings change both in space and in time offers a way to rethink strategies used in writing art histories that have been relegated to the margins. Art historian Vimalin Rujivacharakul notes that while scholars in the field of material culture studies have sketched out compelling arguments for how objects carry ideas between one place and another, impacting their viewing audiences, the meanings attached to an object can also shift, especially when meaning is already unstable and always subject to human interpretation. Objects are not separate from history but in fact deeply enmeshed within it. In this chapter, I think through Tam’s use of objects—such as paintings, sculptures, ceramics, and furniture—coded as “Chinese” to re-vision the erasure of Asian art from Canadian art history. Reflecting upon the worlds inhabited by Asian Canadian artists in the early twentieth century, Tam’s

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installation works pose important questions about the kinds of aesthetic practices that have been deemed worthy of inclusion within broader narratives of artmaking in Canada.

Situating Lee Nam

In September 1933, Lee Nam 李趙南 (Lee Chao Nam) organized a small exhibition of ink paintings in his Chinatown studio, a rented warehouse space in Victoria, British Columbia. Emily Carr, an artist widely regarded as a national icon in Canada (and indeed, as a prominent figure in the Canadian story of modernism), attended the exhibition and wrote the following description of the event in her journal:

He had a room full of paintings. The big double door was open and the shop window was hung with green cotton curtains, truly Chinese. He had covered the brick wall with a thin wash of white [paint] but it was still a brick wall, no delusion. There was an organ in the room and a box in a corner draped with a black and white oilcloth. There was a gay bunch of flowers on it and a new little exercise book in which guests wrote their names, the [Chinese] on one side of the page and the whites on the other. There were not many signatures.

Carr continues, recording her observations about Lee’s work: “it is simple and sincere and very Chinese,” and suggests that “the birds [in his paintings] live and are put into their

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110 Carr remains a complicated and yet deeply beloved figure in Canadian art history. Anointing herself a chronicler of the West Coast, Carr is best known for her landscape paintings redolent with the unique atmosphere of this place she held dear, and for her persistent devotion to the Indigenous nations she encountered and connected with during her many journeys up and down British Columbia’s rugged, mountainous coastline. Her early works illustrate an attempt at documentation, depicting the visual and material cultures of a number of Northwest Coast First Nations usually without the presence of people. These works have been critiqued by Indigenous art historians, such as Marcia Crosby, for promoting an image of a dying Indigenous culture, presenting materials (objects, architecture, etc.) in need of salvaging and positioning white settlers as possessing the authority to preserve them. While Carr was known to have embraced her Indigenous hosts, she also tended to exaggerate her affiliations and viewed traditional knowledge as something that should be extracted in order to resist historical erasure. Despite these issues, Carr remained steadfast in her mission to find ways to co-exist within her environments. Her works, as Sarah Milroy suggests, are “important as a record of a singular artist’s grappling with that great unanswerable question of the settler imagination: Where do I belong?” (39). See Sarah Milroy, “Why Emily Carr Matters to Canadians,” in From the Forest to the Sea: Emily Carr in British Columbia (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 2014), 35-51 and Marcia Crosby, “Construction of the Imaginary Indian,” in Vancouver Anthology: The Institutional Politics of Art, ed. Stan Douglas (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1991), 267-291.

spaces just right. There is a dainty tenderness about them and one is not conscious of paint but of spirit.”¹¹² She finally comments on Lee’s interest in learning techniques in oil painting, expressing that even though he initially approached her to teach him, “I feel more that I would like him to teach me. He has what I lack, an airy, living daintiness, more of the ‘exquisite’ of life.”¹¹³

Carr’s brief writings about his workspace and his painting practice—as well as a single painting with a disputed authorship—remain the sole traces of Lee as an artist (fig. 1.1). Addressing Lee’s absence from Canadian art history, in an essay published in 2003, art historian Gerta Moray examines the potential impact of his friendship with Carr, arguing that their exchanges contributed to Carr’s own maturation as an artist. Though very little information remains about Lee and his work, Carr’s account of the artist “adds

¹¹² Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 93.
¹¹³ Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 94.
valuable details to the [...] history of the Chinese community in Victoria during the 1930s and suggests an overlooked factor in her artistic development.”

It is clear from Carr’s writings that the two artists found ways to connect and relate to one another as outsiders. Mired by the burden of being a female artist in a peripheral and conservative port city, Carr struggled to earn a living with her art for much of her life. To make ends meet, Carr rented rooms in her family’s Beacon Hill home. Lee likewise sought alternative means to earn a living while struggling to expand his painting practice. An immigrant from Taishan, Guangdong Province, Lee worked as a bookkeeper for a number of merchants in Chinatown. By the time the two were in contact, Carr was in her 60s and was beginning to draw critical interest in her work on the basis of her participation in the 1927 exhibition, *West Coast Art: Native and Modern* at the National Gallery of Canada.

Lee, in contrast, faced rejection from the city of Victoria’s insular arts community. A learned painter of flowers, birds, and landscapes, Carr reported that he was “curtly refused” from a sketching class organized by the Island Arts and Crafts Society “because of his nationality.”

Lee’s search for community led him to seek out Carr and to invite her to

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115 It is important to note that Carr’s paintings depicting the material cultures of Northwest Coast First Nations were displayed in this exhibition alongside ceremonial objects confiscated from these same nations by the federal government. As Milroy writes, “[Indigenous] culture was [often] deployed to promote Canadian identity even as Aboriginal identity was being effaced, and Carr’s art—and now her legacy—has been caught up in these machinations of nation building” (41).

116 Emily Carr, *The House of All Sorts* [1944] (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre Ltd., 2004), 163. The Island Arts and Crafts Society was established in 1909 by a group of watercolourists and acted as the city of Victoria’s arbitrators of taste for much of the early twentieth century. The group consisted primarily of wealthy amateur painters, many of whom were settlers hailing directly from England, who engaged in painting and sketching as “genteel pastimes.” While the majority of the artists who founded the Society described themselves as “amateurs,” they benefited immensely from the Society’s mandate to promote general interest in the arts on Vancouver Island. One of the Society’s main activities was an annual exhibition that brought together artists working in a number of media, including painting, sculpture, and “sketching.” The exhibitions were widely attended (including by Carr, despite her works being rejected by the Society on a number of occasions) and cemented particular categorizations of art and aesthetic standards, not unlike professional artists’ societies and academies founded elsewhere in Canada at the turn of the century. For discussion of the shifting terms of professionalization versus amateur art, and the role of
many public and private gatherings in his Chinatown studio. His presence in Carr’s writings reinforces her own self-positioning as a socially progressive advocate for artists working beyond rigid racial, gender, and class barriers.

Carr’s musings on Lee’s exhibition—describing the furniture, Lee’s artworks, and the assortment of objects that marked his arrangement and habitual use of his studio space—counter the immigrant artist’s invisibility. More than 80 years later, Tam speculates on the exchange between Carr and Lee, evoking the historical significance of Carr’s works and her narration of the objects in Lee’s studio to inspire new ways to historicize connections and encounters between unevenly situated actors. Tam’s mixed media installation *Flying Cormorant Studio* (2014-present) serves as the focal point of her

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solo exhibition, *With wings like clouds hung from the sky* 大鵬就振翼 (fig. 1.2),117 which grapples with the erasure of Asian art from Canadian art history, and with the perceived lack of a longer history of Asian Canadian art. Tam expands upon Carr’s description of his studio, arranging objects in this imagined space as a way to reframe Lee’s story beyond one of absence. Through further archival research, Tam navigates traces of Lee’s material presence and places his work within the context of a significant and expansive history of diasporic ink painting, initiating an historical portrait of the artist that challenges constructions of art in Canada based upon material, style, and notions of professionalism.

The diasporic artist’s studio is the primary site in which Tam reconceptualizes overlapping histories of art and immigration. Through installation, Tam “[examines] the nature and production of history”, going beyond merely commemorating or recording an historical past to instead address methods of historiography through an aesthetic and material frame.118 Engaging with archives, histories of art and collections, and theories of museology, Tam approaches her subject matter in a manner akin to an artist-curator, a role that critically unravels disciplinary boundaries between artists, curators, and

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117 *Flying Cormorant Studio* was commissioned for the group exhibition, *Convoluted Beauty: In the Company of Emily Carr* (2014), curated by Lisa Baldissera at the now-defunct Mendel Art Gallery in Saskatoon, SK. In part a response to the special presentation of several of Carr’s paintings at dOCUMENTA 13 (2012), the exhibition aimed to rethink the artist’s place within histories of Canadian and international modernisms. Placing her work in direct conversation with the works of contemporary artists based in Canada, England, Germany, and the United States, Baldissera produced a coming together of national, cultural, and temporal viewpoints to refocus Carr’s past. *Flying Cormorant Studio* has since been exhibited as the focal point of Tam’s solo exhibition, *With wings like clouds hung from the sky* 大鵬就振翼 in 2017 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, in 2019 at the Richmond Art Gallery in Richmond, BC, and in 2022 at the Varley Art Gallery in Markham, ON. See Lisa Baldissera, *Convoluted Beauty: In the Company of Emily Carr* (Saskatoon: Mendel Art Gallery, 2014) and Kevin Griffin, “Emily Carr: Seven paintings chosen for dOCUMENTA 13,” *Vancouver Sun*, 6 June, 2012, https://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/emily-carr-seven-paintings-chosen-for-documenta-13.

institutions.\textsuperscript{119} In \textit{Flying Cormorant Studio}, Tam imagines Lee’s “room full of paintings” furnished with paintings by Chinese and Canadian artists, which she selects from Canadian museum collections and from the personal collections of a number of contemporary Chinese Canadian ink painters sourced from studio visits. Much of the furniture, too, is sourced from community connections: from antique shops, estate sales, and donations from Tam’s family, friends, and colleagues. In the process of selecting and displaying these loaned objects, Tam constructs an aesthetic experience of how artworks and objects structure the ways in which we perceive and engage in history. Placing these paintings in proximity to each other, Tam establishes an intergenerational, multimedia, and transcultural dialogue on artmaking, imagining the kinds of entanglements made possible through Carr’s and Lee’s friendship. This curated space reflects art historian Christian Kravagna’s conceptualization of art history as a “history of contact”, undermining a disciplinary framing that emphasizes relationships between artists build through “influence and reception.”\textsuperscript{120} Drawing connections between Lee’s peers and the generations of diasporic painters that succeed him, Tam questions what happens when we highlight these contacts and the social/political structures through which they are formed and fostered.

Tam’s installation functions as both an embodied site and an active participant in the production of Asian Canadian art history. In each iteration, \textit{Flying Cormorant Studio} employs objects to re-vision Canadian art through the aesthetic frame of an immigrant space, affording Lee the agency to inhabit history. By approximating the objects Lee would have used to furnish his studio, Tam proposes methods for challenging knowledge

\textsuperscript{119} Celina Jeffrey, ed., \textit{The Artist as Curator} (Bristol: Intellect Books, 2015), 7.
\textsuperscript{120} Kravagna, 110.
of diaspora and art. In this chapter I detail how Tam constructs Lee’s studio and how her use of objects—such as period-appropriate furniture, ink painting tools, and selected artworks by Emily Carr and other modernists working contemporaneously in China—constitutes a practice of worldmaking. The exclusion of Lee and countless other Chinese Canadian ink painters from Canadian art history results from the racialization and disenfranchisement of Chinese immigrants in Canada as well as the failure to realize the coevality of Asian and Asian diasporic art at a moment when Canadian museums were quickly building up their collections of Asian antiquities. Taking on the role of an artist-curator, Tam transgresses the disciplinary boundaries of the gallery’s collection and provokes a rethinking of how the habitual use of objects and the spatial design of artworks enforces an historiographic reading. By thinking through the site of a diasporic artist’s studio, Tam participates in the ongoing deconstruction of Canadian art history that recognizes the heterogeneity of lived experiences in this settler state called Canada.121 As an historical and aesthetic object, as well as a method of re-visioning the past, Flying Cormorant Studio reframes Chinese immigrants as significant art historical actors, refusing their status as marginal or peripheral.

**Objects, Space, and the Art Historical Construction of Chinese Diasporas in Canada**

In her artistic practice, Tam re-visions immigrant spaces often marked by cultural and racial signifiers, such as Chinese restaurants, karaoke lounges, photography studios, and Chinatown housewares shops (figs. 1.3 and 1.4). Responding to a site, the artist takes into consideration the visual and material experiences of these spaces as well as their relationships with a local community in the city where the installation is exhibited. Often

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121 Morton, 6-7.
Figure 1.3: Karen Tam, *Terra dos Chinês Curio Shop*, 2012-2016. Mixed media installation, 12.35 x 7.31 x 3.35m. Exhibited 2 September-2 October, 2016 at articule, Montreal, QC. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 1.4: Karen Tam, *Gold Mountain Restaurants*, 2002-2010. Mixed media installation using found and fabricated objects. dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist.
occupying an art museum, a commercial art gallery, or a heritage home museum, her installations temporarily transform the kinds of encounters viewers expect to have within an arts institution and within a Chinatown restaurant or housewares shop, reconfiguring each into spaces through which to re-vision interconnected histories of art and diaspora. Reproducing immigrant spaces, their objects, and the cultural expectations they have come to stand in for, Tam reflects upon how the constructed identity and meaning of immigrant space sheds light on the complexities of building a visual culture in one place and another.

Tam’s installations manipulate continual push and pull between different political registers of worldmaking, demonstrating how majoritarian constructions of diasporas as displaced “outsiders” within a host society contrast the vibrant worlds diasporic communities constitute for and amongst themselves. Her interest in the social and material functions of immigrant space confronts the ways in which Chinese diasporas have been made in white settler states, where spatializing strategies “narrate the stories of colonization” by naturalizing contests for citizenship and belonging.122 White supremacy saturates the landscapes carved by settler colonialism: the farmlands, national parks, and city grids, which were formed through the extraction, exclusion, and compartmentalization of specific bodies defined by racial and cultural difference. In the late nineteenth century, exclusionary immigration policies were put in place to curb the growing Chinese presence in British Columbia and to redraw colonial sites where interracial encounters between Chinese, Indigenous, and white settler communities

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“generated new struggles over land, resources, and labour.”\textsuperscript{123} The Chinese Immigration Act (1885) was the first federal legislation to directly target a specific group of immigrants, though the province of British Columbia had already passed legislation in as early as 1875 to disenfranchise Indigenous peoples and various migrant groups from Asia. With the establishment of the Chinese Immigration Act, a fixed levy of 50 dollars was charged to each person with Chinese nationality upon entering Canada. This tax was introduced concurrently with the completion of the transcontinental Canadian Pacific Railway, which was built primarily by indentured labourers bound to exploitative subcontracts. The purpose of the levy was to discourage more Chinese people, especially women and families, from immigrating to Canada. It was subsequently raised to 100 dollars in 1900 and then to 500 dollars in 1903, culminating in the implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act passed on July 1, 1923, which barred entry to Chinese migrants. These measures to restrict and disenfranchise Chinese people entering and settling in Canada were supported by popular cultural and political discourses that constructed Asian migrants, particularly Chinese men, as a threat displacing white English immigrants.

Terms of exclusion both constituted and enabled the maintenance of Canada as a white settler space. In her study of Vancouver’s Chinatown (which is the largest diasporic neighbourhood in Canada), geographer Kay Anderson links the settlement of “urban ethnic places”\textsuperscript{124} to the development of racist national policy and rhetoric, arguing that the

\textsuperscript{123} Mawani, \textit{Colonial Proximities}, 7.

\textsuperscript{124} “Urban ethnic places” is a term used by geographer Jan Lin to examine the discursive power of racially-coded immigrant neighbourhoods, such as Chinatowns. Lin’s conceptualization of an urban ethnic place emphasizes viewing such coded spaces through the agency of minority communities to bolster a sense of cultural belonging for the purposes of self-definition and self-preservation against state-sanctioned racism. In this way, Lin advocates for the agency of these neighbourhoods’ residences where Anderson’s study does not. See Jan Lin, \textit{The Power of Urban Ethnic Places: Cultural Heritage and Community Life} (New York: Routledge, 2011).
establishment (and subsequent heritage designation) of neighbourhoods inhabited by racialized immigrant populations have helped define terms of otherness in Canada. Policies at all levels of Canadian governance have long been concerned with establishing and safeguarding whiteness as characteristic of Canadian citizenship and identity. Though early nation building efforts focused more acutely on managing race through Canada’s legal frameworks, “at the local level, territorial boundaries […] confirmed the broader cultural and political [boundaries] designating ‘Chineseness’.”\(^{125}\) A space bearing witness to colonial strategies to contain and manage a racialized Other, Chinatown was marked not through its residents’ own agency to define themselves, but by applying existing racial categorizations and meanings to the aesthetic and material production of spaces occupied by Chinese immigrants, delineating and separating these spaces from those in other neighbourhoods not explicitly coded by race. By the mid-twentieth century, due in part to local pushback against a number of urban revitalization schemes, community members lobbied to designate Chinatowns as cultural heritage sites, while Chinatown merchants reshaped the aesthetic façade of these neighbourhoods in an effort to transform them into tourist destinations.\(^{126}\) Calls to preserve Vancouver’s Chinatown, in particular,


\(^{126}\) North American projects include the plan for the City of Los Angeles’s ‘China City,’ a development proposed in the 1930s as a replacement for the city’s historic Chinatown (which was displaced with the construction of the new Union Station). The plans for China City played heavy on vernacular forms and have been criticized for catering too much to the Western tourist gaze. Likewise, the 1950-54 bid for ‘China Village’ in New York followed the city’s 1949 housing act that removed many of the nineteenth-century tenement buildings occupying the area around Chinatown, housing many of its residents. The plan for China Village was developed through consultations with Chinatown merchants, who wanted to emphasize the identity of the space through architectural forms, such as pagodas and dragon ornamentation. The merchants saw this development as a way to ensure their economic survival and resist slum clearance. For more information, see Josi Ward, “Dreams of Oriental Romance: Reinventing Chinatown in 1930s Los Angeles,” *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 19-42 and Greg Umbach and Dan Wishnoff, “Strategic Self-Orientalism: Urban Planning Policies and the Shaping of New York City’s Chinatown, 1950-2005,” *Journal of Planning History* 7, no. 3 (August 2008): 214-238.
cited its vernacular architecture (characterized by a distinct recessed balcony style of architecture) and material culture as evidence of a unique heritage that reinforced Canada’s diversity. This discursive shift in delineating racialized space reveals how settler colonial spatializing logics persist through the framework of official multiculturalism. Reconceived as a tourist space, Chinatown bolsters the nation’s “tolerance” for the racialized Other while flattening historical, socio-cultural, linguistic, and class-based complexities of Chinese Canadian communities. Chinatowns therefore transformed from merely being concentrations of immigrants living and working in close proximity to one another into particular spaces coded as inscrutable and foreign. The idea of Chinatown does not exist as a result of a natural correlation between the historical settlements of Chinese diasporas and the ways in which they have navigated and occupied space in Canada. Chinatowns, and the buildings contained within them, have been consciously imagined as essentialized sites of diasporic culture that possess a specific architecture, arrangement of space, and aesthetics.

127 Anderson, 212.
128 Laura Madokoro’s study of urban development in Vancouver illuminates these many complexities, as well as the enduring effects of spatializing the white settler state. Discussing two separate case studies, she positions diasporic memory as a disruptive force to the implied solidarity of diasporic communities, suggesting that territory and memory are enmeshed within understandings of diasporic belonging. Her case studies include community protests against the demolition of Vancouver’s Strathcona neighbourhood in the 1960s, and the controversy surrounding plans for mixed-family housing (“Monster Homes”) in Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale. Chinese diasporic communities were at the centre of both debates. In the case of Strathcona, community activists cited the neighbourhood’s unique cultural heritage and history as a predominantly Chinese settlement (adjacent to Chinatown’s central business district) as reasoning behind preserving it. In contrast, the Monster Home controversy vilified recent immigrants and developers from Hong Kong, who were said to have “disrupted” the aesthetic unity of Shaughnessy and Kerrisdale, two historically white, upper-class neighbourhoods. As Madokoro suggests, “Heritage preservation had been welcomed in Chinatown, particularly since 1971 when the City designated the area a historic district. Not so by new Chinese migrants in Kerrisdale and Shaughnessy who were seeking freedom to invest and prosper” (21). See Laura Madokoro, “Chinatown and Monster Homes: The Splintered Chinese Diaspora in Vancouver,” Urban History Review 39.2 (Spring 2011): 11-24.
Tam lays bare complexities in the production and design of spaces that have been made through (and have equally had a hand in reproducing) material histories coded by art historical and state-sanctioned racism. Her installations critically stage the ways in which sites inhabited by immigrant communities produce meaning—not solely through form, but through narrative and performance—and she retools these sites as living documents attesting to how diasporic cultures continue to change over time. Emphasizing embodied dwelling, Tam heeds Michel de Certeau’s argument that the everyday practice of space affects the production of historical knowledge. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), the French philosopher traces an invisible, poetic geography counteracting knowledges of space constructed via maps and development plans. Distinguishing spatial strategies from spatial tactics, he complicates the notion that “place” (*lieu*) is an ordered contextualization of abstract “space” (*espace*), instead asserting that spaces are made meaningful through embodied use.\(^{130}\) Whereas spatial strategies generate hierarchical relations between designers and users, spatial tactics “[belong] to the other”.\(^{131}\) Strategies such as immigration laws, zoning bylaws, and the designation of heritage sites further constitute what Henri Lefebvre refers to as “representations of space,” or the codification of space that perpetuates a hegemonic understanding of its social function.\(^{132}\) Spatial strategies formulate complex power dynamics. Meanwhile, spatial tactics such as cooking, reading, and decorating, transform existing spaces marked by strategic power. Temporal configurations of space reveal a site response at work: the various processes of


\(^{131}\) De Certeau, xix.

material, social, and aesthetic assemblage that evidence how worlds are always in the midst of becoming. A look to experiential formations undermines the presupposed inscrutability of immigrant spaces, moving beyond treating Chinese art and identity “as a matter of external imposition”\textsuperscript{133} to illustrate instead how such spaces construct vibrant art histories.

For instance, in \textit{Terra dos Chînes Curio Shop} (2012-2016), Tam stages the experiential formation of commercial spaces located at the centre of life in early Chinatown settlements: shops in which immigrant families purchased household objects (such as serving dishes, bowls, and tea sets) and foodstuffs, read community notices and news from their hometowns, and caught up with their neighbours. However, rather than selling products, Tam’s shop invites visitors to reflect upon recognizable forms of art. Like many of Tam’s installations, \textit{Terra dos Chînes Curio Shop} reinterprets an everyday site of diasporic culture as a space of public critique, highlighting, as Lily Cho suggests, cross-cultural interactions—between Chinese audiences and non-Chinese audiences, between different members within the local Chinese Canadian community—as well as “the powerful presence of the old diaspora within [spaces] of the new.”\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Terra dos Chînes Curio Shop} addresses different kinds of viewing audiences: those for whom an object like a blue and white porcelain plate signals the exotification and commoditization of Chinese visual culture through the circulation of export trade objects, and those who locate within these objects the familiar sights and scents of dinners with family and friends, interwoven with efforts to make home in a hostile environment. The

\textsuperscript{133} Wing Chung Ng, \textit{The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power} (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), 6.
\textsuperscript{134} Lily Cho, \textit{Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), 112.
“Chineseness” of these objects is always being questioned, and this questioning, Cho argues, is productive for undermining the view that culture in diaspora can be represented as stemming from a single origin.135

Temporarily occupying a contemporary art gallery—a public space within a public space—Tam’s shop offers a convincing translation of the materials and visuals one would expect to find in a Chinatown shop (fig. 1.3). While many of the objects staged in Terra dos Chînes Curio Shop are sourced from antique shops and estate sales, a large number are handmade by the artist, designed to mimic the aesthetics of objects coded as “Chinese,” such as a Ming dynasty porcelain moon flask (made with papier-mâché and blue and white acrylic paint), silverware produced for China’s export trade (made with aluminum foil), and jade bi discs (made with soap). The shop’s layout—with objects perceived as more expensive placed under glass or on higher shelves, and less valuable objects located in high traffic areas—is similar to those found in existing Chinatown shops, which developed over time in response to economic demand for products from China.136 Meanwhile, the assortment of antiques and “fake” handmade wares evoke familiarity in their design but also invite scrutiny, asking viewers to question the materiality and historicity of objects affiliated with a racially defined community. The handmade objects, as Tam suggests, are historical documents in their own right,

135 Cho, Eating Chinese, 114.
136 Sojin Kim’s analysis of two neighbouring shops in Los Angeles’s Chinatown traces how the central organizing principle of Chinatown stores changed over time in response to economic demands for Chinese goods. Stores are typically arranged with objects occupying different visual registers according to their cultural or economic value. Expensive artworks and antiques are more likely to be kept under glass or on higher shelves around the periphery of the space, while mass-produced trinkets are displayed on tables or shelves at the front. As Kim argues, these display tactics reflect the multiple ways in which storeowners attempted to sell themselves to both Chinese and non-Chinese audiences. See Sojin Kim, “‘Curiously Familiar’: Art and Curio Stores in Los Angeles Chinatown,” Western Folklore 52, no. 2 (Spring 1999): 131-147.
addressing longer traditions of aesthetic imitation. For example, Tam’s red tray made from papier-mâché (featured in a number of her installation works) mimics an artistic practice that originated in the fifth century BCE in China (fig. 1.5). Lacquerwares are objects made of wood or metal covered with a hard, shiny red or black coating (lacquer) that is then carved or decorated with pictorial engravings filled in with gold. In her own version, Tam reproduces the process of drying, painting, and carving lacquer using Chinese-language newspapers, paint, and gold marker to simulate the shape, colour, and decorative motifs of the “real” thing. The decoration of Tam’s tray derives in part from fantastical pastoral scenes featured prominently in export porcelain and their chinoiserie counterparts, undermining both the typical animal and floral motifs found in Chinese lacquerware and the idyllic paradise constructed within the design language of

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137 Tam, interview with the author, 24 October, 2016.
chinoiserie. Here, the idyllic scene of a secluded mountain village is disrupted by the appearance of geungsi 僵尸 (jiāngshī in Mandarin)—vampiric creatures donning styles of dress popularized during the Qing dynasty—and by the appearance of modern technologies, such as a satellite dish attached to the roof of a shop in the middleground and a row of transmission stations receding into the background. In producing her own objects, Tam is not interested in highlighting the differences between “authentic” and “inauthentic” cultural forms, though she plays on the viewer’s desire for authenticity. Her red lacquer tray, like the rest of her handmade objects, derives meaning from its tactical re-scripting of the strategic codes and markers of Chinese visual and material culture, which as Rujivacharakul suggests, is “multivalent”—always emerging and changing according to how and where these visuals and materials are interpreted. Her reinvented art objects bring the viewer closer to the processes through which artworks are made and acquire meaning and illustrate how artmaking in diaspora forms parallel histories.

Through her emphasis on the tactical and experiential functions of objects—their visual and material properties and their relationships to each other in space—Tam follows de Certeau’s poetic interpolation of space, imbuing her installations with the stories, dreams, and histories of members of diaspora who have committed to memory the

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138 Stacey Sloboda characterizes chinoiserie as a particular “design language” deeply enmeshed within ideological, historical, and aesthetic ideas about Chinese and East Asian art and design. As Sloboda argues, “To uncritically view chinoiserie as an anodyne vision of an Orientalist Neverland is to ignore the social, political, and aesthetic forces that both informed, and were informed, by the style” (8). Though chinoiserie is often thought of as an indulgent imitation; a bourgeois craze that feverishly entered the homes of the European and North American elite, Sloboda and other scholars of material cultures situate it as a kind of political aesthetic that in translating, amalgamating, and approximating Chinese art and aesthetics, ultimately crafted Western perceptions of Chinese culture. See Stacey Sloboda, *Chinoiserie: Commerce and Critical Ornament in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), 139 Rujivacharakul, 15.
experience of a Chinatown restaurant or housewares shop.\textsuperscript{140} She requires her viewers to tap into their haptic senses, for in moving through her installations, viewers interact with objects and how they are arranged: bending one’s head beneath a paper lantern, kneeling to view porcelain miniatures displayed on a low shelf, and looking up at hanging scroll paintings unfurled and fastened to the wall. The focus on objects, how they are made and how they are displayed, therefore enables the artist to investigate how experiential knowledge complicates epistemologies of art history. Emphasizing materiality, performativity, and the situatedness of the objects—challenging how they become decontextualized—Tam reproduces Chinese art objects and stages Chinatown spaces not solely with a goal to excavate their histories and diasporic meanings. Rather, she inscribes viewers into immigrant spaces as a way to reshape them as important sites of Asian Canadian art history.

**Worldmaking in a Diasporic Artist’s Studio**

Like a Chinatown housewares shop, Lee Nam’s studio is at once racially coded and habitually lived. However, in contrast to the public-facing space of the shop, the studio houses private habits and encounters that are then made public through the exhibition of Lee’s artistic labour. The studio’s interior design reflects the ability of the artist to create and inhabit visual and material worlds, exchanging ideas with likeminded colleagues and confidants granted permission to enter. By situating the private space of the artist’s studio in the public space of the art gallery, Tam illustrates how the publicness of an immigrant

\textsuperscript{140} Tam, interview with the author, 24 October, 2016. Tam pinpoints her experience growing up in her parents’ Chinese restaurant in Montreal as integral to her interest in examining immigrant spaces as sites of Asian Canadian art history. Her works are therefore informed by this deep knowledge about these kinds of spaces and their design.
space is often mediated. Viewers’ actions are dependent on whether or not they are already familiar with this space and with the objects on view. As Tam suggests, in the context of an immersive, site-responsive installation, the formerly “solitary space of the studio is expanded and becomes socialized through the viewer’s engagement with [its] material substance.” Socializing the studio enables Tam to push her viewers to engage with Lee’s practice and question how artworks become historical knowledge. Occupying the gallery as a temporary renter, a position that makes possible tactics of dwelling and manipulating, the installation revises the histories contained within the gallery’s permanent collection by drawing attention Lee’s presence not through his extant works (which have not survived) but through his material surroundings, which—together with the viewer’s haptic senses—emphasizes his dwelling in time.

Tam states that reading Emily Carr’s journal, *Hundreds and Thousands* (1965) sparked her interest in the spatial and material production of Lee’s studio, prompting her to think about how the two artists could have connected with each other through their works. Published 20 years after the artist’s death, *Hundreds and Thousands* chronicles a pivotal moment in Carr’s career, one in which she was slowly redefining her practice. The book begins with Carr recounting her successful trip to Ontario and Quebec in 1927, where she met several key figures in Eastern Canada’s modernist art centres, including the Toronto-based Group of Seven. Carr developed a deep friendship, in particular, with Lawren Harris. Her ongoing exchange with Harris proved especially fruitful for her later

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142 Karen Tam, “Flying Cormorant Studio, or the Re-imagining of a Migrant Artist’s Studio” (presentation, Association of Art Historians Annual Conference, University of East Anglia, Norwich, UK, 9-11 April, 2015).
143 De Certeau, xiii.
interest in establishing a stylistic language that could convey the regional specificity of the west coast. Meeting with Harris in his Toronto studio, Carr remarked that one of the things she appreciated about the artist was his ability to produce “a wonderful feeling of space,” offering the following description of one of his iconic mountain landscapes:

He was working on a big canvas - rock forms in deep purples with three large rocks in the middle distance. The sky was wonderful - swirly ripples with existing rhythms running through them. The right corner was in brilliant light and from under the clouds shafts of strong sun pierced down on the rocks in straight wide beams that made a glowing pool of pure light on the water that lay flat and still. Behind, was a deep, rich blue distance. To the right the shafts of light turned it paler green-blue. On the other side a blinging blue played richly with the purple rocks. Under the left side of the rippling, swirling grey cloud forms the water lay flat in blue-grey wonderfulness.145

Terms such as “rhythms” and “space” appear frequently in Carr’s writings at this time as she started to create a new vocabulary for describing her approach to her own subject matter: Vancouver Island’s rugged, windswept coastlines, mountains, and red cedar forests. Her contact with Harris had already started to impact her ideas about art when Carr befriended Lee Nam, and she began shifting her focus to producing more gestural, abstract forms.

Carr wrote about Lee Nam frequently between 1932 and 1935, though it is not clear exactly when the two artists met nor when or if they lost contact with one another. In her memoir The House of All Sorts (1944), which recounts her experiences as a landlady, Carr recalls what may have been their first meeting. Upon learning about the art exhibition for “ordinary people” Carr was organizing in her home, Lee appeared at her doorstep “carrying a roll of paintings […] beautiful watercolours done in [a Chinese]

145 Carr, Hundreds and Thousands, 38.
style.” Carr agreed to let him show his work in her exhibition in place of a flower painter who “[in] finding that the show was not to be sponsored by the Arts and Crafts Society, did not show.” Whereas in *The House of All Sorts*, Lee is presented as a young artist acting through his own agency and desire to gain wider exposure for his work, in *Hundreds and Thousands*, Lee is presented to the reader as someone in need of caregiving, as Carr frequently confesses that she wishes to help him jump-start his painting career. Carr often alludes to the artist’s cultural and racial difference by focusing on the space he occupies. Her observations echo the ways in which Chinese diasporas were made through spatial strategies that both produced and reinforced cultural and racial hierarchies. Along with her description of his “room full of paintings”, Carr makes a point to detail Lee’s behaviour in his studio, relaying how he arranged his space and how this arrangement, to her, reflected aspects of his character and his work. For example, in an entry dated to December 30, 1934, Carr describes witnessing Lee’s skills as an organist, commenting with focused attention on the decorative and material objects surrounding him:

I wandered back through Chinatown and saw Lee Nam seated at his organ among all his pictures. He was playing so vigorously he did not hear before many knockings, and gave me a fine welcome. I asked him to play and he did, putting aside his bashfulness and throwing himself into his Chinese music. I liked it. It was very like their pictures, very akin. […] There is something sweet and sincere in Lee Nam, a striving for higher and lovely things. Something affecting about the neat surroundings, all decent and in order, his Chinese books and pictures, a flower or two and a bowl of goldfish, the photo of a Chinese girl, her hair in a modern fluff over one eye, in a red plush frame. On top of the organ his Chinese calendar and various Chinese photos, his Chinese arithmetic log.

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146 Carr, *The House of All Sorts*, 163. Carr organized many of these kinds of exhibitions in her home.
147 Carr, *The House of All Sorts*, 163.
It is important to note how often the term “Chinese” appears in this passage. As Moray explains, Carr’s frequent reference to Lee’s “Chineseness”—often emphasizing his material possessions, his stature, and his mannerisms—is demonstrative of the artist’s understanding of the constraints placed upon their friendship. Appropriately, Carr highlights these constraints in a statement that follows her description of Lee playing the organ. She comments, “We don’t understand our very closest [relations], and half our trouble comes from thinking we do and reading them through our own particular coloured glasses.”

The above passage illustrates Carr’s attempt to see beyond her immediate experience and knowledge base as well as beyond the myriad ways in which her own subjectivity as a white settler was designated against Chinese otherness. Carr’s discussion of the objects in Lee’s studio indicates that the two may have spent some time in this space discussing their overlapping artistic objectives. Though Carr does not offer the same lucid analysis of Lee’s work as she does for Harris’s paintings, her suggestion that the birds in Lee’s paintings “live” and her remark that the artist was conscious of “spirit” might refer to qiyun shengdong 气运生动, a concept in the practice of Chinese painting concerned with expressing the “breath,” “vitality,” or “spirit resonance” of a painting’s subject matter. Spirit resonance and related concepts reflective of the social and aesthetic appreciation of ink-based art are integral to longstanding efforts to evaluate, codify, and hierarchize paintings produced by elite amateur artists in Chinese society. These concepts are not associated with a particular style of ink painting. Rather, they address the efficacy of the artist’s expression: especially, whether the artist was able to convey both the outer

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149 Moray, 33.
150 Carr, Hundreds and Thousands, 226-227.
appearance of the subject matter and its inner energy or life force. Perhaps reflective of a conversation between the two artists, Carr’s commentary hints at a deeper interest she and Lee may have shared in how to convey ideas and qualities difficult to express in visual form.\footnote{The untitled ink painting depicting four chickens (see figure 1.1) is perhaps also illustrative of the connection between the two artists. Tam contends that it is possible this painting was produced by Carr with the guidance of Lee. A few anomalous features suggest this possibility. The first is that there is no seal, which is a standard feature in Chinese paintings. Seals are small red impressions that feature stylized script, often indicating the name of the artist or owner of the work. They are important elements for tracing the work’s history. The second anomaly is the number of birds depicted. While chickens themselves are auspicious symbols, the number four is an unlucky number because Mandarin pronunciation of the character for “four” (四, sì) is similar to the pronunciation of the character for “death” (死, sǐ). The number four, in this sense, undermines the allegorical message of prosperity and good fortune signified by the chickens.} Her writings from this time confirm that she was striving to express the “breath and fluidity of life” in her work. Consider this passage from July 25, 1933:

I want my things to rock and sway with the breath and fluids of life, but there they sit, weak and still, just paint without vitality, without reality, showing that I myself have not swayed and rocked with experiencing when I confronted them. It was but their outer shell; I did not bore into them, reach for their vitals, commune with their God in them. Eye and ear were dull and un receptive to anything beneath the skin.\footnote{Carr, \textit{Hundreds and Thousands}, 75. Notably, Carr’s interest in expressing “spirit” in her works occurred at the same time that she recommitted herself to her Christian beliefs—hence the frequent references to God in her writings about art and spirit. Lora Senechal Carney writes about Carr’s reconciliation of her art practice with her religious beliefs. See Lora Senechal Carney, \textit{Canadian Painters in a Modern World, 1925-1955} (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2017).}

Through conversation and extrapolation on the meaning of Lee’s cultural expressions, Carr participated in the tactical production of Lee’s space, looking to and reading objects to make sense of the social and aesthetic environment in which Lee produced his work. She is simultaneously a cultural outsider, an interloper who reads this space through her limited knowledge about Chinese art, and a close confidant who shares Lee’s interest in the life-giving potential of art. Lee’s music, books, paintings, flowers, and photographs constitute forms of address that “[generate] a different pattern of emotions and
disruptions, of disagreements and agreements.”

Objects illustrate not only the complexities of formulating Chinese diasporic culture, but also the materials of dissent and difference involved in such entangled processes of worldmaking, for despite lacking more in-depth knowledge of Chinese art practices, Carr’s exchanges with Lee in his studio evidence moments of co-creation. Bruno Latour argues that it is therefore necessary to think of objects as “matters of concern” rather than “matters of fact” and to re-focus different forms of relation-making beyond what objects represent. Applying Heidegger’s evocation of the German term Ding. (“thing”), Latour argues that objects gather around themselves “a different assembly of relevant parties,” triggering “new occasions to passionately differ and dispute.”

Figure 1.6: Karen Tam, *Flying Cormorant Studio (For Lee Nam)*, 2017. Detail: piano, fishbowl, photos, framed ink paintings by Lui Luk Chun 呂陸川, and hanging scrolls by Huang Junbi 黃君璧 (left) and Gao Jianfu 高劍父 (right). Courtesy of the artist.

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154 Latour, 9-11.
common narrative that Carr’s career blossomed solely as the result of her contact with Harris and other members of the Group of Seven. Reconstructing the objects in Lee’s studio, Tam posits the historical and material significance of this encounter between Carr and Lee and speculates on how they could engage with each other within the confines of the settler society they inhabited.

Tam employs Carr’s description of Lee’s studio as a starting point for her own reimagining of this space. She assembles objects and furniture that facilitate social and aesthetic engagements with epistemologies of art-making in China, suggesting that they also make and mark art histories in diaspora. One corner of the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria closely resembles the scene Carr describes in the passage cited above (fig. 1.6). It features an upright piano (in lieu of Lee’s organ), a fishbowl, framed ink paintings, and hanging scrolls by ink painters Huang Junbi 黄君璧 and Gao Jianfu 高剑父 on loan from the gallery’s collection of modern Chinese paintings.155 Beyond the visual and material signifiers in the installation, two musical arrangements reference Lee’s abilities as an organist, creating an aural space that echoes the one in Carr’s description. The first piece, “Colourful Clouds Chasing the Moon” 彩云追月, is a

155 Though Lee Nam’s exact age remains unknown, it is likely that Huang Junbi and Gao Jianfu were his contemporaries and thus their backgrounds parallel the kind of art education Lee could have received. Moreover, Huang and Gao both hail from a similar regional context as Lee. Huang (1898-1991) was an ink painter from Nanhai, Guangdong. He studied Chinese painting in Guangzhou and Western painting in Japan. During the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937-1945), he taught at the National Central University in Chongqing. He fled to Taiwan in 1949, where he became head of the Fine Arts Department of the National Taiwan Normal University. Born in Guangzhou, Gao (1879-1951), along with his brother Gao Qifeng 高奇峰 and Chen Shuren 陈树人 were known for their efforts to modernize Chinese painting. In 1907, Gao and his brother travelled to Tokyo, where they studied modern Japanese-style painting (nihonga). Gao’s study of nihonga impressed upon him that, rather than simply abandoning traditional Chinese painting practices, a synthesis of vernacular and foreign art techniques was necessary for establishing a recognizable modern style of art. Gao believed that the naturalism of foreign art styles and the expressive quality of ink painting should be combined, that subject matter should be updated to reflect issues of the present, and that spirit resonance must be maintained.
popular orchestral piece by a contemporary of Lee Nam—Ren Guang 任光, a composer who studied Western music while living in Paris. The second piece, “Kangding Love Song” 康定情歌 is a Sichuan folk song. Additional arrangements of objects included in the installation are inspired by reconstructions of the shu fang 書房 (study rooms) of scholar-officials serving the Qing government during the eighteenth century (fig. 1.7), as well as from photographs documenting the studios of Lee’s contemporaries, in particular, the Beijing-based studio of ink painter Qi Baishi 齊白石 (1865-1957). Lee’s desk, which is equipped with tools used in Chinese ink painting and calligraphy, including: brushes, ink, an inkstone, and paper (fig. 1.8), materializes his use of space, situating Lee’s art practice within multiple epistemologies of literati art. Like Tam’s handmade porcelain vases and lacquerware, these objects have been constructed as cultural signifiers, used in the production of artworks deemed inscrutable to Western viewers. An object like an inkstone, for example, was once virtually unknown to the Western world despite its ubiquity in East Asia. Regarded as objects of art, as tokens of friendship and diplomatic exchange, as symbols of cultural civility, and as utilitarian tools used in the production of paintings and letters, inkstones signify interconnected social and material worlds. In Lee’s reconstructed studio, the inkstone, along with his other

157 Shu fang were spaces for reading, writing, and painting. They were typically attached to gardens designed in a manner that would encourage the scholar-official to strive toward an ideal of reclusiveness, one shaped simultaneously through a Confucian social framework emphasizing formalized education, morality, and bureaucratic service, and through a Daoist philosophical perspective on human nature, thought, and intention. The construction of the scholar’s aesthetic environment, including windows with carefully framed views of the garden, minimally ornamented furniture, scholar’s rocks, books, scrolls, and antiques—which are all items meant for contemplation—reflects his taste and intellect.
158 For examination of the social and material worlds constituted by inkstones, see Dorothy Ko, The Social Life of Inkstones: Artisans and Scholars in Early Qing China (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2017).
Figure 1.7: *The Studio of Gratifying Discourse*, 1797. Wood, ceramic tile stone, lacquer, tai-hu rocks, 548.64 x 574.04 x 1341.12 cm. Minneapolis Institute of Art.

Figure 1.8: Karen Tam, *Flying Cormorant Studio (For Lee Nam)*, 2017. Detail: desk, brushes, ink, an inkstone, and xuan (rice) paper, ceramic vases, bowls, and tea pot, and a mountain landscape painting by Lui Luk Chun 呂陸川. Courtesy of the artist.
painting tools, marks the artist’s habit and ritual—his use of the strategic space of Victoria’s Chinatown—as well as his performance of diasporic identity. Visitors to Tam’s installation can picture Lee tending to this space daily: sitting at his desk with an unrolled sheet of paper, grinding his ink, dipping his brush, and producing pictures from his mind.

Through her selection of objects and careful arrangement of furniture, Tam crafts a complex portrait of Lee Nam, suggesting that he, like his contemporaries in China, inherited the ideological construction of the literati artist. The literati are highly idealized within the history of art in China, in part due to the role they played in shaping and elevating painting and calligraphy as scholarly, rather than commercial, pursuits. As learned bureaucrats (scholar-officials), the literati were amateur artists with immense social and political capital. Their status as arbitrators of taste and enthusiasts of particular forms of ink-based art were not unlike the positions taken up by the wealthy, privileged amateur artists in Victoria who excluded Lee from their own circles. Chinese literati further share with Lee’s modern Canadian counterparts the notion that painting, as an informed pastime, was the mark of a dedicated and civilized life. However, rather than signalling genteelessness, these concepts of amateurism stem from a belief that scholar-officials practiced art at a level above professional expertise. Free from motives of material gain, the amateur scholar-official practiced painting with intuition or, at minimum, on the basis of Confucian morality. James Cahill notes that the exaltation of amateurism in China was “a late move in the centuries-long campaign to legitimize painting as an upper-class cultural pursuit, not just an artisan’s craft.”159 In Canada, terms of professionalization have always been dependent on time and place as well as the

identity of the artist. In the early twentieth century, the concept of the professional artist in Canada was designated through the robust restructuring of the Canadian art world. Newly founded art academies defined aesthetic standards, created art markets, regulated the training of artists, and controlled admittance of those seeking membership. In contrast, the idealization of amateurism in China initially defined the formation of a field that was slowly expanded as commercial artists gained more social and cultural capital. The abolition of the bureaucratic service exam in 1905 in many respects brought about the end of the political influence of literati art, as an education in the arts was democratized over time through the impact of anti-imperial philosophy on art histories and curricula.

Restaging how one might approach specific objects in Lee’s Chinatown studio, Tam transforms this rented space into a dynamic site of entanglement between past and present forms of art. Though she reframes Lee’s historical significance in relation to the exalted status of amateur scholar-official artist, Tam does not claim that Lee approached ink painting as a traditionalist, nor does she apply an essentialist reading to his practice. Rather, by evoking literati art and material culture, Tam “interrogates how, through different artistic media […] the artist as well as the [viewer] are situated in history in specific ways.” This evocation further works to elevate Lee’s status as an immigrant artist in a hostile, white settler society where he was unable to follow the expected paths towards professionalization in his particular time and place. I will analyze a similar effort to elevate histories of immigration and the role of diaspora in national and global art.

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160 Huneault, 9-10.
histories in Howie Tsui’s installation, *Retainers of Anarchy* (2017), examined in Chapter 2. Like Tam, Tsui plays with traditional painting forms and narrative formats coded as “Chinese” to link historical and contemporary artists in diaspora. However, Tsui evokes this inherited history as a form of diasporic critique, challenging the relevancy of literati ideals to the political situation of contemporary Hong Kong and its own dispersed communities.

By making Lee’s space, Tam understands the artist’s modernity in conversation with evolving concepts of tradition, suggesting that, through his daily practice, he participated in the creative reinvention and interpretation of ink painting. Lee shares with an artist like Qi Baishi the ability to make worlds, pursuing ink painting at a time when artists, writers, and scholars in China were not only rethinking social, political, and cultural articulations through their engagement with Western modernisms, but also advancing existing vernacular forms and techniques. As its own form of aesthetic address, the installation questions what it means to evoke literati ideals in diaspora and reveals the ways in which an artist like Tam, well-versed in the history of art in China, can herself engage with these concepts of art in a transcultural contemporary moment.

**The Artist as Curator**

The practice of curation informs Tam’s approach to re-visioning immigrant spaces and their art histories. With *Flying Cormorant Studio*, Tam takes on the role of an artist-curator, a position that enables her to transgress the disciplinary boundaries of the gallery’s collection in order to provoke an historiographic reading of the artworks selected to occupy this space. Celina Jeffery posits the motivations behind artists taking up curating as creative praxis, suggesting that curating enables more direct authorial
control of their works in the public sphere as well as a way to engage directly with
different communities.162 This sense of engagement ties the artist-curator to a
contemporary genealogy of institutional critique. Terry Smith’s theoretical consideration
of this position traces these ties from roughly the 1960s, defining this position in broad
terms to encompass projects that rearticulated modes of display as works of art (such as
Marcel Broodthaers’s *Musée d’Art Moderne, Departement des Aigles*, 1971 and Joseph
Kosuth’s *The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable*, 1990), the
production of “alternative museums” (such as New York’s New Museum, which was
founded to challenge conventional structures of museums as institutions with imperial
legacies) and “artist’s museums” (such as Claes Oldenburg’s Mouse Museum, 1965-
1977) and initiatives inside the museum that involve inviting artists to re-curate the
collections (such as MoMA’s “Artist Choice” series in the 1980s). As Smith suggests,
projects that blur the lines between curator and artist, artwork and display, illustrate a
shift from “critical curating” to the “curating of critique,” which continues to inform
contemporary exhibition practices both within the museum and outside it.163

Tam’s Lee Nam project has changed considerably from its first iteration in 2014
to its most recent iteration in 2022 due to the artist’s ongoing research. It questions how
curating transforms perceptions of art and critique. *Flying Cormorant Studio* functions
“simultaneously [as] an exhibition entirely of works by other artists and an exhibition of
[the artist’s] own work, while at the same time an installation artwork and a reinstallation

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162 Jeffery, 12.
of (part of) a museum,” staging how knowledges are produced each time artworks are paired together. Tam employs curating as a way to rescript the world-making significance of immigrant space, addressing not only collecting practices and exhibition-making, but also how the reception of artistic media impacts modes of writing art’s histories. Birgit Hopfener examines the reception of artistic media in her research on contemporary Chinese artist Qiu Zhijie 邱志杰. In his work, Qiu studies artistic mediums and modes of history writing in China as material and discursive constructions, critiquing the essentialization of both Chinese art “traditions” and histories of Western modernism. His works make use of strategies emphasizing inscrutability and illegibility—distorting what knowledges of Chinese art we hold onto—while also “addressing and engaging the viewer as a participant [in the work] by informing him about the conditions and practices of the artwork’s making.” In one piece, Copying the Preface of the Gathering in the Orchid Pavilion a Thousand Times (1990-1997), Qiu documented his seven-year-long habitual practice of copying calligraphy by the master Wang Xizhi 王羲之 (active during the 4th century CE), using the same piece of paper until individual characters were no longer legible and the paper resembled a black monochrome. This particular work re-evaluates the ways in which calligraphy, as a form of artistic media and as a mode of writing, has been understood as representative of a past in need of salvage. Yet, Qiu is not interested in salvage. Instead, he is interested in forging new cultural meaning between systems of thought—the central premise of his concept of “total art.” As Hopfener argues, in “[critiquing] dominant forms of historiography and their production of coherent

164 Smith, Thinking Contemporary Curating, 114.
165 Hopfener, 42.
explanatory meanings as socially and culturally discursive constructs” Qiu is able to “claim the right to be a historicizing subject.” He does not regard practices such as calligraphy as evidence of an authentic historical past in need of preservation, but as dynamic forms that entangle the self (both the artistic self and the viewing self) in specific temporal, spatial, and material contexts. Similar to Qiu, Tam draws her viewer in through their desire to salvage the past, for the idea of resurrecting an artist lost to time is indeed enticing. However, she does not mean for her reconstructed studio to do this kind of salvaging work. Rather, the studio deconstructs power structures and the limitations to study art’s histories presented by efforts to simply correct the historical record via inclusion or insertion.

Consider, for example, Tam’s grouping of a painting by Emily Carr with paintings by Qi Baishi and Tam Yuen Yin Law (Tam’s mother) in the exhibition at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria (fig. 1.9). The paintings establish an historical fact about Lee as well as to provoke a relational rethinking of art that engages with the socially constructed meaning of its material production. The works by Carr and Qi allude to Lee’s interest in collecting and producing artworks in a variety of styles and media—a fact reinforced by Carr who writes that, along with the “Chinese pictures” furnishing the walls of his studio, she gave Lee one of her own paintings as a gift for Lunar New Year in 1934. In her writings, Carr does not make it clear whether all of the paintings in Lee’s studio were completed by him or whether they were the works of his contemporaries. This ambiguity enables Tam to not only imagine what the early twentieth-century studio of a diasporic artist may have looked like but to also provoke a rethinking of the connections and artistic

166 Hopfener, 42.
167 Carr, Hundreds and Thousands, 139.
resonances made possible within this space of encounter. Art historian Reiko Tomii theorizes “connections” and “resonances” as part of her methodological toolkit for examining contemporaneous locally-situated art histories. Connections constitute more direct encounters between artists and their works, encompassing face-to-face interactions (like Emily Carr’s conversations with Lee Nam) or knowledge of one another (via exhibitions, publications, auctions, etc.). Resonances, in contrast, constitute indirect links usually felt retroactively, such as overlapping formal and conceptual concerns between artists divided by cultural, linguistic, geographic, or political barriers. As Tomii suggests, connections and resonances enable the study of art via attention to experiential structures of feeling, by measuring and understanding “both ‘facts’ and ‘perceptions/lived

experiences’ of history.” Tam encourages her viewer to compare the paintings by Carr and Qi as a way to highlight how these artists worked contemporaneously while being informed by different art-historical traditions and by using different media. Tam Yuen Yin Law’s painting, completed in 2012, establishes a trajectory of diasporic ink painting in relation to the works of Qi and Carr, as Tam underscores ink painting as a mode of expression tied simultaneously to contemporary and historical constructions of art, modernity, and the nation state. In our conversation about Flying Cormorant Studio, Tam explained that she hung her mother’s painting next to Qi’s because her mother deeply admired his work. Tam Yuen Lin Law’s affinity for Qi’s work sparked her interest in attending lessons in ink painting and calligraphy from Lui Luk Chun, a Montreal-based ink painter and teacher (and Tam’s collaborator for this installation, discussed later in this chapter). Connections based on kinships and affinities are resonances worth examining in Canadian art history because they unravel the intense focus on painting as a nation-building practice, emphasizing many trajectories and motivations in the production of art. Such resonances also expose Tam’s own familial history of diaspora, artistic production, and experiences of marginalization as a racialized person in Canada. By placing these works in proximity, Tam requires her viewers to engage with all of the worldly aspects of ink painting, including its contextual frameworks informed by the geopolitics of art history and settler colonialism, and the contacts and networks formed between Chinese and non-Chinese publics.

Perhaps one of the most prolific artists in the history of modern art in China, Qi Baishi is highly regarded for his enigmatic paintings of humble subject matter, such as

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169 Tomii, 14.
170 Tam, interview with the author, 24 July, 2018.
The artist preferred bold spontaneous brushwork and used striking colour accents. His painting of chrysanthemums is demonstrative of how he approached his subject matter at a time when ink painting was being re-articulated as a modern art practice (fig. 1.10). The painting consists of two chrysanthemums rendered with black ink and colour. The artist uses a blue-green wash to form the leaves and stems of both plants and renders the flowers in yellow and red. Blooming in late autumn, chrysanthemums are symbolic in Chinese painting as signs of fortitude and longevity. Qi conveys the heartiness that this flower evokes through his brushwork. Both the colour wash and the black ink used to detail the flowers are applied with varying dark and light strokes, helping convey individual leaves and petals. Known for his vertical compositions, the artist pairs the height of the red chrysanthemum on the right—standing tall against the blank background—with his commentary on the left side of the page, written in cursive script. The use of ink to render the characters (which start out taller and more legible and then become smaller and harder to read—evidence of the artist’s desire to convey spontaneity as he runs out of space to record his thoughts as they sprang from his mind) balances the more careful work to detail the flowers.

Though retaining many of the elements commonly found in the works of elite gentleman amateur artists—chrysanthemums, in particular, were a favourite subject matter among scholar-officials—Qi’s painting exemplifies radical shifts in the social functions of ink painting taking shape in modern China. Despite the fact that Qi was a self-taught painter, his humble background would have historically precluded him from participating in the same elite circles as his
Figure 1.10: Qi Baishi 齊白石, *Chrysanthemums*, 20th century. Hanging scroll: ink and watercolour on paper, 106.6 x 37 cm. Gift of Brian McElney, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC.

Figure 1.11: Emily Carr, *Trees*, c. 1932. Oil on paper, 88.8 x 58.4 cm. Gift of Donald and Nadine Lawson, Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC.
predecessors. A more robust and commercialized art market completely altered the ways in which artworks in China were created, providing opportunities for artists like Qi to sell their works to new classes of patrons. The publication of painting manuals that instructed artists on a variety of techniques and brush methods further encouraged a more diverse cultural field in which painters could work concurrently in more than one style. Qi was revered for his ability to paint in a range of different methods, most notably in the \textit{xieyi} \(\text{寫意}\), or “sketching thoughts” method. Artists deeply invested in understanding ink painting’s modernity promoted the summary and expressive qualities of \textit{xieyi}, desiring not a wholesale preservation of tradition, but rather to re-\textit{vision} \textit{xieyi} as an advanced approach to form.

The subject matter of Carr’s painting, \textit{Trees} (c. 1932) (fig. 1.11), is a cluster of trees on the edge of a forest connected to the sky and a rocky coastline. The trees are painted in hues of green, brown, blue, and black, with brushstrokes that appear drier in some places than in others. The brushstrokes used to render the waves crashing into the rocks are applied hastily, giving an impression of a choppy sea. Carr uses gestural forms to enhance the windswept look of the trees and the grass, evoking the kind of weather typical of Vancouver Island. While still working in methods derived from European painting traditions (in particular, the practice of \textit{plein air} painting), the manner in which Carr applies her medium enables her to translate intangible concepts about the landscape into visual form. In the early 1930s, Carr adopted a unique sketching medium: oil paint thinned with gasoline. Not only was this sketching medium economical, it further provided her a means to work more spontaneously and in direct contact with her subject matter. This method was particularly beneficial as the artist continued her long sojourns
into the wilderness on Vancouver Island where she spent days alone in her camper, sketching mountains and red cedars. Whereas Carr had previously used her *plein air* sketches as preparatory work for oil canvases completed in her studio, she soon began to view these works as complete paintings. Examining this shift in Carr’s practice, Moray argues that Lee Nam could have influenced Carr’s sketching method, which encouraged her to “develop a system of rhythmic brushwork in response to the landscape,” no longer rendering the land as a set of three-dimensional forms.\(^{171}\) Carr’s thinned oil paint takes on material qualities similar to ink, allowing her to, like Qi, produce summary forms. Her gestural brushwork echoes the marks made by Qi’s ink brush in his painting of chrysanthemums. In particular, the black strokes Carr makes to render the wind whipping through the trees and the grass are reminiscent of the dark ink strokes Qi uses to outline the chrysanthemum leaves and petals and to form his cursive script.

While these works differ significantly both in form and subject matter, their pairing in Lee Nam’s reconstructed studio brings them into relation by highlighting how both artists pursued art as a way to engage with a constantly shifting field of cultural modernity. For an artist like Carr, learning Chinese painting from Lee connected her with other North American artists and writers interested in East Asian aesthetics. As she began to reformulate her practice, Carr turned to a number of Western sources on principles in East Asian art and design that built from texts by Ernest Fenollosa and Arthur Wesley Dow, who read Japanese and Chinese art in particular “as exemplary in their subtle development of abstract and formal qualities.”\(^{172}\) Moray notes that while Carr likely did not have direct access to texts by Fenollosa and Dow, she did acquire Ralph Pearson’s

\(^{171}\) Moray, 41.
\(^{172}\) Moray, 38.
book, *How to See Modern Pictures* (1925), which built on aesthetic principles Dow had read in his study of Chinese art. Carr was also in contact with Seattle-based artist Mark Tobey, whose friendship with Shanghai-born sculptor, theorist, and educator Teng Baiye is well-documented as a critical exchange that impacted Tobey’s practice specifically and the development of abstract art in mid-century America more broadly.¹⁷³ Meanwhile, artists like Qi, working in response to ongoing debates about ink painting’s relevance in modern China, were also cognizant of Western theories on the abstract qualities of East Asian painting—in part due to the fact that the historiographic construction of Chinese art in the early twentieth century was deeply “intercultural.”¹⁷⁴ Writings by Qi’s contemporaries illustrate the complicated position of ink painting at this time. While some artists believed that the continued codification of brushwork severely limited creativity and expression, others argued that methods like *xieyi* could be seen as a point of contact between literati painting and avant-garde painting techniques deriving from Europe.¹⁷⁵ These points of contact became especially complex as many artists in China increasingly turned to painting *en plein air*, a move that prompted the embrace of new

¹⁷³ For discussion of Tobey’s connections to Teng, specifically Tobey’s study of Chinese calligraphy under Teng, see David Clarke, *Chinese Art and Its Encounter with the World: Negotiating Alterity in Art and Its Historical Interpretation* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2011) and Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and Scott Lawrimore, eds., *Mark Tobey / Teng Baiye – Seattle / Shanghai* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).

¹⁷⁴ Yu-Jen Liu, “Stealing Words, Transplanting Images: Stephen Bushell and the Intercultural Articulation of ‘Chinese Art’ in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Archives of Asian Art* 68, no. 2 (2018): 191-214. Liu argues that the construction of Chinese art in the early twentieth century was “intercultural” in the sense that scholars and cultural reformers in China, propelled by aspirations to modernize Chinese society, adopted a more taxonomical approach from Western scholars to categorize objects once seen as part of an everyday material culture into the new label *meishu* 美术 or “fine art.” Painting and calligraphy had been previously elevated above all other material and visual forms in a manner that more closely resembles this concept, in part through the continuous connoisseurship and collecting practices of the imperial court and literati.

ways of seeing through direct observation and the appropriation of linear perspective, as well as developing alternate methods to render a world by manipulating the brush in response.\textsuperscript{176}

By pairing Carr and Qi’s paintings, Tam sets into motion relations between objects “that have been traditionally pushed part by certain interests.”\textsuperscript{177} In this case, what Partha Mitter refers to as the “universal” project of art history, which keeps objects siloed within specific spatiotemporal contexts, upholding Western epistemologies of art and art historiography in the process.\textsuperscript{178} In the context of Canadian art history, Tam’s pairing of these works cares for the object worlds of immigrant spaces, rendering them as part of a continually evolving diasporic culture situated within and beyond the strategic spaces of the settler state. This pairing further elucidates the constructed differences between modern oil paintings and ink paintings. The latter have been conspicuously overlooked in studies of art in Canada because they did not directly relate to the practice of nation building. Ink painting has long been regarded by audiences outside China (and more broadly outside of East Asia) as a medium lacking development throughout its over three thousand-year history. The medium’s association with a stagnant notion of tradition results in large part from a totalizing category of modernism synonymous with Euro-North American art styles and how they developed over time. As Joan Kee points out, though a considerable proportion of contemporary artistic production in East and Southeast Asia as well as in diaspora involves the use of ink, ink paintings rarely figure into surveys and studies of modern and contemporary art unless they illustrate “potential

affiliations with conditions, subjects, and questions already reified as contemporary." Tam resists perpetuating ink painting’s inclusion within the canon based upon its affiliations with Western modernisms, emphasizing it, instead, as an artistic media that produces social intimacies, making sense of the world by expressing personality and the artist’s values. While Carr and Qi were never in direct contact with each other, Tam’s efforts to place their works in physical relation within the reconstructed space of Lee’s studio highlights the retrospective work of art history: that is, the work of mediation, of understanding embodied experiences and knowledges that inform the artist’s situation in space and time. Carr and Qi are connected because they were working at the same time, but at a distance. Challenging the constraints of the gallery’s collection and institutional methods of display, Tam’s curatorial gesture complicates the gallery’s imperial lineage and its system of categorization based on geography, style, and medium. The installation requires viewers to examine these geopolitics of art, offering an immigrant artist’s studio as a site in which to inhabit art history beyond its existing representational frameworks.

**Revisiting Collections of Asian Art in Canada**

The years in which Carr and Lee were in contact correspond with wider developments in the collection and display of art in Canada. *Flying Cormorant Studio* draws attention to how the process of collecting Asian art in Canada followed from contradictory patterns of discriminatory immigration policies and the profusion and influence of Asian visual and material cultures in North America. Concurrent with the construction of “Canadian art” was a burgeoning interest among institutions and private collectors alike in collecting and displaying non-Western antiquities, especially Chinese antiquities. At the turn of the

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twentieth century, Canadian museums like the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM, which opened to the public in 1914 as the Royal Ontario Museum of Archaeology) and the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA, established in 1860 as the Art Association of Montreal) turned attention to China to enact their founding strategies to establish Canada as a peer among modern democratic nations asserting their rights “to collect, display and impose aesthetic values on the rest of the world.”\textsuperscript{180} The collection, categorization, and display of Chinese art was part of a desire to reflect the inherent abilities of Canadian institutions to care for and preserve the world’s cultures and, in the process, educate their publics on the cultural and aesthetic experiences of the Other, rendering Canada a civilizing force in the world. This desire was echoed by prominent curators, collectors, and connoisseurs. In particular, Charles Currelly, an Egyptologist and the first curator of the ROM’s archaeology department, held a cosmopolitan view of the world and was deeply concerned with the museum’s role in the moral education of Canadian citizens. In his memoir, \textit{I Brought the Ages Home} (1956), Currelly traces the ROM’s development into “one of the world’s greatest collections” through his acquisitions, emphasizing the many ways in which “the strangeness of foreign art makes the world smaller” and positing that museums must highlight this strangeness “at a time when indifference to other cultures is not only morally wrong and aesthetically barren but politically dangerous.”\textsuperscript{181} Chinese artworks could specifically serve the function of “making the world smaller,” as Currelly suggests:

\begin{quote}
[because] Pacific trade might in future become as important as Atlantic trade, and as, moreover, it is unlikely that our people will ever become familiar with Chinese or Japanese literature, a comprehensive collection of
\end{quote}

the art of these two great countries would enable our people to grasp something of their greatness. At that time I had no idea how much of our civilization we owe to China, and in that year (1909), our knowledge of China was pathetically small.\textsuperscript{182}

For Currelly, because Canadians could not read Chinese literature, Chinese artworks could stand in for the nation. These objects would signal the museum’s modernity—its embrace of other cultures—and in the process promote the museum-going public’s tolerance for the (non-diasporic as well as diasporic) Other. In actuality, the collections of encyclopedic museums in Canada did not directly help overcome the prejudice and indifference their white settler audiences displayed towards diasporic Chinese communities. Popular anti-Chinese sentiment rose in the same years that Currelly and his colleagues were hastily collecting artifacts from China.

A look at the objects that make up Asian art collections in Canada provides insight into the kinds of aesthetic practices deemed worthy of the public’s attention and which objects could help project such a careful construction of a benevolent and modern nation into the world. Glazed earthenwares dated to the Han dynasty were among some of the first objects from China acquired by a Canadian museum.\textsuperscript{183} During a trip to Cairo in 1907, Currelly acquired an earthenware \textit{hu} (wine) vessel, the shape of which was modeled on the shapes of Shang and Zhou dynasty bronzes produced for ancestor rites (see fig. 1.12). The vessel was among a small collection of earthenwares purchased by a friend from a local merchant who had imported them from China. Currelly’s friend gifted him the objects, an act of kindness that he reports spurred his interest in building the


Figure 1.12: *Hu* vessel, c. 205 BCE-226 CE. Green-glazed earthenware, 25.4 x 19.9 cm. Collection of the Royal Ontario Museum.

ROM’s Chinese art collection.\textsuperscript{184} Currelly continued to collect a wide range of objects from China, including oracle bones and ceramics, religious sculpture, and paintings produced before the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{185} Perhaps the most impressive acquisition, and indeed a cornerstone of the ROM’s collection, is *The Paradise of Maitreya*, a wall painting that dates to 1298. The painting was removed from the wall of a temple in Shanxi Province and sold by a group of monks fleeing persecution. Currelly recounts how, upon learning that their temple would be destroyed, the monks “cut through the heavy clay plaster, and took the picture down piece by piece”, wrapping the pieces in cotton and sending them away for safekeeping.\textsuperscript{186} An English art dealer sold the

\textsuperscript{184} Currelly, 174-175.
\textsuperscript{185} Currelly, 251.
\textsuperscript{186} Currelly, 252.
deconstructed painting on behalf of the monks. The painting arrived in 63 sections and was painstakingly restored in 1933.187 Both the hu vessel and The Paradise of Maitreya demonstrate how temporality played an important role in establishing the cultural significance of the objects that were of interest to Currelly. These objects were considered “treasures” due to their respective ages, representing a heritage that Currelly believed was under threat of erasure.188

From 1907 onward, Currelly continued building contacts with a number of donors and art dealers, many of whom were based in London, an important hub for art trade with China in the early twentieth century. In his memoir, Currelly recounts how, during one of his many trips to London, he was brought to a shipping warehouse along the banks of the river Thames, stuffed to the rafters with objects acquired through infrastructural development:

One evening [Dr.] Seligman [a British anthropologist] said: ‘I would like to take you tomorrow to see some wonderful Chinese things that have recently arrived in London. I didn’t say anything about it until I knew whether you would be received or not; if you went on your own you would probably not be admitted. However, I have a letter asking me to bring you, and if you will come tomorrow in the afternoon, we will go.’ He took me down in the city to a huge Oriental warehouse, where after climbing numerous flights of stairs, we came to where this shipment was located. A few questions soon established the fact that this was the place that I had been trying to find. A railroad had been laid out in China, and railroads did not respect tombs. Numerous tombs were therefore opened, and the workmen found that […] there was a sale for the things taken out of these tombs. A certain man keenly interested in Chinese art had got hold of them and had consigned them to this Oriental dealer. […] I have rarely been more excited in my life. The prices seemed to be fairly reasonable, though by no means cheap. The number of objects was not large. I told the merchant that we were developing a new museum in Toronto, and that the only asset I had at the

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188 Currelly, 251. Originally published in 1956, Currelly makes reference to the politics of the time as justification for building the ROM’s collection: “When China comes out of this nightmare of Communism there is no doubt that it will be another China, with a terrible break between the past and whatever may be its future” (251).
time was a number of debts. I explained that if he would back me by giving me credit, there would be no doubt about his getting his money ultimately, and that I wanted to go very far in this matter. After some consideration, and after talking with me a good deal on several subjects, he said he would back me to any reasonable extent, and so began our tremendous collection of early Chinese objects.  

Currelly’s story cited above is a common one rehearsed in the history of museums: featuring objects ripped from tombs and transported through networks of plunder until they reach a potential collector via whispered word-of-mouth. In the process of moving through these networks, the plunder of these objects becomes justified.  

Currelly’s London connections are therefore significant, for they illustrate how Canadian collections were largely constructed through the imperial lens of the British Empire and how it justified plunder, which, as James Hevia shows, involved reclassifying stolen objects as “prizes”, a legal category that treated plunder as a natural outcome of military victory.  

In fact, Currelly notes that George Crofts, one of the ROM’s most prominent donors and an avid collector of Chinese antiquities, likely purchased a large portion of his collection of textiles and paintings from “the relatives of people who had done a fair amount of plundering.” Global trade of antiquities in the twentieth century was built upon the networks established by the British Empire. Objects “discovered” in markets and by connoisseurs travelling in China circulated through the same markets and museums as those that had been ransacked in the centuries prior. The recommodification of plunder as a prize resulting from war deeply impacted what objects were deemed valuable to

189 Currelly, 181-182.  
190 Azoulay, 92.  
192 Currelly, 250.  
193 Hevia, 136.
global collectors. For example, objects looted from the Yuanmingyan (Old Summer Palace) by the British Army in 1860 were coveted by collectors because of the meanings attached to them, highly valued because they had been part of the imperial collection. These meanings shifted as the plunder of these objects was rationalized thus: it would be necessary to keep them from being destroyed because they were historical artifacts that could provide insight into the aesthetic tastes of the court and other members of the social elite. The aesthetic norms attached to these objects evolved over time as taxonomies were retranslated between languages, cultures, and museum settings, “[obscuring] from citizens the colonial theft that they are complicit in keeping hidden.”

The museum’s civilizing mission was shared by private collectors and connoisseurs, whose personal collections of Asian art reflect further the colonial policies of the modern settler state. Figures such as Sir William Van Horne were among some of the most prominent private collectors of Asian art in Canada. Van Horne notably spearheaded the westward expansion of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) when he served as president between 1888 and 1899. Much of Van Horne’s art collection was amassed at the same time that Chinese labourers were exploited to complete construction of the CPR’s transcontinental line. His personal collection of Japanese art was wide-ranging in both quantity and quality: unlike many of his contemporaries, Van Horne was notably more interested in collecting domestic pottery—specifically, Raku wares used commonly in tea ceremonies—rather than export objects like porcelain and lacquerware. Raku wares connoted cultural refinement and intellect because, to many

194 Azoulay, 96.
Westerners, they looked similar in form. Only an expert eye could distinguish their dissimilarities and note desired signs of imperfection and asymmetry. Collecting small and portable tea containers, bowls, and cups was seen as the ultimate erudite pastime because they could be properly studied and assessed in one’s hand, providing a tangible connection to a distant land. Collections of Asian art therefore positioned men like Van Horne as arbitrators of taste, signifying that they were worthy of the economic power they held.\textsuperscript{196} This self-fashioning was displayed carefully, by staging select objects in the more public areas of their homes—in reception rooms and salons—and saving the truly cherished objects for their private studies. Asian art collections thereby signified the collector’s worldliness and affirmed him as a member of Canada’s elite industrial capitalists, indicating that he was capable of expanding the settler nation’s infrastructures.

**Ink Painting and Interconnectedness**

The twinned exclusion of Chinese people from the Canadian nation state and inclusion of Chinese art objects in Canadian museums illustrates how migration can be deployed in service of the cultural aims of empire, both at home and abroad. While Chinese labour was exploited to continue colonizing Indigenous lands, Chinese antiquities acquired through collecting practices based on imperial conquest could be appropriated and used to signify the achievements of the democratic nation and encourage the making of liberal citizenship, erasing Indigenous sovereignty and denying the cultural value of artworks

\textsuperscript{196} Vigo, 5.
produced by racialized migrants in the process. Ink paintings made by Chinese artists living and working contemporaneously with the white settlers who made up the museum’s desired public fell between the categorizations of art produced through liberal hegemonies. The age of the works and the political positions of the artists precluded ink paintings made in diaspora from being acquired as treasured art objects. Further, these works were not seen as being made in service to nation building because they did not fit the material, aesthetic, and social categorizations of “Canadian art” championed by national institutions, which continued to overwhelmingly view oil landscape paintings as true expressions of Canadian artistic identity well into the twentieth century.

Thinking through artworks as social objects, *Flying Cormorant Studio* revisits Asian art collections in Canadian museums by addressing how so-called traditional media have facilitated encounters between artists in China and in diaspora and between diasporic Chinese artists and white settler artists in North America. Here, ink painting—a practice and product frequently evoking aesthetic concepts and constructions of China—inhabits Lee’s rented space, making possible embodied encounters between different viewing publics. As an aesthetic object situated in time, as well as a method of re-visioning the past, the installation posits historical interconnectedness in a way that disturbs “the historicist use of the contemporary as a periodizing term,” inscribing contemporaneity as coexistence within a disjunctive sense of time.197 Tam’s approach to constructing a sense of history through the space produced by objects—a means to situate Lee’s ink painting practice transculturally and transhistorically—notably speaks to the existential crises generated by what Ranajit Guha describes as the migrant’s temporal

maladjustment, or the feeling of being out of place with other members of a diasporic community and out of sync with the spatiotemporal rhythms in a place of arrival. As I noted in the introduction, by evoking Guha’s conceptualization of diasporic multitemporality Saloni Mathur argues that the “synchronization of a field of vastly different temporalities, the reshaping of colonial paradigms to serve a shared, yet unequal, heterogeneous present, and the realignment of a community’s past, present, and future” constitute the many challenges of writing a history of diasporic art, especially as the experience of migration itself constantly “reasserts the temporality of the migrant against the long history of suppression and rejection of the ‘time of the Other’,” which operates via denying both the migrant’s coevality and belonging.198 Tam confronts how alterity is often re-produced through overlapping spatial and temporal distances by bringing into physical proximity the works of Chinese and diasporic ink painters with settler oil painters.

With *Flying Cormorant Studio*, Tam critically reflects upon ink painting’s transculturality and its constructed, maladjusted temporality. The artist is careful to not romanticize Lee and Carr’s friendship. Without an archive of Lee’s extant work, it is difficult to know the full extent to which these artists engaged with each other as likeminded colleagues. What we do know is that despite feeling an at times patronizing impulse to shield Lee from her racist peers,199 Carr revered the young artist as an equal and even consulted him when she attempted to establish a juried People’s Gallery in Victoria.200 Tam posits the contemporaneity of their works by weaving into Carr’s

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198 Mathur, ix.
199 Carr, *Hundreds and Thousands*, 93. In her reflections about Lee’s September 1933 exhibition, Carr writes, “I wanted to shield him from the brutal buffets of the ‘whites’ and their patronizing” (93).
200 Carr, *The House of All Sorts*, 164-165. Carr mentions Lee Nam in her letter to Eric Brown, the director of
perspectives on Lee another set of disciplinary knowledges that attest to ink painting’s function as a social document as well as an aesthetic and material object whose meanings shift within different geohistorical contexts. The following clipping from *The Chinese Times*, a Vancouver-based Chinese-language daily, was discovered by Tam during her artist residency at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria in 2017. It is, to present knowledge, the only extant source providing information about Lee’s work beyond Carr’s written recollections:

Victoria - Mr. Lee Chao Nam (Li Zhao Nan) from Toisan (Taishan) studied poetry and literature [in his] youth. He was gifted above others. He had learning experience [from] many disciplines of arts and specialized in painting technique. [In] recent years he resides in this area and focuses on fine art. After the closing of the trade exhibition in this city he took back his paintings and life sketches that he made in his spare time, and has rented [the] Yong Building at 556 Pandora Avenue to hold a solo exhibition of his work. Chinese and Western visitors are welcome. The period [starts] from Monday [September] 18 and ends on [the] 30 of this month. The opening hours are from noon to 2 pm, and from 4 pm to 6 pm daily. The reporter went to interview Mr. Lee yesterday and looked at his works. His brushwork seems alive and leads to excellence. He has Chinese masters Gu [Kaizhi], Lu [Tanwei], Ni [Zan], and Huang [Gongwang] in his mind. Visiting the exhibition felt like hiking on the trail of Shanyin [Shaoxin, China], your eyes can’t catch enough [of] the beautiful scenery. It was a breathtaking experience. I can imagine when the exhibition opens there must be a lot of visitors and admirers willing to come.201

Following established discursive conventions in Chinese art historiography, the reporter comments on Lee’s extensive training in the arts and his specialized interest in painting, positioning him as a modern artist-scholar—a portrait similar to the one Tam constructs in her installation, although the masters he cites are very different from Tam’s evocation of Qi Baishi. Evaluating his painterly abilities, the reporter compares Lee’s paintings to

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the works of a number of canonical artists, attempting to situate him within a lineage of
amateur painters widely celebrated as masters of their respective times. The artists listed
here employed a range of techniques with the brush to depict diverse subject matter. Gu
Kaizhi 顧愷之 (345-406) and Lu Tanwei 陸探微 (active in the late 5th century) were two
of the Four Great Painters of the Six Dynasties (220-589) and produced some of the
earliest figurative works in handscroll and mural form. Gu and Lu have been extolled, in
particular, for their abilities to express qiyun shengdong. In contrast, Ni Zan 倪瓚 (1301-
1374) and Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269-1354) were scholar-officials celebrated for
their economic use of the brush, developing personal styles emphasizing abbreviated,
“dry” strokes and generative landscape compositions reminding the viewer of the
summary effects of cursive script. The reporter’s impetus to compare is best understood
as a distilled practice of connoisseurship, a form of art historical assessment wherein
evaluating likeness to the masters validates Lee’s art. Connoisseurship is not an exercise
in continuing traditions but is, rather, a practice of relation across time. By producing an
account of stylistic precedents, scholars and critics can better understand how an artwork
functions as a social object that expresses the artist’s ability to translate thought into form.
This practice of comparison by evoking the past is central to art historiography in China
because it elucidates a concept of style based on an individual artist’s use of the brush.202
Style, in this sense, is a social as well as aesthetic and formal tool, “a manner of
expression rather than an authoritative message,”203 that facilitates contact, exchange, and
forms of meaning making across an arc of comparison. By mentioning Lee’s

203 Judith Brown, “Style,” in A New Vocabulary for Global Modernism, eds. Eric Hayot and Rebecca L.
brushwork—how it “lives” and how it relates to the masters—the reporter appeals to the practice of historical connoisseurship and it is within this appeal that Lee’s work gains discursive and historical value.

Tam gives Lee’s work discursive and historical value by constructing an embodied environment in which to understand the world-making force of his painting practice. Thinking across the boundaries of nation, identity, and history, her installation reproduces the social functions of ink painting and how they are “shaped by its critical moment” while attending to “alternative, even unlikely visions.” Along with re- visioning Lee’s space, Tam stages potential relations to his contemporaries as well as to the artists who came after him rather than to the masters who came before him—a gesture that extends the arc of comparison established by the reporter for The Chinese Times.

Works by Montreal-based painter Lui Luk Chun are used throughout the installation often to furnish parts of the space (such as the desk, walls, and shelves with rolled up scrolls) in place of Lee’s missing works. Made in response to Tam’s invitation to reflect upon the landscape as a vehicle of expression in China and as a trope representing national identity in Canada, these paintings—landscapes depicting the Canadian Rockies (which Lui has produced from memory)—are not meant to stand in for Lee’s missing body of work, but rather to draw parallels between different generations of artists who share personal histories of immigration and whose works have been excluded from mainstream categorizations of contemporary art within their respective times and places. Like Lee, Lui is a learned and talented painter. In 1959, he entered the prestigious China Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) where he trained under the tutelage of Pan Tianshu 潘天壽 (1897-

204 Brown, 216.
After graduating from the CAFA in 1963, Lui worked as a professional artist in Hangzhou for 18 years before immigrating to Canada in 1981, where he has continued to produce calligraphy and landscape paintings and teach these practices to new generations of amateur painters.

In the process of producing and exhibiting *Flying Cormorant Studio*, Tam has created a site-responsive installation activated not solely by engagements with stylized objects but further by stories from local Chinese Canadian communities. The works by Chinese Canadian ink painters elicited stories from visitors who shared knowledge about ink painters they knew—often family members, friends, and neighbours. Storytelling in this manner is crucial for establishing an art history in Canada encompassing intergenerational, transhistorical, and transcultural relations, especially the relations formed between teachers and their pupils (both in China and in Canada), as well as between artists who have exhibited together in museum and community-based shows, and artists who have sold or gifted their works to family and friends. The installation produces a framework through which to examine immigrant art practices not as “commentaries on their particular histories,” identities, and traditions but rather as embodied practices of relating with each other and with the worlds constituted by migrations. *Flying Cormorant Studio* therefore establishes a wider field of art-historical thought in which the works of immigrant artists are integral to and entangled within shifting constructs of art, race, nationhood, and modernity.

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205 Tam, “Flying Cormorant Studio, or the Re-imagining of a Migrant Artist’s Studio.”
206 Yap, 6.
Conclusion

A participatory installation, *Like raindrops rolling down new paint* (2017) complements the space produced by *Flying Cormorant Studio* (fig. 1.13). A component of Tam’s solo exhibition, *Like raindrops* gives visitors an opportunity to learn Chinese ink painting techniques and to create their own paintings of chickens—the subject matter of an ink painting attributed to both Lee Nam and Emily Carr (fig. 1.1). A video featuring Lui Luk Chun guides visitors through the step-by-step process (fig. 1.14), instructing them on how to properly hold an ink brush and how to mark the page with a range of strokes. Engaged directly in the act of painting, visitors come to embody Lee’s practice of making the studio habitable, taking on the artist’s own physical dwelling in space and subsequently reshaping its rhythms. Marking the page complements the act of reading the finished works exhibited on the walls of Lee’s studio. Through the act of making, visitors inscribe themselves within their environment, understanding Lee’s studio as an assemblage of social objects addressing different audiences, thereby producing different meanings.

Though the space Tam produces is temporary—and indeed contrasted against the space produced by the gallery’s permanent collection—it highlights mutually transformative relations between artists, between galleries and their viewing publics, and between members of a diaspora. By focusing on habitual use of the studio, on the objects produced in this space as well as those used to decorate and inhabit it, Tam illustrates how experiential knowledge makes visible historical entanglements that continue to shape relations and power structures in the present.

*Flying Cormorant Studio* thereby transforms immigrant spaces like Lee Nam’s Chinatown studio into dynamic sites of exchange and entanglement between past and
Figure 1.13: Karen Tam, *Like raindrops rolling down new paint*, 2017. Participatory installation including 300 sketches by Lui Luk Chun, Tam Yuen Yin Law, and Karen Tam. Exhibited 3 June-4 September, 2017 at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, Victoria, BC. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 1.14: Karen Tam and Lui Luk Chun, still from instructional video for *Like raindrops rolling down new paint*, 2017. Community ink painting workshop. Photograph by the author.
present forms of art. Tam reframes Lee’s absence from history by manipulating the structures that resulted in making him invisible, such as the strategic spatializing logics and civilizing missions of the settler state that rendered Chinese art and bodies as “out of the time” of the nation, pushing expressions of culture in diaspora to the margins. Lee’s ink painting practice furnishes the studio, recalling the concepts of self-cultivation and expression that this practice signifies as well as the redefinitions of its social and aesthetic functions that were taking shape during Lee’s lifetime. By looking to objects, Tam transforms Lee’s studio from an aesthetic space to be consumed into a site where art history is made. Her work re-visions Asian Canadian art history by turning to social formations and uses of art that counter the nation state’s mode of multicultural recognition. She further deconstructs the conceptual, disciplinary, and structural barriers to “inclusion” within a settler history of art, reflecting on how studies of art can better respond to urgencies presented by global migrations and transcultural exchange, both now and in the past. This sense of multi-temporality—holding in productive tension global social intimacies occurring simultaneously in the past and in the present—will be dissected in more detail in the chapters to come.
CHAPTER TWO:

Stories Make Worlds:
Narrating Lived Time in the Works of Howie Tsui and Dipna Horra

The experiential origin of stories may imply that their mode of temporality is one of presence. In fact, their temporality is that of an unending promise, because the paradigmatic experience at the origin of stories is the aporetic experience of the finitude of human existence. The stuff that all stories come from is life that has been lived.

Cheah, What is a World?, 322.

This chapter examines how site-responsive artworks by Asian Canadian artists may wrest discrepant temporalities of diasporic movement and dwelling in displacement from being, as Bal notes, “overruled by the predominance of measurable, linear time,” a representational strategy that marks progressive change over time rather than being-in-time.207 In her research and video-based art practice, Bal has advocated for a rethinking of time in the multiple, enmeshing time here and time there, a mingling of pasts, presents, and futures. She suggests that artmaking produces a multiple and enmeshed sense of time by aestheticizing interruptions to the social and political order of time-based representations.208 I wish to push this rethinking of time as multiple and enmeshed further to examine not how artworks make interruptions possible, but rather how they re-frame relationships to the past (such as in the installation work by Karen Tam examined in the previous chapter) while also endeavouring to make a more coeval present and future possible. Interruption implies disrupting a normative representation of time as singular. However, as Henri Bergson has shown, time is more accurately experienced as multiple and enmeshed with subjective consciousness. Distinguishing between “objective time,” or

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207 Bal, “Migratory Aesthetics,” 156.
the time reflected through modern technologies of recordkeeping, such as watches, calendars, and schedules, and “lived time,” the time of experience. For Bergson, no two moments of lived time are ever the same. This because our past feelings and memories influence the way we experience time in the present. Moments that have just passed continue to linger within a memory which lengthens and swells as it accumulates more experiences. Bergson’s understanding of how memory impacts the way we feel time is key to his theorization of time as multiple, for he insists that the way we live time is never the same from one moment to the next. Memory conserves the past, but we can never recall the past in the same way as it was once lived. Bergson’s theory of time is useful for understanding how human agency, rather than teleology, brings about a sense of being embedded within an ontological construction of a world in process. Lived time contracts and expands regardless of how it is recorded or calculated. Thus, in contradistinction to a normative sense of time as linear, a normative sense of time as multiple and enmeshed opens up ways to recognize different and yet coeval terms of being and belonging.

Working through durational media, the artists discussed in this chapter respond to a site lodged firmly within diasporic memory and consciousness, a site where migration—an experience that stretches everyday experiences of time—makes one acutely more aware of time’s multiplicity. In their installation works, artists Howie Tsui and Dipna Horra underscore “home” as a multi-temporal and contingent place: a site of change and relation produced by memory, story, and diasporic critique. This chapter examines two of their works in particular: Horra’s sound installation Avaaaz (2010) and Tsui’s animated scroll installation Retainers of Anarchy (2017), which relate stories about

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a homeland to an experience of home-in-displacement. As members of double
diasporas—in other words, diasporas who are displaced from a homeland through two or
more migrations—the artists’ approaches to investigating home throw homeland myths
into stark relief. Their experiences of serial migrations, holding stories from multiple
places and of multiple times, complicate how diaspora is often narrated as a single life-
defining migratory journey from one place to another. In thinking about how their works
tell stories and how they narrate and co-construct time in diaspora, I am prompted by
Cheah’s theorization of the multi-temporal worlding enacted by stories. Specifically, how
stories do not merely interrupt or produce alternate or parallel teleologies but rather
communicate and thereby bring about one’s enmeshment within a world.²¹⁰ For Cheah,
interruption undermines the worldmaking potential of stories because it reinforces global
and national capitalist representations of the world. Like Cheah, I insist that stories are
worldmaking tools. However, I recognize how their function in visual art carries forth
attachments to sites grounded within migration narratives. I turn to stories and the site of
home because every immigrant family has a story about where they came from and how
they ended up where they are. Often, these stories become ritualized as part of the
family’s experience and performance of diaspora and they give texture to how future
generations regard where and how they are situated. Through my reading of Avaaz and
Retainers of Anarchy, I conceptualize the practice of storytelling as the co-construction of
multiple and enmeshed time—a practice that acknowledges the past but also embraces the
continuum of experience.

²¹⁰ Cheah, What is a World?, 25.
My understanding of storytelling as a practice of co-constructing multiple and enmeshed time has wider implications for how the study of Asian Canadian contemporary art can confront Asian Canadian studies’ own myths of time. As Chris Lee has noted, time as a construct and as a mode of inquiry has factored critically within Asian Canadian studies through acknowledgement of critical moments of redress in Asian Canadian history, shaping a narrative of progressive visibility that aligns with the Canadian nation state’s own narrative of multicultural tolerance. Writing in response to the centennial anniversary of the 1907 anti-Asian riots in Vancouver’s Chinatown (which was commemorated in 2007 with a series of conferences, exhibitions, and publications examining social and policy changes regarding anti-Asian racism), Lee addresses the need for commemoration in Asian Canadian critical practices, aiming to think beyond simply marking the passage of time through the framework of “gaining visibility” and instead to theorize an “ethics of commemoration” that problematizes Asian Canadian historiographies.\(^{211}\) Anniversaries have become a common way to write histories of marginalized communities because they narrow the temporal gaps between the past and the present and create opportunities for uncovering important interactions (such as moments of solidarity and practices of coalition building) between racialized communities that often get lost in writing from an “official” perspective. As Lee determines, when examined through the lens of so-called anniversaries of change, “[the practice of] commemoration reimagines our current conjecture of time and space as a cipher of these multiple sedimented pasts.”\(^{212}\) It initiates a new relationship with the lived

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\(^{212}\) Lee, 122.
time of the past as an exchange in which recognition gives way to a sense of responsibility. Yet, an anniversaries model of writing history demonstrates a continued reliance on official measures of time. As Larissa Lai has shown, this method of measuring time through redressing past injustices works to bolster the settler state’s assimilationist policies by denying “discontinuities, reversals, and aporias in experience [and] self-understanding.”

Though commemoration and redress seek to right the wrongs incurred in the process of writing a history through exclusion, these practices always require acknowledgement of wrongdoing—in the form of an official apology or monetary compensation—after the fact. This means that belonging, as a subject of redress, is always articulated through the time in which the nation overcomes its colonial past. Horra and Tsui grapple with such a past in a way that reimagines temporalities of belonging within the settler nation. In their works, they each carve out sites through which to push the boundaries of Asian Canadian as a history, an identity, and a politics, underscoring how Asian Canadian terms of subjectivity invite critique and re-negotiation. Through storytelling, the artists highlight contingent moments of lived time worthy of return.

Storytelling in Asian Canadian contemporary art thereby offers a critical practice that multiplies the past and the present and problematizes how Asian Canadian studies frameworks have historically challenged dominant national histories that marginalize and obscure the realities of anti-Asian racism.

Stories, like objects, are carried between places: housed in the mind until they are expressed—recalled, recorded, or co-narrated. To be clear, this chapter engages with both oral and visual forms of storytelling. I am interested in how Horra and Tsui utilize a

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213 Lai, 7.
number of narrative strategies to reconfigure the temporal frame of their respective formats. Both artists seek to ground the worlding features of the story to the worlded site of the home, a site that in being grounded highlights structural conditions that make movement and/or stasis possible. I intend to push these durational questions further in Chapter 3 through my investigation of the landscape in Jin-me Yoon’s video works. Here, my analysis links the durational aims of storytelling with the multi-temporality of diaspora to unravel how home can be reimagined as a site that destabilizes burdens of representation.

**Home as a Nexus of Story and Time**

In the centre of a dimly lit gallery sits a table, four chairs, a wheeled trolley, and a window pane suspended from the ceiling. The table is readied for an intimate tea service, with a porcelain tea set—including a pitcher, cream jug, sugar bowl, and two cups and saucers—serving chai resting beneath a single hanging light. The minimal design of the tea set (white porcelain with a brown geometric pattern) complements the humble aesthetic of the table and chairs, which resemble furniture sets found in virtually any middle class suburban home in North America.\(^\text{214}\) Though this scene appears at once familiar and welcoming, the sparse furnishings give the viewer pause. In contrast to spaces cramped with objects in installations by Linda Sormin (see Introduction) and Karen Tam (see Chapter 1), the minimalism here is uncanny, leading the viewer to feel as if we are experiencing a domestic interior after it has been vacated. Amplifying both the ordinary and the strange is the fact that the installation incorporates a soundscape.

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prominently featuring disembodied voices that sing songs, tell stories, and chatter aimlessly, gossiping and reminiscing. The window pane rattles and hums with the sound of a storm brewing exterior to this makeshift space. Retrofitted with hidden speakers, the simple furnishings, the storm window, and the fine china serve as conduits from which voices, stories, and atmospheric sounds emanate, filling the space where aesthetics lack.

Such is the experience of Nairobi-born and Ottawa-based artist Dipna Horra’s sculptural sound installation, *Avaaz*, which was produced in response to the artist’s reading of Homi K. Bhabha’s theory of unhomeliness and her experience as part of a double diaspora with ancestral ties to Punjab and with many globally dispersed Indian diasporas. The unhomely, according to Bhabha, is central to the psychic and subjective experiences of postcolonial migrancy. Building upon Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny as something unfamiliar (*unheimlich*, the opposite of *heimlich*, or “homely”) and thereby threatening, Bhabha theorizes the unhomely as a feeling of losing a sense of belonging in a rapidly globalizing world. For Bhabha, unhomeliness is not homelessness, sitelessness, or lack of time. Rather, it is the boundary between the space of the home and the outside breaking down, the result of a migratory journey that fundamentally alters knowledge and perception of the world.215 Breaching public and private, the unhomely is a site-responsive feeling that, like the experience of migration, makes other worlds possible. For members of a double diaspora, this breach of time and space troubles the presumed ontological stability of both home and world. The experience of double diaspora “reworlds” concepts of diasporic belonging by highlighting and critically restructuring certain migrations as by-products of colonial encounters. Unhomeliness is

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therefore not experienced simply by moving from one place to another, but through subjective connections to multiple sites of encounter: through memories, cultural practices, and histories carried in the process of settling somewhere else. This experience of movement and resettlement is disorienting because subjects must negotiate displacements even at home, where the familiarity of the domestic world and the unfamiliarity of the exterior, societal world are enmeshed. Horra examines these disorienting feelings in *Avaaz*, producing a site where histories, cultural knowledges, and generational experiences of migrations between India, Kenya, and Canada converge and speak over one another. The sparse furnishings and rich soundscape of her makeshift home configure a dense and layered experience of time held in tension with atemporal constructions of diaspora as a psychic connection to an unchanging homeland. By weaving together fragments of stories, the artist seeks to approximate her family’s many storytelling rituals—evenings spent around the dinner table, listening to the elder members of her family reminisce. *Avaaz* forms a complex story about moving and dwelling within Britain’s imperial networks, revealing many migratory journeys that have made the artist’s family strange to itself.

The unhomely is a concept likewise explored by Hong Kong-born and Vancouver-based artist Howie Tsui. Working with a variety of media—including ink painting, sound, animation, and installation—in his art practice, Tsui builds fictional and disorienting worlds, often presenting the viewer with a version of history bound simultaneously to a physical place and to the psychic realms of memory. Much of Tsui’s works exalt histories of Chinese immigration by subverting traditional and contemporary art forms in unexpected ways: exaggerating and mixing formats and specific imagery in a manner that undercuts their functions and aesthetics. He specifically focuses on the
worldmaking functions and the exalted status of paintings produced by China’s elite scholar-official class, rethinking their links to hegemonic constructions of culture and the political ordering of Sinophone social worlds, both past and present. Tsui’s monumental, five-channel animated installation *Retainers of Anarchy* (2017) plays with the narrative format of a handscroll and the generative imagery of Chinese landscapes (fig. 2.1). Projected onto a giant screen is a hand-drawn cross-section of a crowded block

Figure 2.1: Howie Tsui, *Retainers of Anarchy*, 2017. Algorithmic animation sequence: 5 channel projection, 6 channel audio, 25 metres. Exhibited 12 April-15 September, 2019 at the Ottawa Art Gallery, Ottawa, ON. Photograph by Justin Wonnacott. Courtesy of the artist.

216 My use of the term “Sinophone” here relates to the concept of the Sinophone as theorized by Shu-mei Shih. The field of Sinophone studies has developed over the past decade to address the practice in academia to synonymize “Chinese studies” with the study of the People’s Republic of China, considering anything outside its sphere of influence as peripheral. Scholars of Sinophone studies examine the plurality of Sinitic-language communities outside China and in diaspora as well as the cultural expressions of minority communities inside China “where Mandarin is adopted or imposed” (Shih, *Sinophone Studies*, 11). Through the concept of the Sinophone, Shih examines how Sinitic-language cultures move and how they are articulated and produced translocally. She offers a useful framework through which to understand complex historical formations and material emplacements of Chinese diasporas: especially, how they are enmeshed within different time-based politics between places, not always in response to the hegemonic call of the PRC. I employ the term Sinophone here mindful of these plural constructions. See Shu-mei Shih, Chien-hsin Tsai, and Brian Bernards, eds., *Sinophone Studies: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), Shu-mei Shih, *Visuality and Identity: Sinophone Articulations across the Pacific* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).
Figure 2.2: Howie Tsui, mahjong players in *Retainers of Anarchy*. 2017. Key frame drawing for algorithmic animation sequence. Courtesy of the artist.

of apartments set within a pastoral landscape. This dizzying and cramped dwelling space—evoking the structure of the Kowloon Walled City—is animated by fantastical figures engaging in a number of different rituals. In one apartment block a group of men play a game of *mahjong*, their faces melting into the surface of the table as the rice cooker next to them whistles and lets out steam (fig. 2.2). Another apartment block pictures a butcher wielding a cleaver in each hand, carefully and expertly chopping a pound of meat. Other spaces animate people sleeping, making and eating hand pulled noodles, watching television, praying to ancestors, or being haunted by mischievous spirits. Unlike the traditional manner in which one reads a handscroll, unfurling it section by section and reading it right to left, the illustrated scenes in Tsui’s installation zoom in and out of focus in random sequence. There is no set narrative and the order of the scenes is never intentionally repeated. Yet, while Tsui foregoes a linear story, the viewer is still required
to spend a considerable amount of time piecing together visual fragments. These many pieces reveal the quotidian order of this cramped space—a potential to dwell amid the chaos. Re-adapting the traditional medium’s conventions of spatial visualization and its ability to unfold time according to the viewer’s pace, Tsui devises a transcultural and transhistorical method of visual storytelling that serves as a metaphor for the haptic experience of dwelling in displacement.

Like Horra, Tsui is also a member of a double diaspora with connections to sites entangled within Britain’s imperial networks. As a child, Tsui and his family relocated to Lagos, Nigeria from Hong Kong before settling in Canada. Since arriving in Canada, the artist has made his home in Thunder Bay, Ottawa, and Vancouver. The artist’s body of work is largely concerned with how multiple migrations, underpinned by colonialism and imperialism, impact diasporic subjectivity. *Retainers of Anarchy* builds upon Tsui’s earlier works in this regard, which endeavour to “make strange” forms of Chinese painting, introducing grotesquely rendered figures whose appearances recall histories of anti-Chinese racism in Canada. These figures reflect upon the unease of encountering the racialized Other in a nation conceived as a white settler country. Many of these figures are featured in the present work, which is set in a space that once stood between empires, a reminder of Hong Kong’s own status as a liminal city. Though not specifically focused on diasporic histories and experiences in Canada, *Retainers of Anarchy* continues to trouble atemporal concepts of diaspora between Canada and a Chinese homeland, exploding the boundaries of spaces assumed to be familiar. Forms of Chinese landscapes, the format of the scroll, and the domestic interiors reproduced on the screen are made strange with the use of a visual language recalling the unhomely and disorienting feeling of being situated without an anchor between competing cultural reference points.
This chapter examines the storytelling functions of the two installations described above, analyzing how the artists employ different media to narrate elements that breach public and private, world and home. Engaging with artworks that tell stories, this chapter asks questions about the functions of art and its relationship to constructed histories of migration, expanding the previous chapter’s investigation of artworks (specifically, ink paintings) as site-responsive objects that shift in meaning. I think more critically about how concepts of time affect how Asian Canadian art engages with the site of the home. My comparative analysis further connects the contingent and relational worldmaking capacities of storytelling with how time is lived in diaspora. Storytelling is a practice of positioning the self within a world ontologically understood as processual—a response to social landscapes, political imaginaries, and aesthetic encounters always in the process of becoming. It is also a method of meaning making through which diasporic communities can locate and recognize shared experiences and historical consciousness even when forms of collectivity are made strange. The phenomenological force of storytelling as a worldmaking practice is expounded by Hannah Arendt, who argues that stories are occasions for relational dialogue that, together with the products of labour (which she defines as biological necessity) and work (which she defines as creative efforts or the production of material things-in-the-world) “constitute the fabric of human relationships and affairs.”

Stories are both in-the-world (through acts of telling, listening, reading, and/or viewing) and produce a world by transforming individual experience into social engagement, communicating an event or series events in such a way that they can be re-experienced by an audience. They are integral to everyday life because they shape how

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Arendt, 95.
Cheah, 321.
subjects think about themselves and how they encounter others. Storytelling therefore orients both the teller and the listener in lived time and facilitates connections among subjects for the purpose of understanding one another.

As Lok Siu explains, because stories underscore the messiness, unevenness, and meaningfulness of migration, they play important roles in articulating diasporic subjectivity. Recounting and analyzing four familial immigration stories (collected through interviews with participants from Chinese families who immigrated to in different sites in the Americas and the Caribbean), Siu argues that storytelling in diaspora “embodies the substance—the shared memories and experiences of migration—that inform diasporic […] consciousness.”

Storytelling structures and is structured by relations between subjects who encounter each other and who recognize that they share an imperative to move through, care for, and transform their environments. Within Asian Canadian studies, conventional forms of storytelling (i.e.: rehearsing a series of events through spoken dialogue or in writing) have served as necessary methods to build coalitions and construct visible forms of subjectivity. Roy Miki, for instance, begins his foundational essay “Turning In, Turning Out: The Shifting Formations of Japanese Canadian from Uprooting to Redress” with a story about a migratory journey “home” and a moment of self-realization, one in which “the formations [of Japanese and Canadian] found themselves clashing with each other in a much younger consciousness.”

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220 Roy Miki, *In Flux*, 65. In 1970 Miki had been living in Japan for close to 16 months. One summer day he was drawn into a large crowd of people assembling around a carnival display in Asakusa, the historical district of Tokyo. The voice of the barker announcing feats of sword-swallowing and fire breathing drew his memory back to a similar scene from his childhood in Winnipeg where, while attending the Royal American Show, he was made aware of his own difference as a racialized person in Canada. “Here were men and women doing wondrous feats […], but alongside them were others whose bodies were the
moment in which he acutely recognized and felt the unhomeliness of diaspora—during a trip to Japan where he states he could not recognize his “self” despite being constructed as Japanese and hence “Other” throughout his childhood in Canada—profoundly impacted Miki’s development as a critical theorist focused on constructions of nation and identity. Toronto-based filmmaker Ali Kazimi provides another crucial example of storytelling as a form of Asian Canadian relation-making in the introduction to his book, *Undesirables: White Canada and the Komagata Maru* (2012). Much of Kazimi’s work has focused on examining the arrival, detainment, and expulsion of the *Komagata Maru* as not just an isolated incident of discrimination against South Asian migrants but rather as symptomatic of federal policy that delineated terms of “desirable” and “undesirable” immigration and citizenship based on colonial racism and political entanglements between Canada and India. In *Undesirables*, Kazimi recounts how he came to study the *Komagata Maru*, explaining how it prompted critical thinking about the limits of Canadian multiculturalism, limits he had personally experienced upon moving to Toronto from Delhi in 1983. As Kazimi suggests, his witness to how the *Komagata Maru* resonated in contemporary migratory struggles inspired ways to relate to the journeys of those who had attempted to arrive before him. Relation, for Kazimi, is an act of seeing one’s self and one’s community in the plural. Stories like Miki’s and Kazimi’s illustrate not only how the worlds envisioned by and made through Asian Canadian coalition spectacle, the objects displayed for their divergences from the normative gaze” (ibid., 66). The carnival’s discriminating “freak show,” which made a spectacle of bodily difference, was a memory deeply lodged within Miki’s childhood memory. In Asakusa, he was made aware yet again of his difference. However now, surrounded by other Japanese-identified bodies, Miki states that he was uncomfortably invisible. His difference was seemingly undetectable, but this undetectability led to his feeling a profound sense of non-belonging.

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building and relation-making are continually negotiated on a personal basis but also how
the act of storytelling produces worlds that diasporic actors care for as they seek to forge
cultural and social intimacies where they are situated. I intend to build on this
conventional sense of storytelling. The premise of telling a story, of speaking or bringing
into vision an aspect of the self, enables Horra and Tsui to probe constructions of the
home-in-displacement against an unchanging construction of a putative diasporic
homeland and the progressive and linear construction of the settler colonial nation. In this
way, the artists envision the site of the home as a field of encounter rather than as a
categorical or essentialist construct. This reconceptualization insists that relational being-
in-the-world is continuously negotiated between places and between generations.222

In the following sections of this chapter, I propose that Horra and Tsui repurpose
the temporal frameworks of their media to narrate a dense and contradictory experience
of diaspora. Through their narrating of diasporic time, the artists offer the home as a site
of relation within the history of Asian Canadian art. My analysis starts with Tsui’s
installation, *Retainers of Anarchy*, which I read as a meditation on the home as a site of
diasporic critique. I emphasize how the artist’s engagement with traditions of landscape
and genre cinema in Sinophone milieus, as well as with contemporary politics between
Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China (PRC), calls into question the imagined
spatial and temporal boundaries of a homeland—challenging ideologies of social
cohesion and affiliation. Tsui practices a manner of visual storytelling emphasizing
uncertainty and contradiction, reflecting the difficulty of re-orienting the diasporic self in
response to multiply constructed and contrasting versions of past, present, and future. By

evoking the Kowloon Walled City as a metaphor for contemporary politics of diaspora, Tsui calls into question the responsibilities diasporic communities have to homelands in the process of being erased.

In contrast, my analysis of Horra’s installation, *Avaaz*, examines how the artist builds upon the mutable and hybrid medium of sound art, which has a relatively short institutional history. I explore how the artist employs sound to ritualize and co-narrate her family’s migration story, thereby positioning herself and the viewer as inheritors of her family’s experiences as a result of British colonialism. While the storytelling in *Avaaz* follows a more linear trajectory in comparison to Tsui’s animated scroll, I argue that use of the experimental media of sound enables Horra to reconcile dual senses of security and precarity, intimacy and distance in a space filled by her family’s stories. These stories are voiced within the intimate setting of a domestic tea service—itself a symbol of settler colonial dominance and global empire—where visitors to the gallery can eavesdrop and ensconce themselves in the drama of migration. Horra’s soundscape offers an expanded perspective on her family and their story, enabling the viewer to focus on invisible socio-political and cultural power dynamics that continue to linger beneath the everyday aesthetics of homes produced in the process of moving and settling. Sound, Salomé Voegelin writes, is a contingent materiality, an “invisible layer of the world that shows its relationships, actions, and dynamics.”223 In *Avaaz*, sound makes possible the resonant temporal *feeling* of diaspora. Despite their disparate practices, storytelling enables the artists to connect intergenerational and art-historical knowledges to the affective production of Asian Canadian social imaginaries, emphasizing how these knowledge

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systems resonate with a multi-temporal experience of moving and dwelling in displacement.

**The Walled City as Diasporic Critique**

Howie Tsui’s visualization of the cramped apartment block in *Retainers of Anarchy* evokes the precariously built tenement structures in the Kowloon Walled City, a disputed territory located between Hong Kong and the PRC that was demolished in 1994 (figs. 2.3 and 2.4). Originally the site of a military fort built during the Song dynasty (960-1279) and used throughout history as an outpost to manage China’s salt trade, the Walled City was embroiled in ongoing struggle between the Qing government and the East India Company through the nineteenth century. Trade disputes with Britain resulted in the depletion of China’s military and the forced surrender of the New Territories (lands extending from Hong Kong into the mainland through the Kowloon) for 99 years. Though falling under British jurisdiction, the Walled City remained under Chinese control until 1899, when it was rumoured that Chinese soldiers were using the Walled City to refortify themselves in order to take back the surrendered lands. While the British took the City, the Chinese government never renounced claims to the space. As a result, the Walled City’s operations were seldom managed, and the space was largely neglected, poising it to become a refuge for those seeking low rents and lax police presence, as well as for those fleeing the turmoil of the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949) and Japanese occupation of the Kowloon. A liminal space located outside of the law, by the 1990s the Walled City reportedly had an estimated population of over 50,000 and was considered the most densely occupied area in the world. The Hong Kong government announced plans to demolish the Walled City in 1987. These plans sparked the complicated legal transfer of
Figure 2.3: Howie Tsui, still from *Retainers of Anarchy*, 2017. Detail: the Kowloon Walled City. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2.4: Ian Lambot, Aerial photo of the Kowloon Walled City in 1989. © Ian Lambot / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA-4.0.
sovereignty form Chinese to British authorities and a lengthy eviction process. Demolition of the Walled City began in March 1993 and was completed 13 months later in April 1994.

Beyond its storied past, the Walled City was best known for its ever-changing structure. Spaces could be re-adapted quickly and according to need. Increasingly taller and thinner high-rises could be built at a moment’s notice—a result of there being no official building codes to regulate construction and maintenance of the space. Picturing its massive, labyrinthian form (at its height, the Walled City boasted 360 buildings that stood ten to fourteen stories tall), Tsui reproduces the seemingly random and highly adaptable spatiotemporal rhythms of the Walled City, a strategy that enables him to aestheticize its various states of becoming. Though the figures occupying these quarters find themselves in a liminal space between states and between histories, life continues to clip along. One minute the viewer may watch a sequence that moves between a figure seated in meditation, another practicing martial arts, and another mindlessly eating a cup of noodles in front of a blaring television set when, suddenly, the flow between these separate vignettes is interrupted by a plane flying overhead—an allusion to the fact that the Walled City once stood beneath a busy flight path.

Many of the stories reflected in the vignettes echo those that have been recorded in oral history projects focused on the Walled City. The most extensive and well-known project was spearheaded in the late 1980s by photographer Ian Lambot and photojournalist Greg Girard, who sought to document everyday life in the Walled City, attempting to address the many rumours and urban legends that circulated about the

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criminal activity that was said to take place there. Working with students from the University of Hong Kong—who served as translators for the pair—Lambot and Girard gained access to this space and interviewed people who made it their home: including factory workers, merchants, and dentists who opened up shop, serving a vibrant community of people deemed outcasts from society. Their book, *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City* (the first edition was published in 1993 and was updated in 2013) chronicles the Walled City’s stories, pairing candid and posed photographs with the translated stories of residents who describe how they came to live in the Walled City and why they have stayed. The majority of the residents cite low rents and the ease of acquiring space and setting up a business as reasons for why they found the Walled City an attractive place to live. While Lambot and Girard were adamant in giving space for residents to describe their living situations “in their own words,” the captions—authored by a collaborator, Charles Goddard—printed beneath photos in the book emphasize the project’s anthropological gaze, inscribing the reader as an observer to this society of outsiders.

*Retainers of Anarchy* works against the anthropological gaze, tapping into the rumours and legends that circulated among Hong Kong’s residents to narrate how it occupies a specific state of liminality between time and geography and between fantasy and reality. Tsui explains that his work attempts to paint a picture of a person born and raised in Hong Kong in the decades leading up to the 1997 handover.

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225 A story recounted by dentist Lam Mei Kwong, for instance, is accompanied by a photograph of his dental clinic and a caption that reads: “A spacious and well-furnished clinic, with relatively modern equipment—probably made in China or imported second-hand from Japan—revealed Lam Mei Kwong to be one of the City’s more successful dentists.” See Greg Girard and Ian Lambot, *City of Darkness: Life in Kowloon Walled City* (Watermark Publications UK, 1993), 25.

226 Howie Tsui, “Visual Artist Talk with GIF Roulette,” presentation for the Toronto Reel Asian Film Festival’s Canadian Spotlight, 15 November, 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ob2NvgLPIU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ob2NvgLPIU).
memories, he examines Hong Kong’s hybridized landscape of colonial British and Cantonese culture, an anomalous point in time on the verge of erasure.

The destruction of the Walled City functions as a metaphor for the threatened erasure of cultural sovereignty and political autonomy in contemporary Hong Kong. It also links this contemporary politics to racist paranoia surrounding the influx of migration from Hong Kong to Vancouver in the late-1990s in anticipation of the handover. This increase in immigration sparked veiled anti-Chinese sentiments best imagined through the expressed fear that Vancouver would soon transform into “Hongcouver,” a hybridized city whose white settler identity would be erased both by an imagined majority Hong Kong-born population and through a perceived architectural resemblance to Hong Kong.\footnote{227} In 1997 Hong Kong did not gain territorial independence following British occupation. Instead, it was “returned” to the PRC. Present-day Hong Kong is marked by, as Rey Chow writes, the “double impossibility” of a “postcoloniality that is a forced return to a ‘mother country,’ itself as imperialistic as the previous colonizer”.\footnote{228} The story of the Walled City reveals how this state of existing “between colonizers” is a type of temporal positioning between different visions of empire and their representational regimes. Through storytelling, Tsui enacts critique of contemporary politics that is rooted simultaneously within his own memory of Hong Kong as his birthplace and within his current position as a double diaspora in Vancouver. His storytelling acknowledges how the urgency to act—to demonstrate and demand reform—mounts the longer Hong Kong remains in stasis, on the precipice of being assimilated back into an imperializing

\footnote{227} Day, 168.  
homeland. His work aligns, socially and politically, with the student-led Umbrella Movement (September 26-December 15, 2014)—which called for genuine universal suffrage for the election of Hong Kong’s chief executive—and with recent demonstrations against the Extradition Law Amendment Bill have galvanized activism both within and outside of Hong Kong. Introduced by the Hong Kong government in 2019, the Extradition Law Amendment Bill was proposed to enable the extradition of activists and vocal critics to the PRC. It was met with a wave of criticism and opposition on the part of Hong Kong residents who feared that extradition would expose them to the PRC’s more punitive legal system. Residents opposing the bill organized a widespread demonstration that was attended by hundreds of thousands on June 9, 2019. A gathering outside the Legislative Council Complex was organized to stall the bill’s second reading on June 12 and eventually escalated into violence as demonstrators were targeted by police using tear gas and rubber bullets. Another larger demonstration—reported to be the largest in Hong Kong’s history with an estimated 2 million participants—took place on June 16, calling for the complete withdrawal of the bill, an investigation into the police’s misconduct and excessive use of force, demands for the release everyone who had been arrested, as well as a retraction of the official

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229 Tsui has collaborated on another project more specifically focused on the work of Hong Kong activists. In 2015, he worked with Vancouver-based arts collective Hong Kong Exile (a group consisting of multidisciplinary artists Milton Lim, Remy Siu, and Natalie Tin Yin Gan) to produce 越界/粵界 (transgression/cantosphere), a multimedia installation that unravels centuries-long routes of migration, indentured labour, and global capital resulting from multiple networks of imperialism and possessive nationalisms (both in China and in Canada). The project consisted of text-based video projections, sound art, and a participatory mahjong table installation, all of which evoked political slogans heard in the streets of Hong Kong throughout the Umbrella Movement protests. The project attempted to bring into alignment activism against cultural erasure in Hong Kong with more localized activism to preserve the Cantonese roots of Vancouver’s Chinatown, which faces a threat of gentrification.

characterization of the demonstrations as a “riot” and the resignation of Carrie Lam as chief executive.\textsuperscript{231} Though the bill was withdrawn in September 2019, demonstrations have continued, and the movement has evolved to advocate for Hong Kong’s political autonomy, full democracy, and further inquiries into police brutality.

*Retainers of Anarchy* aligns with the work of Hong Kong activists in a few ways. First, by including figures that bare resemblances to key political leaders who have continued to advocate for Hong Kong’s sovereignty. Curator Diana Freundl notes that Tsui has created figures in his work resembling Yau Wai-ching (one of six pro-democracy figures elected to serve in Hong Kong’s legislative council in September 2016), Lam Wing-kee (the founder of Causeway Bay Books, a prominent bookstore in Hong Kong that sold political books banned in mainland China), and Joshua Wong Chi-fung, who is known internationally for his involvement in the Umbrella Movement demonstrations.\textsuperscript{232} *Retainers of Anarchy* elevates the labour of these activists by presenting them as figures following the heroic codes of similar characters fighting against imperialism and oppression in martial arts films. Tsui’s use of the conventions of these films—part of a genre of storytelling known as *mou hap* in Hong Kong—will be examined in more detail in the following section. Here, I wish to suggest that in presenting these activists as characters in this genre of story, Tsui teases out the tensions that arise when views about the homeland are so deeply ideologically divided. As Freundl suggests, by carefully interweaving contemporary politics with heroic fiction, Tsui


produces “a visually complex, richly textured landscape of personal imagination, cultural appropriation, and historical references that is synthesized to offer encounters with legend and reality.” For Freundl, this textured landscape is not unlike the multivalent landscapes of cities like Vancouver, where complex relationships between a home-in-displacement and a diasporic homeland are navigated on a constant basis. Tsui’s evocation of the Walled City operates as a way to obliquely dismantle the homeland’s stasis “between colonizers,” putting forth an argument instead for how contested values in the homeland profoundly affect experience in diaspora.

Tsui’s experiences as a member of a double diaspora are enmeshed within complex histories of movement between global sites altered by British colonialism which further inform present-day politics between Hong Kong and the PRC. In artist talks, Tsui often shares many stories from his childhood, particularly those about the media and popular culture his younger self consumed. Tsui states his family’s frequent moves between Hong Kong and Lagos (before immigrating to Canada in 1984) profoundly impacted the way he absorbs and catalogues disparate visual cultures, causing him to adopt a “kaleidoscopic” perception of the world. With *Retainers of Anarchy*, he attempts to approximate the experience of occupying different junctures between colonized places and cultures, suggesting how migration between nodes of empire spotlights complex relationalities always in the midst of change. This storying through change is especially prescient for double diasporas whose experiences do not site directly from one place to another but rather move through simultaneous places. Co-constructing time as multiple and enmeshed, storytelling involves a narrative imaginary in dialogue

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233 Freundl, 43.
234 Howie Tsui, “Visual Artist Talk with GIF Roulette.”
both with the lives of others and within one’s own lifetime of memory. It holds the potential to weave together “fragmented place-specific memories” and aids in making sense of a multi-temporal world continuously shaped by politics of movement and settlement.235

Subverting the Scroll

Retainers of Anarchy builds upon Tsui’s larger body of work that disrupts and re-configures traditional forms and formats in Chinese art to critique terms of belonging and displacement within and between imperializing regimes. Like Karen Tam, Tsui investigates the construction of various social and political imaginaries—and their historical conditions—through the aesthetic and material form of specific artistic media typically coded as “traditional.” Earlier works, such as Celestials of Saltwater City (2011) (fig. 2.5) and The Unfortunates of D’Arcy Island (2013) (fig. 2.6) compile oral histories, legends, East Asian mythologies, and Tsui’s signature disfigured characters to highlight both the unhomeliness of diaspora and the effects of the Canadian settler state’s policies of socio-spatial segregation. Tsui’s process involves accumulating stories (typically originating from a particular place referenced in the work) and organizing associated imagery. His large-scale works are often planned around one or two stories that provide a base from which other visual references, narrative vignettes, and anecdotal tangents emerge. For instance, in The Unfortunates of D’Arcy Island, Tsui tells the story of D’Arcy Island, a small island located in the Haro Strait near Vancouver Island that was once a site used to quarantine Chinese men who were suspected to be afflicted with leprosy. Tsui’s giant four-panel painting on mulberry paper is anchored by this central

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235 Siu, 145.
Figure 2.5: Howie Tsui, “Capsizing” scene from *Celestials of Saltwater City*, 2011. Composite still from multimedia performance with wooden projectors, Chinese pigment and ink on transparencies, dimensions variable. Performed 10 June, 2011 at the Vancouver Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (Centre A), Vancouver, BC. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 2.6: Howie Tsui, *The Unfortunates of D’Arcy Island*, 2013. Paint pigment on mulberry paper mounted onto board, 36” x 96”. Collection of the National Gallery of Canada. Courtesy of the artist.
story about the marooned men who, in not being cared for by medical professionals, were essentially left to die. This central story underscores a longer history of anti-Asian (and specifically, anti-Chinese racism in Canada). By the end of the nineteenth century, a period in which anti-Chinese racism was legalized in Canada, leprosy was a disease often associated with Chinese migration despite the fact that there were very few cases of it within Chinese Canadian communities. In *The Unfortunates*, Tsui’s visual storytelling subverts the convention in Chinese painting to depict figures of importance (for instance, imperial court subjects, scholars, and various Buddhist or Daoist deities) within a meditative landscape as a way to venerate their status. Here, the lepers toil within a landscape that seems to be decaying alongside them. Beyond drawing parallels between the undead and the sick, *The Unfortunates* highlights settler colonial paranoia about the “Other” and their placement within landscapes acquired through Indigenous dispossession and displacement.

Like *The Unfortunates of D’ArCY Island*, *Celestials of Saltwater City* is anchored by a number of stories connected to longer histories of anti-Chinese racism in Canada. A multimedia installation combining live narration, slide projections, and music performed at the Vancouver Centre for Contemporary Asian Art (Centre A), in *Celestials of Saltwater City*, Tsui adapts various formats—such as utsushi-e, a Japanese method of performative storytelling that involves the use of a magic lantern (a portable wooden device that allows for multiple operators and simultaneous projections), and East Asian shadow plays—to trace the transpacific journeys of migrants between multiple times,

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overlaying stories of movement between Hong Kong and Vancouver that span the
nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. The title of the performance riffs on the term
“Saltwater City,” the name given to the city of Vancouver by Cantonese-speaking
migrants, and the term “celestial,” which was once used in a derogatory way to refer to
Chinese migrants as “alien.” Tsui deliberately plays up the perceived otherness of the
subjects of the work, whose otherworldly appearances derive largely from the artist’s
very literal interpretations of Chinatown folklore and Cantonese slang. Projected onto a
paper screen in the gallery, the subjects enact scenes of mahjong games, capsizing
steamships, tea services, and supernatural possessions. Many of these scenes were
realized through stories the artist sourced from interviews with elders in Vancouver’s
Chinatown. The process of reminiscing and listening—a transfer between the speaker and
the artist—enables Tsui to highlight the historical consciousness and heterochronic time
of diaspora. Celestials of Saltwater City straddles lines between real and imagined, past
and present time to amplify and rearticulate local histories, linking them to wider
networks constituted by diasporic culture and memory.

Retainers of Anarchy departs from Tsui’s earlier works that tell stories about
Chinese diasporic communities in Canada. Here, the ever-changing tenement structure of
the Kowloon Walled City makes strange the visual and temporalizing frameworks of an
art genre that developed to express a communion with nature and to convey specific

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237 For example, in one scene in Celestials of Saltwater City, Tsui narrates a ghost story recounted to him by
an elderly Cantonese opera singer. In the story, the spirit of a stillborn baby possesses a Chinatown
prostitute. In constructing this narrative, Tsui states that he interpreted the Cantonese slang term for
“madam,” gwai po (turtle lady) literally. His prostitute character is visualized with “the facial markings of a
red-eared turtle” as a way to illustrate this reference, and the turtle lady’s eyes flash lightning bolts and
storm clouds as a way to refer to her possession. See Joni Low and Howie Tsui, “Evoking Past into Present:
The Spectral Imagination of Howie Tsui,” Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art 10, no. 6 (2011):
79. I also discuss Celestials of Saltwater City in Victoria Nolte, “Asian Canadian Minor Transnationalism:
social, political, and philosophical convictions. Tsui situates the Walled City within a landscape of trees, rivers, and distant mountains evocative of *shan shui* —or “mountain water” paintings—the genre of landscape painting produced both by professional court painters and by the elite amateur literati class. The ideological principles of *shan shui* were codified by scholar-officials who took pleasure in the visual components of calligraphy, emphasizing in their writings on the subject the balance of individual characters, the composition of a text, and the form of each stroke. A theory of calligraphy developed over time to encompass not only the embodied practice and historical transmission of writing but also concerns about its visual meaning and how it could provide insights into the relationship between an individual’s character and his artistic expression—the idea being that the higher the quality of his character, the finer his art. *Shan shui* are often produced for the purposes of expression rather than for faithfully representing existing places. The manner in which the components of a landscape are produced reminds the viewer of abbreviated forms in cursive script and can recall idealized constructs of dynastic power and subjectivity. Whereas in Canadian art history, landscapes reflect ideological terms of the settler nation, in the history of art in China landscapes are typically revered for their ability to reveal the interior world of the maker (although intended audience is key: in this vein, landscapes can also be used to reflect possession of territory and imperial power as an element of one’s character). The brushwork in landscape painting conveys a lyrical expression of nature, recalling how a verse may spontaneously spring from the mind of a poet. When mounted in the format of

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238 The functions of landscape in Canadian art history will be discussed in more detail through my analysis of Jin-me Yoon’s video works in Chapter 3.

a handscroll, the artist’s rhythmic formula of mountains, trees, and rivers intimately embeds the viewer within a generative image inspiring contemplation, eventually urging them to respond with their own poetic thoughts. *Shan shui* can be seen to function in this exalted historical context as an embodied form of worldmaking: an engagement with a world in constant generation and mediation by the mind and hand of both the artist and the viewer.

Tsui’s play with the format and exalted subject matter of *shan shui* undermines the genre’s often deeply ideological portrayal of social and political cohesion and the reclusion and self-righteousness of the scholar-official artist, presenting the viewer with a misaligned vision of multiple facts and fictions. Similar to the worlds produced in Chinese landscape paintings, the world of *Retainers of Anarchy* is constructed and evocative, based upon imagined realms depicted in martial arts stories, or *mou hap* (武俠 *wuxia* in Mandarin), and featuring a cast of characters whose appearances derive from a range of East Asian visual cultural sources: from Hong Kong horror cinema and classical compendiums on mythological beasts, places, and folklore, to Buddhist hell scrolls and tales of *yōkai*—shapeshifting supernatural beings residing in liminal zones throughout the Japanese archipelago. Popular among global Sinophone communities and broader East Asian and Western audiences alike, *mou hap* stories are typically set within an alternate world (referred to in Cantonese as *gong wu*, or “rivers and lakes”) during the waning days of the Song dynasty and follow social outcasts who, by establishing and remaining faithful to their own chivalrous codes, seek justice against a corrupt and tyrannical emperor.
While stories with mou hap themes and subject matter have a long history in Chinese literature and art, the genre became popularized during the early twentieth century when it evolved into a vehicle to address contemporary state politics, especially to critique economic policy and social injustices. Cinema scholar Stephen Teo notes that mou hap’s emphasis on warrior traditions were initially regarded as anti-imperial and a challenge to perceptions of China as the “sick man of Asia”, a stereotype (stemming from the circulation of eighteenth-century Chinese encyclopedias illustrating smallpox symptoms) that drove European expansion into China in the nineteenth century. The idea that China was diseased was used as a justification for imperialism and war. According to Teo, mou hap could function as a tool to encourage heroism, which could eventually aid in fostering a long-lost military tradition in contrast to the dominant scholar tradition that was fast in decline.\(^{240}\) However, critics of the genre claimed that it detracted from the aims and principles of the May Fourth Movement, especially the push to move away from feudalism and refashion China into a modern democratic nation. Following the Chinese Civil War, mou hap took root in the emerging Hong Kong film industry. In Hong Kong, mou hap transformed into its own separate genre of films that eschewed the fantasy element of traditional stories, attempting to tell more localized stories (in Cantonese) about heroes using their martial arts skills to fight oppression.\(^{241}\) Stories of heroism and triumph over the elite are what make mou hap a popular form of escapism, but they often produce nostalgia for an idealized anti-colonial Chinese past, one that blurs distinctions between different warrior traditions and concepts of morality. Using narrative and visual

\(^{241}\) Teo, 59.
tropes from *mou hap* to tell a story about the Walled City, Tsui emphasizes the genre’s anachronisms and imagined politics.

Imagining the multi-faceted underworld of *gong wu* in the format of an animated handscroll, Tsui engages with another monumental form of visual storytelling that has been used increasingly for the purposes of instilling social and political cohesion. As Alice Jim explains, large-scale animated scroll projects have been used increasingly in the past few decades to foster national pride among Chinese citizens, residents of Special Administrative Regions (Hong Kong and Macau), and global Sinophone communities.242 The format of *Retainers of Anarchy* was inspired by a special presentation of *River of Wisdom*, a 120-metres-long animated projection of the Northern Song dynasty (960-1127) scroll *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* 清明上河圖, which is designated a national treasure. Produced by Crystal CG, the same media company that produced the animated scroll projected during the opening and closing ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, *River of Wisdom* premiered as the centrepiece of the China Pavilion at the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai before being exhibited for a short time at the Asia World-Expo in Hong Kong. Tsui encountered the 3D-animated scroll in Hong Kong, where he states that he was initially drawn to the installation’s massive scale as well as its use of digital technology to re-imagine its source material. However, the politics of this encounter became more apparent the longer he spent time in the space, as he states that he “felt it was necessary to respond to how idealized that world was, so socially harmonious.”243

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Encountering *River of Wisdom* led Tsui to question the constructed political narrative of the original *Qingming* scroll as well as Hong Kong’s current relationship to the PRC, which in the decades following the 1997 handover, has been defined primarily by struggles to maintain political and cultural autonomy under the PRC’s party-state formulation, “one country, two systems.” Interpretations of the *Qingming* and other narrative handscrolls have in large part contributed to an ideological understanding of the Song dynasty as a period of economic growth, political stability, and artistic innovation, and this understanding of Chinese history has been evoked frequently since the mid-2000s in contemporary socio-political and economic policy, especially in the Communist Party of China (CPC)’s concept of a “harmonious society” (*hexie shehui* 和谐社会).244

Painting practices flourished under the patronage of several Song emperors, leading to a deeper enmeshment of the arts with court politics. Produced by Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (1085-1145), *Along the River during the Qingming Festival* is revered for its panoramic scene depicting happenings in and around a city initially thought to be the Northern Song capital Bianjing (present-day Kaifeng in Henan Province). As viewers unfurl the scroll they move from the mouth of the river and the rural edges of the city gradually into a climactic scene depicting a densely populated bridge. While the scroll has been celebrated for offering a glimpse into period clothing and architecture, as well as for depicting people from different social classes and the various economic activities of urban Song life, like most paintings produced for the court it contains a carefully composed, political message. The scroll functions politically to depict an image of Northern Song culture as

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peaceful and orderly. Acknowledging the lack of place-specific landmarks that would identify the city as a true-to-life depiction of Bianjing, scholars of Chinese painting have long debated the intended message behind the scroll’s construction of an idealized city, citing its ambiguous title (the paired characters 清 and 明 in the title can refer to the spring Qingming festival, which centres on ancestor worship, or can mean “clear” and “bright,” which resonates with notions of social peace and order) and the artist’s meticulous, hyper-detailed and naturalistic brushwork as evidence supporting multiple readings.\footnote{245} Naturalistic brushwork was used especially in court paintings of this calibre as a descriptive and constructive tool. Earlier interpretations of the \textit{Qingming} scroll overlook the evocative nature of the artist’s use of the brush, which, in this instance, could be read either as nostalgic or ideological, promoting ideas of a functioning society following from the natural order of the emperor’s reign.\footnote{246} Beyond this debate, after its rediscovery in Manchuria in 1945, the scroll became one of the centrepieces in the collection of the Palace Museum in Beijing where it continues to serve as a narrative representation of a significant period in China’s history, upholding the idealized worlds imagined through the adoption of Confucianism as state ideology and the codification of art in service to dynastic power. A format that pictures a continuous narrative and social landscape slowly revealed through prolonged engagement, the handscroll’s intimate scale stirs the viewer to recognize their own place within a social hierarchy emphasizing the roles of its individual members.


\footnote{246}{Hansen, 192-193.}
Despite faithfully reproducing its imagery, political functions, and ideology, the monumental scale of *River of Wisdom* notably expands the affective conventions of proximity and movement and how they make and mark time in the original *Qingming* scroll. Videos and images of the scroll have helped prolong its life, celebrate it as a work of technological achievement, and circulate its transhistorical message of peaceful order and social cohesion beyond its intended audience. In *Retainers of Anarchy*, Tsui employs similar elements of scale and mediation to turn the political functions and visual conventions of the *Qingming* scroll on their head while also examining how the *River of Wisdom* scroll’s Neo-Confucian vision of a harmonious society undergirds how the CPC exercises its power in Hong Kong and in diaspora. The installation has been exhibited in a number of places in Canada, including in Ottawa, Toronto, Vancouver, and Victoria, as well as internationally, in Xi’an and Sydney. While Canadian galleries have highlighted the installation’s diasporic critique, when exhibited in China, the work’s political message was significantly downplayed. Promotional materials for the exhibition in Xi’an stated in an oblique way that the installation only makes reference to “the life of heroes and the communities they protect during the Song Dynasty (960-1279 AD).”

The fact that the work reflects upon Hong Kong simultaneously in past and present is completely overlooked. As SY Chan notes, while the CPC promotes a policy of anti-imperialism, such a policy has not resulted in a decolonized Hong Kong. Rather:

> the Chinese and Hong Kong governments have, for the most part, left intact and continue to benefit from political and economic structures that reproduce domination and exploitation of the masses by a privileged elite. Moreover, when citizens contest these policies and demand reform, local

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and national authorities often turn to colonial-era practices of repression to stifle dissent.\textsuperscript{248}

Urban geographer and China studies scholar Carolyn Cartier traces how evocations of China’s imperial history and its terms of social cohesion obscure the real contestation of values reshaping life and the production of space in Hong Kong in the post-handover era. Looking at a number of pro-democracy activist artworks staged in public spaces around Hong Kong, Cartier comments on how the subtle ways that artists in Hong Kong stage dissent often “make apprehensible the politically unsayable that frames the aesthetics of politics in this fugitive time of the SAR.”\textsuperscript{249} Retainers of Anarchy attempts to narrativize these unsayable politics of time and place by producing a fictionalized version of real politics. Fictionalization is an element that Tsui has employed across his body of work, one that stems from observing how fiction plays a role in the production of Chinese culture in diaspora. Indeed, fictionalization can operate as an important self-preservation tactic, as Cho notes in her study of the literary and visual culture of small town Chinese Canadian restaurants.\textsuperscript{250} Through elements of fiction, diasporas have forged their own sense of agency and culture and have produced ways to relate to each other. Elements of fiction magnify the real politics examined within Retainers of Anarchy as it generates for the viewer a kaleidoscopic view of Hong Kong’s state of flux.

Like its source materials, Retainers of Anarchy moves between real-life and fictional realms to tell a story straddling multiple times and spaces. A host of characters

\textsuperscript{248} SY Chan, “Decolonization as Egalitarian Transformation: Hong Kong’s Unfinished Struggle,” in \textit{Reorienting Hong Kong’s Resistance: Leftism, Decoloniality, and Internationalism}, eds. Wen Liu, JN Chien, Christina Chung, and Ellie Tse (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan Singapore, 2022), 75.

\textsuperscript{249} Cartier, 685.

\textsuperscript{250} Cho, \textit{Eating Chinese}. Fictionalization within the space of a Chinese Canadian restaurant refers to how specific food items—like chop suey—were invented in diaspora out of a scarcity of ingredients but marketed to Western consumers as “authentic” Chinese food. There is much to say about how diasporic approximations of certain dishes are important sites of culture and history.
inhabit a sprawling vista with clusters of trees and a snaking river. Typifying the vagabonds, disbanded soldiers, labourers, and other outcasts one would ordinarily find in *mou hap*, these figures swing from knotted tree branches, guide a boat along the riverbank, smoke, drink tea, and practice martial arts. Along with Tsui’s depictions of prominent Hong Kong-based activists, some of these characters are based on Jin Yong’s Condor Trilogy, a novel series thought to epitomize the *mou hap* genre. To the right and in close proximity to the Walled City, a figure wearing resplendent yellow robes is trailed by a cluster of zombified attendants (fig. 2.7). The robed figure carries a bell and a banner that suggests he is meant to be an exaggerated caricature of an emperor. Whenever the Emperor rings the bell his attendants—who are dressed as scholar-officials serving in his government—respond accordingly, stopping or starting their slow march through the painted space. Complementing this cluster of characters, on the far-left side of the installation an outlaw is seen lynching another scholar-official with a paper scroll in his
hands. By depicting China’s historical elite in a manner that both alludes to and expands upon the *mou hap* genre—variably as brainless zombies serving a corrupt leader or as a casualty to an act of revenge—Tsui critically engages with the function of classical Chinese paintings to align the painter with Confucian virtues, such as loyalty to authority and social cohesion. In rendering a diasporic critique of a “Chinese” homeland, *Retainers of Anarchy* exposes how ideological constructions of history evoked to imply order and stability in reality spell a forced and violent cohesion to a singular way of being-in-the-world. Whereas Tam’s evocation of literati idealism elevates Lee Nam’s status as an immigrant artist during an era of increased hostility towards migrants from China (see Chapter 1), Tsui’s sharp satire of literati culture questions the relevancy of elite forms of art to diasporic audiences.

While the PRC heavily censors *mou hap* due to its anarchist themes, the genre has continued to flourish in Hong Kong. *Mou hap*’s constructed vision of China’s past has become more deeply entrenched as the genre was deployed in new media (such as in films, television series, and video games) and became widely accessible beyond its Sinophone audiences.\(^{251}\) Tsui specifically employs *mou hap* as “surrogate memory” for a Hong Kong he only briefly encountered in his youth.\(^{252}\) Deploying the traditional narrative functions of the scroll, Tsui evokes this genre’s often contradictory use as both a highly commercialized form of Chinese culture and as a liberating force, a manner through which to narrate worlds of possibility. *Parallax Chambers* (2018), a companion piece to *Retainers of Anarchy* (exhibited together in Tsui’s solo show, *From swelling...

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\(^{252}\) Freundl, 34.
shadows, we draw our bows, from September 26, 2020 to January 3, 2021 at the Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery in Toronto) grapples more closely with the layered elements and contradictions of mou hap (fig. 2.8). The animated installation features many of the same characters and scenes witnessed in the Walled City and similarly runs through a digital algorithm, shuffling and presenting scenes at random. Rather than surveying the entire structure of the Walled City situated in the landscape, here the viewer is presented with individual, sectioned-off rooms. Mutant figures lurk and haunt these claustrophobic spaces where they meditate, fight one another, undergo physical training, or transform into human-animal hybrids. Like their counterparts in Retainers of Anarchy, these figures are subversive rather than heroic, and their situations in hermetically sealed boxes suggest a heightened state of anxiety. By telling the stories of these figures through random sequence and via subverting the subject matter and format of a traditional art
practice, Tsui questions the impacts of state politics on those living in displacement: what happens when the concept of a homeland is just as nebulous and ever-changing as the situation of diaspora? Tsui relates the constructed worlds of *mou hap* to the experience of working within a “larger conceptual frame of fluctuating identities and culture” and the feeling of inhabiting spaces “between reality, history, and fiction.” This manner of storytelling embracing uncertainty and contradiction reflects a process of re-orienting the diasporic self in search of modes to connect across different times and places and recognizes how the lived time of diaspora pulls one towards different constellations of self, community, and history.

**Storytelling and Tea**

Deriving the title of her installation from the Punjabi word for “voice,” in *Avaaz*, Dipna Horra likewise produces a world in diaspora straddling the lines between reality, history, and fiction. The stories told in her installation highlight how colonization of the Indian subcontinent put into motion her family’s migration story. They also reveal how conceptions of an Indian homeland have shifted as a result of such colonial migrations, producing a diaspora best understood as profoundly heterogeneous. *Avaaz* is anchored by the voice of the artist’s father, which emanates from the teapot placed in the centre of the table, recounting stories of migrations that complicate divisions between colonizer and colonized. He first relives his grandfather’s immigration from India to Kenya in 1889, which was part of a larger wave of approximately 29 million Indians who left the subcontinent via Britain’s imperial labour and trade networks. The Indian diaspora in Kenya grew exponentially following Kenya’s absorption into the East Africa Protectorate

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253 Baker, “Retainers of Anarchy: In Conversation with Howie Tsui.”
in 1895. Occupying middling positions within a colonial hierarchy as merchants, government clerks, and bureaucrats—as well as indentured labourers—Indian migrants “were intimately connected with the expansion of the empire as agents of modernity,” often viewing themselves as settlers.\textsuperscript{254} By 1963 (the year of Kenyan Independence) Indians constituted 30 percent of the population of the city of Nairobi and two percent of the nation’s overall population. Sana Aiyar writes that British colonialism helped establish for Indians both territorial and generational relations to Kenya as a second homeland, a place that facilitated “moments of mobility and immobility” as well as “ideas and practices concerning politics, class, and race that [have] shaped Indian claims and languages of belonging.”\textsuperscript{255} Indian settlers responded to the anti-colonial movement in Kenya in many ways depending on a number of factors, including their political orientations, their occupations, and their geographical location. As Aiyar notes, they typically occupied “a space between rebel and loyalist, simultaneously involved in supporting and suppressing” Kenyan independence.\textsuperscript{256}

After discussing his grandfather’s life in Kenya in the late nineteenth century, Horra’s father tells a story about his uncle, Girdhari Lal Vidyarthi, a journalist who founded \textit{The Colonial Times} newspaper in Nairobi in 1933. Vidyarthi was an active member of the anti-colonial movement in Kenya and was tried for sedition for his criticism of the British government and his defence of Kenyan nationalism. As Horra explains:

\begin{quote}
My father’s story [narrated] the political upheaval that occurred from the 1950s to the 1970s in Nairobi. During these years there was a shift from British rule to independence in 1963, when the Kenya African National
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{255} Aiyar, 7-8.
\textsuperscript{256} Aiyar, 181.
\end{flushright}
Union obtained political power. Violence was a part of these movements and freedom of speech was supressed. My family experienced segregation and fear in the pre-independence years, and a lack of job opportunities and possibilities [...] in the post-independence period: they could not see a future for themselves in Nairobi.257

Disclosing Vidyarthi’s political activism, Horra’s father’s narration underscores how the heterogeneous positionality of Indians living in diaspora is reflective not only of the subcontinent’s immense diversity and density, but also of the fractious geopolitics of this region and those it remains connected to.258 As with all diasporas, the construction of a unifying narrative is impossible—however the multiplicity of Indian diasporas in terms of politics, religion, language, and cultural expression is especially so. And yet, the creative staging of stories like those told by Horra’s father attempt to make sense of multiplicity and to work through the co-existence of “old” diasporas within “new” migrations, a binaristic distinction examined by Vijay Mishra. The “old” signifies “early modern, classic capitalist or, more specifically, nineteenth-century indenture” while the new is related to “late modern or late capitalist” flexible citizens—each “traverse two different kinds of topographies” but nonetheless continue to refract one another.259 For Mishra, this binary has a strategic and productive function, for it recognizes how earlier phases of migration impact the lasting psychic imaginary of a diaspora even as the conditions that constitute a diaspora continue to change. This is not a question of establishing essential terms or contours of diasporic identity or laying claim to a homeland—but rather a question of rethinking serial migration beyond successive movement. Mishra’s conception of old and new is a reflection of the lived time of diaspora, a reflection of how

257 Horra, 178.
259 Mishra, 13.
the past spills over as a residual return. The stories recounted in *Avaaz* highlight the impossibility of a chronology of diasporic encounter. Instead, the stories enact a residual sense of time and movement—the narrative thickens through tangents, moments of recall, and repetition, giving shape to many starting and stopping points. *Avaaz* responds to the embodied global politics of being part of a double diaspora while also re-examining the private and political lives of family members who made multiple sites their home.

The old impacts the new in the context of *Avaaz* via stories of movements made in haste, which are heard through the material properties of a Staffordshire tea set retrofitted as a speaker. Staffordshire rose to prominence as a centre of English ceramics production in the eighteenth century (after European kilns were able to replicate the production of Chinese porcelain). These vessels reflect how the production of and performance within domestic space in the West is coded through empire. In particular, the cultivation, circulation, and consumption of tea—a staple product signifying Englishness—is bound to colonial violence; to wars waged for the purposes of monopolizing global trade and to the recruitment and exploitation of indentured labourers from India to toil in tea estates throughout Asia. In the decades following the decolonization of its former colonies, Britain lost its monopoly on the global tea market. A leisurely cup of tea became a site of national longing for the glory days of empire, as manufacturers lamented that it was the insatiable thirst of Britons that had made the nation a world power. As Ming Tiampo suggests, tea provides a historical framework to help visualize Asia’s intertwined colonial and diasporic histories in a manner similar to how the slave ship serves as a metaphor for Paul Gilroy to imagine the Black Atlantic.

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Tea’s centrality to English life is constructed in tandem with its construction of empire, therefore serving as a device to examine Asia’s “histories of being worlded from other places.” In Canada during the early twentieth century, tea and the associated aesthetics of an English tea set were regarded as class signifiers and as commodities reflecting settler colonial heritage. Though Indian migrants to Canada were, like their white settler counterparts, subjects of the British Empire at this time, the terms of their colonial subjectivity were “undesirable” in contrast to the desirability of white settlers. Concurrent with a rapidly increasing Indian immigration to Canada, the Bengal-based anti-colonial Swadeshi movement was gaining momentum, opposing ongoing British rule of the subcontinent. Historian Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty argues that the increase in Indian immigration in the early twentieth century is linked to the burgeoning anti-colonial movement as “Indians were leaving the country by land and sea, not only in quest of better opportunities but also of [...] new ideas.” The presence of Indian and other South Asian migrants in Canada created an acute anxiety in the minds of imperial authorities. Not only did their claims to citizenship as subjects of the British Empire disturb the process of constructing a “white man’s country,” but their migrations reminded colonialists of the widespread political activism and radicalization of Indians in their homeland, efforts that British authorities were unsuccessfully trying to quell. Asserting legal independence as a self-governing dominion, the Canadian government enacted measures to curb immigration from India, such as removing direct routes between

262 Canada’s South Asian population (encompassing migrations from present-day India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Nepal) increased rapidly between the years 1904 and 1908—the year the “continuous journey” rule was implemented to curb migration from the subcontinent—building from a total of 45 migrants in 1904 to 2,623 in 1908.
the two nations and instituting the continuous journey rule, as well as to disenfranchise already settled communities. Sarjeet Singh Jagpal notes that “the implications of these actions were far-reaching.”

South Asians could not participate in public life in Canada—nor could they become full Canadian citizens—until 1947, the same year as the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. Ongoing turmoil in India coinciding with the dispossession and racialization of Indian migrants in Canada made for compounded terms of undesirability.

Placing the tea set in the centre of a generic kitchen table, Horra highlights the cultural and class aspirations of immigrants and how these same aspirations—typically associated with the stereotype of Asians as a “model minority”—often suppress their voices and their histories. Sealed to dampen the sound, the tea set muffles the disembodied voices while simultaneously acting as the conduit to tell their stories—an allusion that signals doubly to how colonialism frames migratory encounters and how memory can soften as it is transmitted between generations, in the process of possible subsequent migrations. The installation therefore requires the viewer to move closer to the table in order to effectively hear its stories. Viewers become more socially intimate both with each other and with the histories entangled by and with the consumption of tea. Producing a multi-layered soundscape that echoes serial migrations and the multi-temporality of diaspora, *Avaaz* narrates how familiar, intergenerational encounters are part of a broader political landscape of Indian migration, a global social imaginary formed through many nodal points within a colonial network.

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264 Jagpal, 24.
Ritualizing Stories, Co-narrating Diaspora

In order to stage the structural effects of lived time in diaspora, with Avaaz, Horra strips the visual of its exalted place in the history of art, employing sound to construct a site through which her family’s migration stories are co-narrated and ritualized. As Horra’s father recounts stories about his grandfather and his uncle, other members of the family can be heard casually speaking to each other, going about their daily lives completely unseen. The voice of a five-year-old Horra emanates from the sugar bowl, singing songs in English and French. As time passes in the teatime ritual, a tension mounts between the warm, comforting atmosphere produced by familiar household sounds and the disconcerting feeling of listening to disembodied voices. These voices—both in their disembodiment as well as via the stories and anecdotes they share with the viewer—speak to the dissociative feelings related to the family’s many migrations, processes in which new languages and customs had to be learned. The co-narrated atmosphere of Avaaz skirts the lines between imaginary and staged, localized and displaced. The installation thereby enables both Horra and the viewer to participate in experiences that have shaped her family’s history and sense of belonging in diaspora.

A privileged element of the artist’s body of work, sound fabricates a phenomenological experience of her family’s history. Breaching notions of presence, the disembodied voices are layered against field recordings the artist made throughout the city of Ottawa with the use of a binaural recording device fashioned from a molding of her ears. Exhibited alongside her installation works as a miniature sculpture, with the recording device—titled Dipna’s Ears (2009)—the artist investigates the audible registers of the city where much of her family currently resides. Sounds of car engines and horns, the buzz of electric wiring, and the squawks of birds and other wildlife in the
city’s core are filtered through the artist’s ears before they are encountered by the viewer. This ambient noise resonates with the calm and reflective tone of Horra’s father’s voice and with the chattering of various family members moving through their daily lives as unseen entities. The noise of the city also helps ground the installation’s evocation of the site of home to a specific place, undermining conceptions of diasporic homes that resist the politics of emplacement. In a conversation with another Ottawa-based artist, nichola feldman-kiss, Horra notes that Ottawa plays a significant role in a number of her works because it “picked us” (referring to her family). Upon moving to the suburbs of Ottawa, Horra’s family found a place in which to stay after “finding no future” in Nairobi. The city of Ottawa is thereby more than just a backdrop. It is a relational space that joins in the co-narration of Horra’s family’s stories and a sited context in which to ground the narrative flow, glimpsing, perhaps momentarily, at the many practices of dwelling held in tension within the nation’s capital. With Avaaz, Horra gives sound a location, a time and place through which to re-orient the stories she and her family members continue to carry.

Avaaz brings about an awareness of how sound enhances relational being in a world made strange. For LaBelle, sound operates “through modes of spatiality, from the immediate present to the distant transmission, from inside one’s thoughts and toward others, from immaterial wave to material mass, from the here and now to the there and then.” As formless being-in-the-world, sound performs with and through a space, structuring intimacies and thickening the surroundings through additional layers of

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267 LaBelle, xiii.
meaning. Indeed, sound is a “thinging thing” Voegelin suggests (evoking Heidegger), a contingent materiality that “expands and contracts space by accumulating reverberation, relocating place beyond itself, […] and inhabiting always more than one place.”

Though an individual sound can be fleeting, its sonic properties linger in the mind and spark memories of sonic encounters previously lived. For instance, as I write this, I can still hear in my mind the sound of my baby stirring from sleep in the next room, even though she woke from her nap almost an hour ago. This sound merges with the soft mechanical murmur of my partner’s computer, a sound that fills out our home office, acting as a constant companion to my thoughts and as the soundtrack to my work day. Boundless and yet site specific, sound can stick with the listener even after its source has been quieted. The fleeting and yet resonant property of sound constitutes a tool for reworlding, for sound can alter experience of a world already in process.

The contrast between sound’s formlessness and the visual world of art is key to the conceptualization of sound art, a field of art-making with disputed roots and disagreements over what the term “sound art” actually entails. As Alan Licht notes, many artists, curators, and scholars have applied the term to refer to artworks in which sound is the primary material or medium. Practitioners in the field often insist that such works are more experimental in nature. Works frequently cited as early forms of sound art include those by twentieth-century futurists such as Russian avant-garde artist Arseny Araamov, whose Symphony of the Sirens (1919-1923) “combined fog horns, steam locomotives, sounds of marching regiments, artillery batteries, and hydroplanes with

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268 Voegelin, 2.
269 LaBelle, xiii.
those of whistles and factory sirens,”271 and the sound poetry and performances of Dadaists like Hugo Ball and Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven. By the mid-twentieth century, artists working in a number of experimental art forms, from performance to conceptualism and new media, took up the formless potential offered by sound as a medium to produce new methods of expression. Many artists associated with the international, interdisciplinary artist community known as Fluxus, for instance, experimented with the boundaries between visual art and music. Fluxus “event scores”, such as instructional works by George Brecht, Mieko Shiomi, and Yoko Ono, recontextualize actions, objects, and ideas as durational performances, often evoking musicality to enmesh the participant within their environment and engage them in an experience of lived time. In his research into histories of sound art, LaBelle draws connections between mid-twentieth century art movements that utilized sound and the formation of site-specific art practices that sought to critique structures and institutions of artmaking. He notes that artists working between performance and site specificity turned to immaterial and conceptual forms like sound to rethink the primacy of objects in the history of art. Sound and site-specific art are naturally aligned through their emphasis on environments, bodies, and ideas rather than on a single object.272 Because the terms of what constitutes sound art remain nebulous and conflicting, for the purposes of my analysis of Horra’s installation works, I understand sound art as an expanding art form that “both stimulates and builds, challenges and destructs, reinvents and subverts” the

272 LaBelle, xiv.
worldmaking capacities of art. Sound accents and highlights the timespace questions posed by artworks made in response to a site. Possessing generative properties, sound art shifts attention to the intangible, time-based worlds we inhabit, embedding the listener within a locality while also connecting them further afield.

Horra’s interest in exploring the capacity of sound as an art medium stems in large part from her professional background in architecture and multimedia. Investigating interrelations between space, time, migration, and cultural identity, Horra typically works with autobiographical elements, reconstructing childhood memories through the stories her parents and grandparents have told throughout her life. Earlier works, such as *Between the Folds* (2005-2007), installed for the group exhibition *My Culture Includes My Scene* (June 25-August 21, 2005 at the Ottawa Art Gallery) examine this process of reconstructed memory in the form of a video projection augmented by sound. Suspended from the ceiling and projected onto large sheets of white cloth is a video of the artist’s mother folding and unfolding the drapes of a sari to an audio mix of Kathak dance, tabla rhythms, and chanting. This gesture is a poetic act that reconciles Horra to one aspect of her complicated heritage as a member of a double diaspora—a connection to cultural knowledges and stories that are not entirely her own but have nonetheless deeply and affectively constituted her sense of time and place. As Horra explains, while she has only worn a sari for specific occasions, the garment is a large part of her mother’s life and identity in diaspora. The artist captures her mother’s gestures in the video in

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273 Groth and Schulze, 6.
274 Horra earned her Ph.D. in Architecture from the Azrieli School of Architecture and Urbanism at Carleton University.
275 Howie Tsui also exhibited work in this group exhibition curated by Milena Placentile.
276 Horra, 180.
fragmented views, giving the garment moments of complete clarity—an indexical sign the artist associates with her mother’s migration story. Originating in Northern India, Kathak dance traditions constitute forms of storytelling through gestures, body movements, and facial expressions. In *Between the Folds*, this form of corporeal storytelling is set to the rhythm of the music, which lulls the viewer into a space of encounter taking shape against the tactile folds of the draped cloth. During opening night of the exhibition at the Ottawa Art Gallery, the fabric screen also served to partially conceal the artist and her mother during a performance in which they wrapped Horra in a sari, performing this ritual several times and encouraging audience members to participate. Horra writes that this performance acted as a form of intergenerational and intercultural transfer: “In a gesture to share personal cultural traditions with the public, my mother imparted her knowledge to several people by teaching them how to wrap a sari on their bodies for the first time.”

Like Horra, the audience members punctuated her mother’s gestural narration with their own bodies, memories, and knowledges. *Between the Folds* relates to *Avaaz* via this use of sound and story to produce a ritual space in which to imagine meetings of past and present, family and self. By engaging with a cultural object like the sari, the artist emphasizes her relationship to her family through repetition and transfer—through stories told and retold, heard and reheard, and through her witness to her mother’s daily habits of dress.

Horra does not commit herself to the act of storytelling but rather collaborates with members of her family. *Between the Folds* and *Avaaz* are built around her parents taking on the position as the storyteller—either through voice or through gesture—

277 Horra, 180.
whereas another sound installation, *Dhunia* (2012-2014) features Horra’s grandmother as the storyteller. *Dhunia* is an evolving project that has been exhibited in a number of arrangements: notably, as a seven-channel audio installation at A Space Gallery in Toronto (March 8-March 31, 2012) and as an eight-channel audio installation at the Art Gallery of Mississauga (November 6, 2014-January 1, 2015). The installation consists of a series of windows individually suspended from the ceiling. The window motif is one Horra continues from the conceptualization of *Avaaz*. Here, the windows are presented as sculptural objects that contain within them voice coils (an essential part of an electronic speaker), low-level amplifiers, and circuit boards that loop the 24-minute audio file. Removed from old farm houses in the Ottawa Valley, when hung in the exhibition space the windows cast long shadows across the bare floor, creating a threshold space straddling the exterior and interior space of the home. Acting as conduits for sound and as literal framing devices, the suspended windows play a multi-channel recording of Horra’s grandmother recounting, in Punjabi, a parable about the Hindu goddess Parvati’s quest for material wealth. A frequent reader of Hindu religious and philosophical texts, such as the Vedas and the Upanishads, Horra’s grandmother (who resided in the United Kingdom for much of Horra’s childhood) committed this parable to memory. Confidentially reciting a story that she has told time and time again, her voice reverberates with the ambient sounds of birds, train whistles, and rushing subway cars, suggesting a body trapped between material and non-material realms.278 Cathy Lane suggests that sound works incorporating disembodied voices, especially feminine-coded voices, highlight a productive tension between the presence of the voice and the absence of the body it

278 The title of the work derives from a Punjabi-language term that can be translated as “the present world,” a reference to material concerns in opposition to the concerns of the supernatural or spiritual realm.
suggests.279 This tension is heightened in Dhunia, where the disembodied voice speaks
the story into space while inviting the viewer to listen with their entire body as they move
through the installation. feldman-kiss highlights this uncanny intimacy, via slippages
between presence and absence, in her description of the work:

The space is visually austere yet sonically thick. Like magic, each gently
vibrating pane tells its own story. I need to work a little to hear the
words. I stand close to the frame—a little too close. I’m listening in. I am
an intruder in the conversation. I am on the outside looking inside. I
move to the next window. I am offered another story.280

Looking for signs of a body, the viewer grasps instead at a voice that has historically been
cast outside public spaces of conversation. The voice of Horra’s grandmother, speaking
her own language, is a refusal to assimilate—to be unheard in a cultural context that
attempts to erase her—and it contrasts the warbled singing voice of Horra’s younger self
in Avaaz, which the artist states reflects some of her first experiences in Canada, namely
how she slowly lost her grasp on her first language, Punjabi, as she adopted English and
French.281 Within this almost-home space, the disembodied voice speaking Punjabi
parallels a video piece that accompanies the window installation. The video, featuring the
artist’s handwritten English translation of her grandmother’s parable, “serves as a
metaphor for the artist’s personal voice”, reflecting an instance in which cultural
knowledges become dislocated and then relocated in settler vernacular.282 Horra’s
translation can also be read as a moment of interjection not unlike the moments in Avaaz

279 Cathy Lane, “Gender, Intimacy, and Voices in Sound Art: Encouragements, Self-Portraits, and Shadow
Walks,” in The Bloomsbury Handbook of Sound Art, eds. Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze (London: Bloomsbury
280 nichola feldman-kiss and Dipna Horra, “nichola feldman-kiss and Dipna Horra in Conversation,” in
Other Places: Reflections on Media Arts in Canada, ed. Deanna Bowen (Toronto: Media Arts Network of
Ontario, 2019), 80.
281 Horra, 184-185.
when her youthful singing voice overlaps with her father’s meandering narration.

Through translation, Horra stages a dialogue with her grandmother and attempts to produce her own embodied meaning within the linguistic frameworks available to her.

Horra positions herself as an engaged listener and participant in her family’s stories, recalling the ways in which storytelling within familial relationships underscores intersubjective practices of meaning making. Through co-narration, Horra’s installations stage a lyrical study of the diasporic self and its co-constitution through familial rituals. Co-narration is a dynamic process of story and memory requiring not only a storyteller who crafts a monologue, but a listener who reshapes it as dialogue. As the storyteller speaks, the listener dialogues not solely through voice (interjecting and/or muttering agreement, disagreement, or understanding), but also by filtering and reshaping the storyteller’s narration with their own experience and memory. The listener, in this regard, “moves from receptive audience member to responsive performer.” Katherine Borland argues that this give-and-take between the storyteller and the listener in a story told into a narrative that is embodied transgenerationally—a process of making each other visible and recognizing shared and yet differentiated relations to a past. Avaaz highlights this practice of embodied transfer by evoking gatherings that Horra’s family commonly participate in—evenings in which they sit around the kitchen table, drinking tea and reminiscing, sharing stories form myth and from everyday life.

In Avaaz, the audio track containing the voices of Horra’s father and family members is played on an endless loop. The sonorous quality of the voices telling stories

\[283\] feldman-kiss and Horra, 83.
\[285\] Borland, 440.
and sharing bits of gossip is enhanced as time elapses. By playing this vocal track on a loop, Horra illustrates how particular stories become part of a family’s constructed history when they are told again and again. Listeners and narrators alike come to “anticipate and even speak each other’s words”, adding layers of multivocality to the performance of the narrative. Horra enhances the way that the stories blend into the retrofitted furniture and thicken the space by using low frequency sounds—such as the din of household appliances, the sounds of footsteps, doors opening and closing, and the sounds of thunder—that vibrate the window and the tea set on the table, a strategy that underwrites “the resistance to colonialism contained in [her] father’s accounts.” This notion of a “storm brewing” gives a sonic quality to colonial memory, transforming an unseen force into one that is continually felt. The act of listening to repeated and residual environmental sounds “opens the idea of space and time to produce places whose actuality wanders and changes, and that depend on the listener, as inhabitant, to make them real.” Thus, repurposed as “sound”, the stories multiply and expand the space of the installation, generating listeners and embodied viewpoints that speak to the plurality of the experiences recounted and co-narrated.

Repetition transforms Horra’s family stories into a domestic soundtrack. Avaaz then takes this soundtrack and stages it as a social event, a sonorous experience that is further modulated through the listening bodies of visitors who participate in the family’s storytelling by their virtue of being there in the space. The durational experience of the work calls to mind early works by John Cage who, by inserting the presence of the

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286 Borland, 445.
287 Horra, 178.
288 Voegelin, 18.
listener, “[resituated] the terms by which the referent of [sound] takes on social weight, beyond symbolic systems and toward immediacy and the profound presence of being there.”289 Horra names Cage as an influence to her art practice, explaining that his emphasis on “the inventive, performative nature of daily life” resonated with her interest in deploying sound to construct social spaces where diaspora, culture, and memory intersect.290 Much of Cage’s work emphasizes the immediacy of being in the room and regards sound as gesture, ritual, and performance. Cage’s 1952 composition, 4’33, for instance, attunes the audience to environmental sounds rather than an instrumental score. 

*Avaaz* operates in a similar manner to render her family stories as environmental sounds. It speaks Horra’s family stories to a wider public, fashioning new engaged listeners who, like the artist, filter and reshape the family’s history. In this way, *Avaaz* presents “a series of narrative performances [emerging] and [connecting] not simply around a given topic but by patterns of repetition with variation”,291 which, similar to Tam’s installation works, renders a space made meaningful through habit, use, and remembering. Through co-narration, *Avaaz* renders the site of the home-in-displacement as “a precise and powerful kind of identification” that takes as its central framework “relations of recognition” rather than origins.292 Horra does not need to be the originator of her family’s history to communicate it so vividly. Instead, her co-narration ritualizes an experience of being there with memory. Horra’s installation works question not only how the past continues to affect the present, but what *sounds* of the past can tell us about how we make meaning in a world made strange through displacement.

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289 LaBelle, 7-8.
290 Horra, 182.
291 Borland, 442.
292 Axel, 423.
Reconfiguring the Lived Time of Diaspora

From moving image to sound, this chapter has examined how storytelling functions in installations by Horra and Tsui to narrate historical disjuncture and subject positions beyond established modes of representation. Their stories give form to migratory experiences by “[constructing] a shared experience of displacement as well as an emergent map” of transitional spaces, communities, and homes constituted through their dispersal and forms of recognition.²⁹³ My comparative analysis of the installations by Horra and Tsui has examined the narrative modes and formats used to tell stories that bring about a sense of living within multiple and simultaneous senses of time and space: within memories that are not entirely one’s own but that nonetheless impact the ways in which diasporic subjects understand themselves within the vibrant worlds they co-construct. Sensing multi-temporality is key for bringing about what Cheah refers to as the durational force of worlding, the idea that worldmaking is not a solely cartographic or representational process but a practice of ethical engagement with a world in process. Stories are necessary for grasping this sense of processual identification, which Cheah insists gives rise to acting in the interests of creating a better world.²⁹⁴ Though Cheah assumes a universalist stance that I believe is risky when theorizing Asian Canadian art as worldmaking (for it risks extrapolating the specific historical and social stakes involved in the political project of the Asian Canadian movement), I insist that conceptualizing how art enacts being-in-the-world is useful if we wish to dismantle reductive methods of interpretation.

²⁹³ Siu, 144.
²⁹⁴ Cheah, *What is a World?*, 192.
The durational nature of the works examined in this chapter highlights the many ways in which we can witness and feel world-historical processes in motion. Through visual references and practices of co-narration, both artists tell stories that unfold a sense of lived time in diaspora by reconfiguring the temporal frames of their respective media. For instance, in *Retainers of Anarchy*, Tsui critiques to conflicted and conflicting visions of China’s past and Hong Kong’s future by “depicting an ungoverned, chaotic, dangerous world, a liminal zone ordered by its own rules and its own codes of conduct.”

The manner through which the viewer comes to know this world is integral to the work’s storytelling. Scenes depicting happenings within and beyond the Kowloon Walled City move in and out of focus with the use of a digital algorithm that randomizes the selection of vignettes and the narrative sequence. Though technologically composed, this method of visualization does not subtend the viewer’s ability to engage with the scroll. Instead, it augments the multi-sensorial experience of reading a traditional paper scroll where, through physical manipulation, the viewer is able to choose the pace and the sequence, moving not only forward, but backward to pause and further reflect upon a painted scene, a poem, or a colophon with the knowledge of what follows. Through randomization, Tsui’s algorithmic animation maintains the scroll’s function as a generative storytelling medium by relying on the viewer’s active engagement with its imagery. While viewers cannot control the narrative, they can participate in a critical aspect of the scroll’s capacity to constitute a world through the element of anticipation. Anticipation, according to Wu Hung, is what determines the scroll’s storytelling temporality, which is not always linear but rather determined by the whims and the interest of the viewer. As Wu explains:

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Since a full presentation of a long scroll depends on the spectator’s enthusiasm and engagement (i.e.: his patience to unroll the scroll to the end), the exposed images should always fulfil a dual function. On the one hand, these images should be expressive for what they are; on the other, they should stir up the viewer’s interest in the following section that is still rolled up. The unspoken question—What’s next?—is typical of a handscroll and can be manipulated into endless variations: What are these figures looking at? What are these chariots or boats moving towards? Where is this stream or path leading to? In a handscroll, the sense of suspense is achieved by delaying answers to these questions.296

Suspense is key to the handscroll’s capacity to visually tell stories and is enhanced by the viewer continuously oscillating between two forms of expression—between words and images. A scroll’s narrative format therefore not only functions to stir anticipation of what comes next in the story. It also moves the viewer to examine relationships between its forms, especially, how the meaningful interplay of words and images confirm, extend, or contradict one another. Reading the scroll for form and narrative requires time spent analyzing the artist’s stylistic allusions—potentially, comparing them to the works of earlier masters and contemporaries—as well as to read and parse inscriptions, many of which have been added as additional historiographic layers to the scroll, a record of former owners and readers. Suspenseful engagement also extends to the appreciation of the “kinaesthetic dimension of [the artist’s] calligraphy,” as the viewer “follows stroke order and pauses, moments when the brush must again be dipped” in ink.297 To enter into the world of a scroll is to enter into a process of becoming, one made through a complex “triangulation and multiplication of relations, mediated by time and space, image and text, place and position.”298

298 De-nin D. Lee, 95.
Since each sequence is randomized, the most effective way to engage with Tsui’s storytelling is through suspenseful anticipation of which figures or events will appear next and to speculate whether or not these characters or events have been seen previously. Some of the figures were produced specifically for *Retainers of Anarchy*, others are repurposed from earlier works, but all are animated in a manner that requires the viewer spend a considerable amount of time making sense of and responding to their appearances and their actions. With more time spent engaging with the scroll, the figures, who initially appear as strange or unnerving, become increasingly familiar and their actions no longer seem random. In many ways, Tsui’s ability to re-configure the temporality of the traditional medium speaks to the current manner in which one would view a scroll today.

Divorced from its intended context and audience—the intimate setting of a scholar’s garden—handscrolls have become essentially frozen in time. Kept under glass in a museum, handscrolls are either displayed so that only one section is available to be read, or they are unfurled in their entirety, forcing the viewer to walk the length of the display case. In these circumstances, handscrolls no longer move and instead present the entirety of a story in a single moment.\(^{299}\) Tsui’s re-configuration reflects the scroll’s temporal frame. However, rather than presenting a nostalgic vision of China’s history (such as in the *River of Wisdom* scroll), he calls into question the politics of this constructed time. Depicting its spatiotemporal rhythms, Tsui transforms the Kowloon Walled City into an indexical sign of Hong Kong’s liminal “time between” the colonizer and the dominant culture and of the diaspora’s multi-temporal “time between” departure and arrival. He

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\(^{299}\) Wu, 61.
pulls the viewer into this space where meaning is made through prolonged engagement, where one must wait to see “what comes next,” and where time stutters but also flies by.

The storytelling in Avaaz is likewise fragmented and dependent upon the attention span of the audience. Some viewers will only stay to hear a specific story, song, or piece of gossip before leaving the gallery space. Others may stay for hours to become more familiar with the uncanny cadence of the disembodied voices and to conjure in their minds the images of the specific sites and relations narrated. The viewer’s impetus to slow down, to remain, to rest their head on the table, counterbalances many of the stories recounting movements made in haste. Discrepancies between the time(s) of moving (in the past) and the time(s) of remaining (in the present) therefore become increasingly noticeable the longer one stays. We can anticipate, for instance, the exact moments when Horra’s five-year-old self will be heard singing and we can pinpoint important reference points in her father’s story detailing his family’s difficult decision to leave Kenya in search of a new home elsewhere. This strategy of multi-temporal representation, as Anne Ring Petersen suggests, undoes the ontological distance between past and present.300 Bal further refers to this strategy as “temporal foreshortening,” evoking the practice of spatial foreshortening used in linear perspective. Whereas in space objects arranged along a sight line appear smaller the further they are from the viewer, in time, events that have been “foreshortened” have been brought closer together in order to make the past feel “compellingly ‘present’.”301 Horra shortens the temporal distance between chronological points by emphasizing the phenomenological properties of sound, producing an aural

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301 Petersen, 204.
environment that centres memory and story as the formless “things” constituting being-in-the-world. Since sound art expands the representational and referential properties of visual art by engaging with an additional sense, when listened to, they alter the rhythms of the gallery, making audible invisible relations, and offering alternate opportunities for worldmaking through a sonorous site. Spoken stories in Avaaz are the audible force that “presents the phantasm of the real world and lets us inhabit it as the world of ‘what could be’ or indeed of ‘what is’ if we only listened.”302 The act of listening to these oral fragments activates self-conscious reflection on temporality in a manner not unlike Fluxus’s “event scores.”

Conclusion

According to Arendt, storytelling is contingency. Each time a story is told it is brought “into a sphere where [it] will assume a kind of reality which, [its] intensity notwithstanding, [it] never could have had before.”303 An action that transforms private into public meaning, individual into collective experience, storytelling “makes sociality possible” and is “a vital human strategy for sustaining a sense of agency in the face of disempowering circumstances.”304 The imperative to narrate and bring form to stories of movement and settlement remains urgent in response to ongoing crises of displacement and immobility, which result from compounded effects of capitalism, imperialism, and climate change, including the scapegoating of economic and climate refugees, anti-immigration backlash, and nationalist violence perpetuated against Indigenous nations

302 Voegelin, 50.
303 Arendt, The Human Condition, 50.
and racialized and religious minority communities. As T. J. Demos illustrates, artists have responded to the many crises of the early twenty-first century by using formal strategies to intervene in and lay bare structures that continue to inform the way subjects labour, work, and act. Focusing in particular on how artists have reimagined documentary practices, Demos argues that “mobilizing the image” has been an especially generative approach for “imagining mobility” against structural immobility and for reconfiguring contemporary art’s global politics. Much of this work has exposed conflicting narratives: especially, the contradictions between neoliberal promises of unfettered access to new forms of culture and capital and the stark realities of state conflict, racial exclusion and discrimination, economic precarity, and eco-crisis. Combining storytelling with a rethinking of the political capacities of image-making, site-responsive artworks about migration call into question utopian constructs of an interconnected world made possible by centrifugal processes of globalization—oftentimes revealing lingering imperial relations.

How do we situate stories that narrate and bring about the complications of movement and settlement within a critically disjunctured and yet entangled world? Like migration, storytelling is not entirely linear, though it is often perceived to be. While stories told orally begin with the teller calling upon the listener, the narrative is not always chronological. Interruptions, meandering tangents, and parallel narrations are all elements of storytelling that trouble chronology, mimicking the ways in which subjects encounter the world. Though linearity, Bal notes, is part of an Enlightenment ideology of progress that has been repeatedly challenged over time, it remains crucial as “a facet of

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meaning-production as it is illusory as a fact”—it serves as one mode of relation among others.\(^{306}\) Migration, too, does not follow a chronological, straight line between here and there, now and then. Rather, migration is residual movement. Many temporalities co-exist within the process of migrating and the process of telling a story. With storytelling, both teller and listener are attuned to their own time(s) as well as the durational time it takes to narrate the story and the timespan of the story itself (does it span days? Years? Decades?). With migration, the past “does not float passively as a chunk frozen in time, but functions as experience both activated by and invested in the force of a precipitation.”\(^{307}\) Though stories about migration may emphasize a chronology, the linear treatment of movement and resettlement effectively highlights how time-based narratives of place impact the diasporic subject’s psyche, their consciousness of collective identity with other dispersed populations, and their sense of belonging.\(^{308}\) Site-responsive artworks, I argue, attune us to worlds made in the process and practice of dwelling between departures and arrivals. Engaged with the stories of the places with which they dialogue (stories that are often at once local, national, and global), site-responsive works manipulate what Kwon identifies as the push and pull between the perceived sitelessness of contemporary media and the weighty sitedness of projects that rely on place in order to make meaning,\(^{309}\) reimagining the complex dynamics of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that characterize artworks and stories about migration. Critical engagement with the site of art-making opens up the potential to investigate the aesthetics and politics of diaspora as a process of

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\(^{307}\) Guha, 159.

\(^{308}\) Dalia Kandiyoti, *Migrant Sites: America, Place, and Diaspora Literatures* (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2009), 45.

\(^{309}\) Kwon, 157.
becoming, as an affective encounter with transitional experiences in multiple times and spaces.

In their installation works, Horra and Tsui combine the contingency of storytelling with the relational potential of site-responsive artworks. The artworks are contingent because the stories they tell are rooted in the migratory politics of everyday life—within experiences of transition as well as the forms of sociability made possible through recognizing shared and yet differentiated displacements. The artworks are relational because they move focus beyond an essentialist program of grappling with one’s identity and toward addressing the political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics that compel or force people to move, to re-assemble their lives and communities, and to embed themselves in new places. Despite their different approaches to artmaking, in their works Horra and Tsui give primacy to the sociability of stories. Tsui’s play with the *mou hap* genre’s many tropes and its emphasis on complexity, ambiguity, and heroic idealization to subvert the imagery of a Chinese handscroll, exalting the everyday flows of a disputed space whose disappearance speaks to wider politics between the PRC, Hong Kong, and those living in diaspora. Referencing Chinese art history, literature, folklore, and contemporaneous politics, his monumental animated installation subverts the constructive and narrative worlds of the scroll while re-configuring its multi-temporal approach to storytelling. Compared to Horra’s minimal aesthetics and emphasis on the phenomenological properties of sound, Tsui’s visual storytelling is a method documenting ongoing transformations that mark members of Hong Kong’s diaspora as they negotiate the complexities of their displacement from a homeland struggling against the PRC’s hegemonic control. In comparison to Tsui’s efforts to world the scroll, with *Avaaz* Horra conceives of how the affective medium of sound re-stages and co-narrates
her family’s immigration story. By playing the audio track on loop, the stories are repeated again and again, engendering a residual site that connects across multiple times. An experimental and abstract channel in conceptual art practices, sound enables the artist to question what diasporic time *sounds like* and how it constitutes a force of worldmaking. Through co-narration, Horra takes up a position of being there with sound and memory to facilitate connection.

Through oral and visual methods of storytelling, Horra and Tsui’s works foster relationality within a world made strange through circuitous movements. They each constitute moments in which diasporic subjects recognize a shared interest and an imperative to co-constitute belonging and multi-temporal being-in-the-world. Storytelling therefore enhances the ethicopolitical horizon of site-responsive artworks by offering diasporas a way to re-orient the self, to change the experience of migration from estrangement into an experience of worldmaking. Thus, storytelling does not necessarily help us understand the world. Rather, it is an action that *opens up* a world, changing experiences of time by actively working through past events and bringing them into the present. Without stories, “action and speech would lose all human relevance.”

Stories about migration, which typically disclose relations and the politics of moving and dwelling, rethink diaspora as a temporal as well as locational orientation. Untethered from an essentialist category, this concept of diaspora creates methods to examine the complexities of diasporic emplacement between generations and places.

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310 Arendt, 182.
CHAPTER THREE:

Worldmaking with and through the Landscape:
Politics and Poetics of Emplacement in the Works of Jin-me Yoon

We are born and have our being in a place of memory.
bell hooks, Belonging: A Culture of Place, 5.

[...] landscape is a dynamic medium, in which we “live and move and have our being,” but also a medium that is itself in motion from one place or time to another.
W.J.T. Mitchell, Landscape and Power, 2.

In a recent issue of the journal Art Margins, art historian W.J.T. Mitchell revisits his widely-cited work on landscapes and power. The response paper, titled “Reframing Landscape”, recounts how his study of landscape evolved by engaging with sites in England, New Zealand, and Palestine. Despite their geographic distances, these sites are connected through the British Empire: as the centre for the Picturesque movement (England), which gave rise to new ideas about the landscape as a space that cultivates identity, as an idealized colonial outpost in the Pacific (New Zealand), and as a space struggling for independence and self-governance in the traumatic aftermath of the British Mandate (Palestine). For Mitchell, landscape provides “a feeling for places as historical palimpsests” and a knowledge that places are haunted by conflict, violence, and erasure.\(^{311}\) Feminist theorist bell hooks likewise ruminates on the historical power of landscape, turning to it as a way to examine belonging as a sense of environmental emplacement, both in the past and the present. She writes about how, despite living with inherited traumas of slavery, the Black folks she grew up with in the southern United

States would turn to the earth as a way to feel a sense of belonging and kinship—not just with each other, but also with the non-human world. hooks writes:

When we love the earth, we are able to love ourselves more fully. I believe this. The ancestors taught me it was so. As a child I loved playing in dirt, in that rich Kentucky soil, that was a source of life. Before I understood anything about the pain and exploitation of the southern system of sharecropping, I understood that grown-up black folks loved the land. I could stand with my grandfather Daddy Jerry and look out at fields of growing vegetables, tomatoes, corn, collards, and know that this was his handiwork. I could see the look of pride on his face as I expressed wonder and awe at the magic of growing things. I knew that my grandmother Baba’s backyard garden would yield beans, sweet potatoes, cabbage, and yellow squash, that she too would walk with pride among the rows and rows of growing vegetables showing us what the earth will give when tended lovingly.312

For hooks, writing about Kentucky is unavoidable because her thinking about emplacement is repetitive and circular, always pulling her mind back to her earliest memories of understanding where she is situated. Though her writings in Belonging: A Culture of Place (2009) start from her childhood home, the theorist does not seek to essentialize or naturalize landscape as a source of identity. Rather, hooks’s stories about her Kentucky home elucidate Mitchell’s argument about how the landscape is steeped in history and how it holds connections permeate temporal and spatial boundaries. The continual change and expansiveness of landscape is key to rethinking its worldmaking poetics and politics.

In the previous chapter, I argued that the storytelling methods of Howie Tsui and Dipna Horra throw the site of home and associated diasporic myths of the homeland into stark relief. Manipulating the temporal frames of their storytelling media, both artists hold associations between here and there, now and then in productive tension with the linear

312 bell hooks, Belonging: A Culture of Place (New York: Routledge, 2009), 34.
narratives of settler time. The present chapter builds upon this rethinking of the durational site-responsive imagination of visual and oral storytelling, thinking through landscape as a multi-temporal and multi-sited medium for engaging with the politics and poetics of simultaneous displacement and emplacement. I examine three video works by Korean Canadian artist Jin-me Yoon who imagines simultaneous place through a dynamic engagement with different senses of time—through family, through historical consciousness, and through the environment—that are reliant upon each other and that point to ways of relating beyond structures of settler colonial modernity. Experimental camera techniques enable Yoon to give shape to time’s residual qualities, imagining that it moves along a vertical axis rather than along a horizontal line. Through a vertical axis, moments in time become sediments, layered and synced with each other. Objects and stories are carried from one environment to another, creating a palimpsest of relations across space. Engaging with interconnected, transpacific histories in sites in Korea and in Canada, Yoon’s works move through the many emotional sediments of war and migration, lingering on moments that preoccupy the mind, that mark the body, and that shape environments and ecosystems.

Diasporic worldmaking with the landscape is a practice not of disrupting space and time, but rather of reconstituting knowledge in new spatiotemporal configurations and in response to the exigences of migrations that are in the process of reshaping lands in simultaneous places. With regard to its long history as a form and genre reinforcing settler colonial representations of home and history, as well as imperial ways of seeing, how might we reconceive the landscape as an active participant in the critical dialogue in the process of unfolding in the contemporary art world, one that questions our ethical responsibilities to the land, the efficacy of locational identity, and a fractured sense of
global geopolitics? How do we examine landscape works by Asian Canadian artists beyond focusing on what they represent, when the racialized logics of the landscape in a Canadian settler context have necessitated theorizing Asian Canadian terms of visibility and the politics of historical presence? Finally, if we seek to situate Asian Canadian worldmaking with and through the landscape, how might we dislodge a reading of landscape art as a form expressing an inherited settler right to place?

**Landscapes of Emplacement**

The camera focuses on four people of various ages working together to dig a hole into a sandy shoreline. They are standing on Long Beach, Pacific Rim National Park Reserve, which is the traditional territory of the Nuu-chah-nulth First Nations and one of the most westerly points of Vancouver Island. Each person takes part in a ritual of digging and forming the sand into a large mound (fig. 3.1). As they continue to reshape the landscape, each person intermittently stops and gazes at the horizon, staring across the expanse of the Pacific Ocean. The opening scene of *Long View* (2017), a video project by Vancouver-based artist Jin-me Yoon, features members of the artist’s family—her parents and children—performing a gesture that embeds them within their surroundings. Waves crash along the shore, marking distances between the places separated by this oceanic space while simultaneously re-suturing them, pulling them together through continuous motion and interaction. Grappling with interconnections between land, water, and history, in *Long View* the artist locates a feeling of being physically emplaced in one environment while psychically connected to others.

Like much of Yoon’s body of photographic and video work, *Long View* investigates the landscape as a site of diasporic emplacement, critically reflecting upon
immigrant relations with place in North American and East Asian contexts.

Commissioned by Partners in Art (a Canadian non-profit that promotes and funds multidisciplinary contemporary art projects), *Long View* was originally exhibited as part of *LandMarks2017/Repères2017*, a series of contemporary art projects based across Canada’s national parks and organized with funding from the federal government for the 150th anniversary of Confederation. Taking as its focus complicated histories and hidden stories embedded in the land, *LandMarks2017* questioned official, celebratory narratives of Canadian multiculturalism by presenting deeply held personal narratives—those of settler complacency and complicity as well as those re-investigating Indigenous knowledges of land and place that exceed Canada’s history of colonization.\(^{313}\) The idea of a landmark was interpreted broadly among participating artists, with many producing collaborative, ephemeral, and site-responsive interventions calling attention to different

senses of human and ecological time. *Long View* is the culmination of Yoon’s year-long investigation of Pacific Rim National Park Reserve and its transpacific entanglements. Her research involved conversations with various local communities, including elders and members of the Tla-o-qui-aht and Ucluelet First Nations, Korean Canadian and Japanese Canadian elders, Korean War veterans, as well as Indigenous and Asian Canadian youth.

Offering a speculative view across the Pacific, *Long View* reflects Yoon’s interest in image-making as a collaborative process—a method for engaging socially, as well as aesthetically, with multiple histories and knowledge structures. Thinking through past, present, and future relations on Indigenous lands, in *Long View* the artist is particularly mindful of the militarized colonialisms that propelled the transoceanic migrations of Korean families like her own and how they perpetuate nationalist violence on both sides of the Pacific. In a Canadian settler context where Asian diasporic histories have largely been framed as narratives encompassing struggle against white supremacy, being emplaced carries the potential to depoliticize the ways in which immigrant communities may be complicit in the ongoing displacement of Indigenous peoples from their lands. In East Asia, emplacement involves a connection to geographies torn apart and haunted by overlapping geopolitics of Japanese colonialism, American imperialism, and the Cold War. Terms of belonging operate in conjunction with state agendas that obscure and complicate postwar memory projects. Picturing the landscape as an aesthetic form and a politics, *Long View* breeches the ordered timespaces of settler and ethnonationalist states by actively engaging with colonial and settler colonial hauntings here and there, now and then.

Beyond *LandMarks2017*, *Long View* is part of a series of site-responsive video works in which Yoon explores entanglements of body, memory, and environment. The
videos link specific islands—Jeju Island, South Korea (in Other Hauntings, 2016), Vancouver Island, Canada (in Long View, 2017), and Hornby Island, Canada (in Living Time, 2019)—through parallel and intersecting histories of colonialism, militarism, war, and global tourism, as well as through the artist’s own moving and dwelling as a diasporic subject. The videos in this series do not present a linear narrative, nor do they present the island landscapes in their entirety as forms that are meant to be consumed. Instead, the videos are associative, highlighting material practices of dwelling and commemoration that stretch across lands and generations. The artist employs a number of advanced editing techniques—such as montage, split screens, and overlays of footage from Korean War documentaries, travelogues, and home movies—to disrupt cinematic shots of forests, coastlines, and vast ocean vistas composed through the prolonged, panning motions of her camera. Close-up shots of local plant life, wildlife, and water (captured with a second handheld camera that Yoon repeatedly shakes) are interspersed within montage sequences with images of soldiers and military aircraft, acting as visual leitmotifs throughout this body of work. This imagery abstracts and obfuscates the landscape, rendering it a form with which to rethink not only the temporality of diaspora but also the processes and conditions of diasporic emplacement within environments affected by, and represented through, competing ideological interests.

Yoon’s video works mark a critical distinction between relating with and belonging to the landscape. With regard to the postslavery landscape described by hooks in the passage cited above, distinctions between “relating with” and “belonging to” require engaging the past with the present in order to think critically about how we inhabit particular sites. For hooks, engaging the past with the present is a specific mode of storytelling wherein familial memories, rituals, and social histories become the “raw
materials” for imagining sustainable environments and ecologies. Yoon re-visions the landscape through this lens of simultaneous dwelling, using the camera to produce embodied connections and interrelations between the transoceanic sites featured in her works. My analysis focuses on how the artist employs methods of abstraction to broker relational imagery, bringing forth knowledges carried by the land and the body which are not always easy to decipher, and which counteract representation as the impetus of the genre of landscape as well as the purpose of lens-based art. Thinking beyond representation enables dynamic engagement with inherited histories and subjectivities and shifts attention to how both the camera and the landscape function as tools linked to imperial violence. Originally constituted as an art genre associated with imperial ways of seeing, landscape supports myths of settler colonial possession by offering the viewer an expansive and seemingly objective view of a site in nature that can be occupied and consumed. Traditional landscape forms were transformed with the invention of photography, a medium associated with empiricism. Photography was therefore taken up in the nineteenth century as a method to further enforce terms of imperialism, rendering lands, objects, and people as things to be collected and salvaged. The violence of lens-based media, as Azoulay suggests, lies in the push to document and exhibit the world as well as in the technological functions of the camera’s shutter, a device that filters out what lies beyond, thereby framing and constituting what it wants the viewer to see. The “brief operation” of the shutter “can transform […] a whole shared world into a thing of

314 hooks, 4-5.
the past, and the past itself as a separate time zone, a tense that lies apart from both present and future.”\textsuperscript{316} The shutter moreover works in an instant to order, narrate, and stabilize knowledge about the land, imprinting identity and sovereignty within its form.

Using advanced formal techniques, Yoon’s video works rethink representational claims to land by undermining the shutter’s mechanization of vision and unsettling the ideological history of landscape. In Canadian art history, landscapes have long been conceived as tools for nation-building. They extend the logics of imperialism beyond processes of colonization to conflate settler identity with territory, promising “spiritual oneness of nature and [the] self” mirrored with a “mythical unity of a people who are defined by the [shared] landscape they inhabit.”\textsuperscript{317} Rather than perpetuating nationalist constructions of landscape as a site through which to broker belonging as a form of possessing land, culture, and history, Yoon’s videos picture landscape as a relational construction resonating in memory. Abstract imagery draws the viewer to focus on small gestures performed by the figures who inhabit the environments featured on screen. Often repeated within and between the separate works, their gestures merge with landmarks (both natural and manmade), evoking associations between different and yet interconnected histories and land-based practices. Images referencing imperial ways of seeing and ongoing state violence also appear in these works, but they typically function to bring the past into the purview of the present, undermining the epistemic damage instigated by the click of the camera’s shutter. By thinking beyond both the camera and the landscape as representational devices, Yoon questions how knowledge—embodied, environmental, and structural—formulates diasporic subjectivity in time and place.

\textsuperscript{316} Azoulay, 6.
\textsuperscript{317} Manning, 7.
With this chapter I produce an analysis of form and subject matter that emphasizes Yoon’s deep focus on the sites she investigates while also bringing forth the relational work her videos perform. As Lisa Lowe has demonstrated, broaching both the discreteness of site-specific histories and the intimacies produced through relational analysis is a difficult task, one that requires reading across the distances created by existing knowledge structures such as archives and canons and their terms of visibility and representation. Proposing a strategy of intimate reading, Lowe highlights how history, as a form of worldmaking, can be re-thought as an emergent practice that “does not necessarily require completely ‘new’ subjectivities or constituencies but can comprise elements of residual ongoing conditions.”

Intimate reading is not recovery nor recuperation but rather a reflection on what it means to “supplement” repressed knowledges with “narratives of affirmation and presence.” Though Yoon is largely concerned with the effects of colonialism, militarism, war, and tourism on the sites she investigates, she insists that these conditions should not be read as themes informing her work. Rather, she probes how these conditions structure dwelling in diaspora. By imagining how the sites in her work resonate in memory, the artist’s image-making practice becomes “a vital form of articulation,” a practice of intimate reading that engages landscape as a meaningful form and genre through which to reconceive deterritorialization and settlement in a time of increased globalization. Her videos are related to other works by diasporic artists grappling with what Marsha Meskimmon refers to as “the problem of the time and space of the subject-in-process,” which is a problem

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318 Lowe, 34.
319 Lowe, 40.
“crucial to anyone seeking an adequate means by which to figure the experience of migration” into the aesthetics and politics of contemporary art in a global context.321

Yoon approaches the landscape by complicating the “sublation of identity into territory and the assumption of vastness and emptiness,”322 shining a light on the ideological parameters of image-making as well as the continual transformation of the land. Through abstraction, her lens-based art constitutes, rather than merely reflects, terms of dwelling and emplacement in diaspora. This chapter conceptualizes how abstraction functions in Yoon’s works to rupture the sovereign gaze of the settler colonial and ethnonational regimes that consume the sites and subjects she investigates. I trace Yoon’s engagement with the landscape as an embodied site (of self and nation), positing how her landscapes “resonate” and how they unfix the shutter’s time, expanding the worldmaking capacities of Asian Canadian contemporary art.

Unsettling a Canadian Tradition

Early settlers in Canada imbued their sense of place with the notion that nature was Other and needed to be conquered. Distinguishing between populated “civilized” space and the space beyond, longstanding nomadic concepts of place fostered the belief that the act of sojourning into unknown territories was a worthy pursuit wherein one could be rewarded “by finding perfection in, for example, eternally […] fertile land.”323 A nomadic concept of place views the land as something that can be collected, possessed by a roving, settling eye. Nomadic concepts of place thereby reinforced imperial ways of seeing and played a

321 Meskimmon, 76.
322 Manning, 11.
significant role in transforming colonizers into settlers and, eventually, settlers into “natives.” Taking cues from Romantic art and literature—especially, Romanticism’s idealization of travel between and within foreign lands—some of the earliest settler artists in Canada directed their gazes to seemingly untamed wilderness, expressing in their works a sense of displacement within their new surroundings. While these artists were largely amateurs, traveling through the wilderness in order to fulfill primary duties as missionaries, surveyors, or government clerks, their views of the land as boundless space supported conquest. Nomadic concepts of place continued to prevail throughout the second half of the nineteenth century following Confederation in 1867. They were evoked primarily by artists in English Canada who turned to artistic models and landscape motifs from the metropole to document ongoing settlement of the New World.

Nomadic concepts of place persisted into the twentieth century as Canadian artists transformed the wilderness into a source of national identity. Painters such as Emily Carr (discussed in Chapter 1) and the Group of Seven continued the practice of journeying into the wilderness, living in relative isolation for days or weeks at a time in order to paint natural scenery. These artists rose to prominence throughout the 1920s and 1930s, decades in which artists in Canada were deeply polarized, moving between nationalism and internationalism, tradition and modernity, landscape and figurative painting, in response to political uncertainties, economic disparities, and social limitations brought on by the Great Depression. It is crucial to note that Canadian artists at this time were deeply conscious of their relationships with Europe, which remained the effectual centre of an

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324 McKay, 5.
325 McKay notes that the work of romantic painter John Constable was a particularly important source of inspiration for many settler artists.
international modernist movement. Europe—and European art—appears as a spectre in many artists’ writings at this time, exposing the anxieties of nation-building in a very young post-Confederation nation.\textsuperscript{326} Affiliations with European cultural values were evoked and disengaged seemingly when there was need. In the realm of the visual arts, the turn away from Europe was necessary for artists seeking a means to articulate and establish a uniquely Canadian artistic tradition. Concurrently, in the realm of national politics, the turn towards European value systems, knowledge structures, and imperialism was necessary in order to continue restricting non-European immigration. Anti-Asian racism surged throughout this period both in national policy and in popular sentiment, as evidenced by public support for the Chinese Exclusion Act (see Chapter 1). While this legislation targeted specific classes of migrants from China, its use as a tool for maintaining the construction of Canada as a white man’s country extended to the exclusion and disenfranchisement of migrants from other parts of Asia until immigration laws were significantly overhauled in 1967.

For many artists, the land represented the promise of a unique and united Canada. Serving as the de facto spokesperson for the Group of Seven, A.Y. Jackson believed that art-making was a territorial endeavour. The task of artists, he determined, was to remain “with their feet in the soil”—to express a sense of identity that could only be found through continued exploration and interpretation of the landscape.\textsuperscript{327} Lawren Harris, another prominent member of the group, also fervently supported the establishment of a modern art practice reflecting distinctly Canadian values. His views on the landscape were interwoven with his perspectives on nationalism, modernity, and a sense of

\textsuperscript{326} Carney, xxviii.
\textsuperscript{327} Charles C. Hill, Canadian Painting in the Thirties (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1975), 11.
“spiritual progress” achieved from looking inward to the self as a source of cultural inspiration. Paintings by Harris, Jackson, and their colleagues prominently featured natural landmarks such as lone mountains, trees, and icebergs—“visual anchors” that transformed nomadic place into a conception of a wilderness space untouched by history and capitalist modernity. Meanwhile Carr, who developed and maintained a friendship with Harris in the later decades of her life, was similarly drawn to the spiritual resonance of the Canadian wilderness, evoking in her paintings its “astonishing fecundity and its rhythms of regeneration and decay.” Like the Group of Seven, Carr’s landscapes are characterized by a deep concern for belonging to place. Composing landscapes largely devoid of human interference, white settler artists in Canada were thereby able to separate the land from the political and social upheaval of the day, removing reference to anything that could undermine an ideological construction of the landscape as a space in need of safeguarding. As many art historians have noted, the absence of Indigenous and racialized immigrant perspectives from their works reinforced wider efforts to remove certain subjects from the fabric of the nation and to nativize the identity of the white settler.

Landscape functioned, in this regard, “as both a witness and accomplice to [the] racial violence” of colonialism and nation-building.

Nomadic concepts of place have transformed yet again in our current era of globalization and deterritorialization. Since the late 1990s the term “nomadic” has

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328 Carney, 4-6.
329 Day, 89.
330 Milroy, 39.
332 Day, 76.
broadly characterized circuitous movements and the displacements of both the diasporic artist and the globalized art world. The diaspora-as-nomad and the artist-as-nomad are related tropes as Carol Becker points out, questioning who is entitled to take on this romantic role as a wanderer. Through landscape, artists address distinct practices of inhabiting many “homes” and their corollary constructions of identity. In her study of contemporary landscape art in Canada, film studies scholar Erin Manning unpacks the relationships between artists working today—those who participate in this globally oriented art world—and artists such as Carr and the Group of Seven, whose works remain historically significant to the interconnected story of Canadian nationalism and art. Manning investigates how contemporary artists in Canada (including Yoon) have grappled with the legacies of Carr and the Group of Seven by critically re-assessing their landscapes as products of settler colonial worldmaking. She regards contemporary landscape art as a practice that reveals “an excess of seeing” wherein “what is not represented becomes as important as what is perceived.” Revealing cultural values in a given time and place, landscapes constitute ideological interests in the power of the visual. The act of constructing a landscape can therefore be best understood as a practice of collective self-fashioning that, when thoroughly investigated, lays bare broader practices of worldmaking and their social effects. While Manning calls for “an exploration of that which exceeds the visible,” I read in Yoon’s video works an act of

334 Manning, 11.
335 Mitchell, *Landscape and Power*, 2. As Mitchell determines, as a cultural medium landscape “has a double role with respect to something like ideology: it naturalizes a cultural and social construction, representing an artificial world as if it were simply given and inevitable, and it also makes that representation operational by interpellating its beholder in some more or less determinate relation to its givenness as sight and site” (2).
336 Manning, 11.
reworlding the landscape—a practice of responding to a world in which there is already hegemonic worldmaking happening all the time. Appropriating the ideological functions of the landscape, Yoon alludes to the power of visuality to produce sites within which to reclaim history and to complicate constructions of the nation undergirded by white supremacy and anti-Asian racism. Her landscape works position diaspora as a useful tool for producing a world out of erasure and for deconstructing the resonant power of nomadic concepts of land as Other. Thinking beyond representation therefore alerts the viewer to “the dialogical aspects of vision,” drawing attention to the many ways in which we view and construct the landscape and provoking us to draw embodied connections “between imperialist structures of the sublation of identity and territory.”

Investigating the Landscape

Since the 1990s, Yoon’s lens-based art practice has critically focused on constructions of the diasporic self, examining memories and histories and how they are carried by the body in the process of becoming displaced. Moving between photography and video, Yoon strategically employs elements of Vancouver photoconceptualism, a school of photographic art she encountered and engaged with while completing her BFA in the 1980s at Emily Carr College of Art + Design (formerly the Vancouver School of Art, now Emily Carr University of Art + Design). Photoconceptualism was defined by its proponents—artists such as Jeff Wall, Ian Wallace, Roy Arden, Ken Lum, and Stan Douglas—as an avant-garde practice that refuses dominant regional themes and the boundaries and subject matter of conceptual art. Experimenting with photography, cinematography, and other forms of image-based media, artists sought to subvert the

337 Manning, 19.
modernist legacy of the nomadic wilderness landscape, which had come to embody the historical identity of art produced in British Columbia. Vancouver photoconceptualists turned their cameras toward the “defeatured” urban landscape, staging images that reflected issues of urban decay, industrialism, and neoliberal capitalism. As art historian Leah Modigliani suggests, their rejection of the wilderness landscape in turn constructed an alternative settler colonial narrative, one that disempowers Indigenous legal claims to land rights by imagining the land as “nostalgic, old-fashioned, or not critical enough.” Though Yoon takes up elements of photoconceptualism in her works—in particular, through her interest in staging dialectical images that confront dominant art languages and histories—the artist pushes this intellectual project further, investigating “interior, consciousness-forming structures” and their broader, entangled relationships with the landscape and its social and cultural histories.

Throughout her career Yoon has concentrated on the idea of “inherited representations,” a term she uses in reference to identities constructed and reinforced through governmental and institutional “systems of containment” such as immigration policies and official multiculturalism. Her works often probe what it means to inhabit a body that shoulders representations exterior to itself, those which play a role in dictating how the subject passes through and lives within the socio-historical fabrics of the nation and the globe. The artist examines these constructions with further attention to how

339 Leah Modigliani, Engendering an Avant-Garde: The Unsettled Landscapes of Vancouver Photo-conceptualism (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 12.
images of the land reinforce inherited representations of place. She seeks to undermine “the way that photographic meaning is naturalized [and] the way that [images] are presumed to be faithful mechanical reproductions of the real world, capturing the world without any cultural or historical mediation.”

Using the camera as a collaborative device, Yoon often draws the viewer’s attention to acts of sight or to experiences that destabilize established ways of seeing. Common formal devices found across her body of work include subjects that cast long, purposeful gazes at the viewer, at their surroundings, or at each other, and unconventional camera angles that topple the pictorial space, emphasizing altered sightlines and highlighting repressed or hidden knowledge systems. Yoon’s interest in experimenting with form in this way derives in part from her experience of migrating from Korea as a child in the late 1960s. Memories of postwar Korea as a topography flattened by war, occupation, and precarity impact how the artist gives form to modes of survival and memory that refuse linear narratives of progress. Her works engage with the disconnects between how histories like the Korean War are commonly remembered (as a drawn-out series of actions slowly inching towards a conclusion—i.e.: reconciliation between North and South Korea) and the locational ontologies of diasporic remembrance felt and expressed through the body. Like hooks’s regard for her Kentucky childhood, for Yoon, making art about Korea is not an essentialist exercise but rather a practice that connects memories about simultaneous displacement and resettlement. By engaging with the landscape (both in Korea and in Canada), Yoon mobilizes sight as an embodied action and a practice of relational being-with. A commitment to deconstructing and denaturalizing self and image therefore

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342 Gagnon and Yoon, 60.
propels Yoon’s continued engagement with landscape and its processes of transition and change.

Yoon’s investigation into the landscape is distinguished by an attention to place “that is uniquely informed by experiences of cultural and geographical displacement” while remaining sensitive to how the land is often constructed as “the site and source of authentic national identity.” Many of Yoon’s photographic series, such as *Souvenirs of the Self* (1991), *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (1996), and *Touring Home from Away* (1998), grapple with the politics of migration and settlement by critiquing terms of belonging to the nation, employing the racialized body of the Korean immigrant to disrupt settler colonial constructions of national identity mapped onto empty, picturesque wilderness. While *Souvenirs of the Self* questions why this body appears so unsettling—especially when situated against iconic Rocky Mountain vistas in Banff, Alberta, Canada’s first national park—*A Group of Sixty-Seven* and *Touring Home from Away* turn the settler vision inward, complicating the Korean immigrant’s relationship to inherited representations of the depopulated landscape.

For instance, in *A Group of Sixty-Seven* (fig. 3.2), paintings by Harris and Carr serve as backdrops in 67 individual portraits of different members of Vancouver’s Korean Canadian community. The portraits are arranged into two grids. In the first grid, each person is posed in front of Harris’s painting, *Maligne Lake, Jasper Park* (1924). Facing the camera, their gazes meet the viewer’s eye to disrupt the representation of a meeting point of two mountains situated along the shore of a pristine lake. In the second grid, each person is posed in front of Carr’s painting, *Old Time, Coast Village* (1929-30). With their

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backs facing the camera, each person directs their gaze towards the Haida village revealed beneath a lush forest canopy rendered in Carr’s Post-Impressionist style. Asian American studies scholar Iyko Day reads Yoon’s intervention into the works of two of Canada’s most celebrated painters as a critical gesture unsettling a romantic, anticapitalist view of the landscape. Evoking serial photography and the visual language of state identification, the portraits undermine the erasure of Asian immigrants from the dominant social and
cultural landscape in Canada by complicating the abstract homogeneity ascribed to Asian bodies as the artist emphasizes the gender and generational diversity of her subjects. Yet, while Yoon creates a space in which these subjects appear to each other and in the landscape, her gesture also critiques Canadian art history and its complicity in constructing and naturalizing white settler claims to nation. Facing Carr’s painting, each subject is positioned in a manner that highlights the complex relationships Korean Canadians have to Indigenous nations; evoking how they may benefit from global capitalism and settler colonialism as well as how they may relate to the traumatic displacement and dispossession of Indigenous nations through Korea’s own history of colonialism under Japanese imperial rule and American occupation in the post-WWII era.

The subjects of Yoon’s portraits reveal that these histories of colonialism and racism cannot be separated from representations of the land. Thus, more than an intervention into symbolic and structural formations of the nation, *A Group of Sixty-Seven* challenges longstanding myths that Canadian identity is derived from a unifying sense of self and place located within the landscape.

Riffing on the feeling of being “at home” while at the same time being made a tourist or stranger, *Touring Home from Away* picks up on the multiple senses of racialization, settler complicity, and art historical critique in *A Group of Sixty-Seven*. In this series, the artist poses with her parents, her husband, and her young children in front of different landmarks on Prince Edward Island—another island geography located on Canada’s east coast (fig. 3.3). Known for its red sand beaches, for its significance as the birthplace of Confederation, and as the home of Lucy Maud Montgomery’s iconic

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fictional heroine in *Anne of Green Gables*, the island province is lodged firmly within Canada’s national consciousness, thus serving as a compelling setting in which to imagine the emplacement of the racialized Asian body and its simultaneous histories. Whereas *A Group of Sixty-Seven* unsettles nomadic concepts of place and their inherited representations, *Touring Home* delves into the pastoral—a concept that, as art historian Marilyn J. McKay reports, is related to the white settler imagination of the landscape as a homeland. While nomadic concepts of place helped glorify exploration and conquest, the pastoral was often evoked in the aftermath of settlement. In the mid-nineteenth century, white settler artists in Canada highlighted this particular feeling of being emplaced in the New World “by contrasting wilderness with farmland, village, or town within a single image.”* Touring Home* in part questions the pastoral’s entwined narrative of colonialism and homemaking by laying bare its multiple constructions. In her study of how landscape operates in the works of contemporary diasporic writers and artists in North America and the Caribbean, literature scholar Sarah Phillips Casteel argues that the pastoral articulates a sense of place while simultaneously registering displacements. As Casteel suggests, Yoon’s *Touring Home* reflects a “critical pastoral mode that promotes new forms of emplacement”—in particular, emphasizing how landscapes deeply entrenched within a national imagination highlight diasporic isolation and difference. By juxtaposing images of rural landscapes with images reflecting the composed world of modern tourism, the artist communicates the inhabited tensions that inform commitments to place in diaspora: “*both* the anguish of exile *and* the deep

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345 McKay, 10.
346 McKay, 10.
347 Casteel, 182.
pleasures of emplacement.”

Yoon activates the landscape as a dynamic and relational form, imagining the idea of a homeland as “a provisional, imaginary point,” both a poetic and political construction that can be exploited in the process of being reaffirmed. This unsettles the inherited representation of the Canadian homeland, highlighting what terms of deterritorialization and settlement mean in the context of constructed nationalisms and in relation to the colonization of Indigenous lands.

Yoon’s video works move away from unsettling nationalism and settler colonialism to instead understand both as structural logics operating through particular visual and scopic regimes. By investigating inherited representations, Yoon engages with how these structural logics operate to obscure terms of difference, “making many social visualities one essential vision” and ordering elements of the landscape within a “natural” hierarchy of sight. Staging how different sites are carried, remembered, and embodied by diasporic subjects racialized and gendered in particular ways, the artist highlights the landscape as a specific scopic regime, re-instating it as a contested terrain rather than a harmoniously integrated form signifying the nation. Moreover, she questions both nomadic and pastoral concepts of the land and how they support mechanics of seeing intimately connected to empire and nation from her perspective as a member of diaspora, a distinction associated with late-twentieth century concepts of global nomadism. While the diaspora-as-nomad disturbs that nation’s myth of common origins, it also denies relations to place that attest to diaspora’s lateral connections beyond a standard binary of

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348 Casteel, 186.
insider/outsider. A longer timeline of nomadism can be traced by considering how the nomadic concept of landscape prevailed into the twentieth century in paintings as well as in various forms of lens-based art produced by white settler and diasporic artists alike. This timeline counteracts the presumed stasis of settlement, acknowledging how one’s relationship to place can evolve over time. Daniel Coleman offers a framework for thinking about the ways in which conceptions of diasporic space contrast Indigenous conceptions of “literal place.” Although both diasporas and Indigenous nations have been displaced from respective homelands due to settler colonial and/or capitalist expropriation, the differences between their histories of displacement have resulted in often oppositional political and social objects. Coleman offers matters of place as a terrain upon which to navigate these disconnections. Whereas place in a diasporic imagination has signified experiences of discrimination, internment, indenture, and enslavement, for Indigenous nations, a connection to place is necessary for political recognition and cultural survival. Rather than attempting to bridge the separate objects of diasporas and Indigenous nations—and risk flattening their politics—Coleman argues that the presumed stasis of Indigenous place (a myth of colonial time) may be rethought to imagine “sovereignty without essentialism,” while deterritorialization as a condition of diaspora may become more deeply attuned to Indigenous worldviews that stress the sociality and agency of the land. In her work with landscape, Yoon questions the possibilities for solidarities to grow from these complicated and contested positions. Her works search for

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352 Clifford, 250.
354 Coleman, 67.
a critical language to highlight points of intersection. Whereas early settlers conceptualized the land as something “alien” that becomes “familiar” (“home”), Yoon’s video works focus on intimacies, tracing movements while also paying attention to embedded histories and how they are activated as they come into relation with the histories carried by diaspora. Her landscapes are already familiar because they are imbued with story and memory. Affect thereby assists the artist in locating emplacement not as possessing a site but as a process of embodiment.

Yoon uses abstract forms to imagine how places resonate in diasporic memory. Operating through affect, these forms highlight parallels between Jeju Island, Vancouver Island, and Hornby Island, which, while distanced from each other, are connected by the same ocean. The artist engages with these places through her research into their histories, holding conversations with residents in order to give form to relations that are not immediately apparent. My reading of Yoon’s landscape works evokes a term—resonance—used primarily to refer to a property of sound. In this way, I take up Tina Campt’s proposal to “listen to images,” which she posits as a method for accessing affective registers of the visual in order to “enunciate alternate accounts” of an image so that the viewer may be attuned to experiences commonly overlooked in the process of capturing something on film. Opening up new methods of interpretation and

355 Here, I want to highlight Ming Tiampo’s scholarly writings on Yoon’s works, which were published as this dissertation was nearing completion. Tiampo emphasizes how Yoon’s works “articulate a vision of the future that makes a structural critique of colonial logics,” thereby “[proposing] a poetics of repair” (“Reworking and Repair.” 177). See Ming Tiampo, “Reworking and Repair For a Future Tied to Past and Present,” in Jin-me Yoon (Toronto and Göttingen: The Scotiabank Photography Prize with Steidl Verlag, 2022), 172-181 and Ming Tiampo, “‘Who Am I Here?’ Activating Diaspora as Method,” in Jin-me Yoon: About Time, eds. Zoë Chan and Diana Freundl (Vancouver: Vancouver Art Gallery and Hirmer Verlag, 2022), 152-169. Tiampo also recently published an open-access monograph that examines Yoon’s career over the course of thirty years. See Ming Tiampo, Jin-me Yoon: Life & Work (Toronto: Art Canada Institute, 2022), https://www.aci-iac.ca/art-books/jin-me-yoon/

interpellation, the sites in Yoon’s videos “resonate” with each other because the artist calls the viewer to imagine visual or conceptual parallels that can often be found retroactively.\textsuperscript{357} Offering form as a method of relation, the artist highlights how a site is constituted through memory and lived experience, which cannot be separated from the wider structures that render how a site may be represented politically or constructed ideologically in art practice. Her works mediate the landscape as form that can be embodied even as it is tied up in vision.

**How Landscapes Resonate**

In Yoon’s video works, visual allusions to place ricochet and merge with a suite of gestures—such as walking, digging, and gazing—performed by the figures who inhabit the sites the artist investigates. Each figure’s connections to their surrounding environments are residual, marked by momentary glances (backwards and forwards) and contemplation of landmarks such as the ancient Arbutus tree featured in *Living Time*, the Pacific Ocean in *Long View*, and the sacred rock known to Jeju locals as “Gureombi” in *Other Hauntings*. The artist engages with these landmarks to think through the landscape as a multi-layered, socio-historical and political construction embedded in and with memory.

The sand mound pictured on the beach in *Long View* is one such landmark that draws associative connections between overlapping histories of colonization, immigration, and settlement. This form is likewise evoked in the opening frame of *Living

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\textsuperscript{357} Tomii, 16. Here, I am evoking Tomii’s concept of resonance, which is connected to her work in multi-siting art history, producing new contact points to link local and global histories of art (and thereby multi-center rather than de-center the discipline’s epistemological structures). I conceptualize resonance as a formal strategy in this series of videos more thoroughly in my essay, “Toward a Formal Language of Resonance: Diaspora and Place in the Video Works of Jin-me Yoon,” published in *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 8, no. 2 (2022): 91-118.
Time where, on Hornby—a tiny island located in the northern part of the Salish Sea, east of Vancouver Island—an overgrown mound on the forest floor marks the passage of time. The long grass growing from its rounded surface sways gently in the breeze as a chorus of birds can be heard in the distance. In contrast to the communal effort to dig into the sand on Vancouver Island, it is implied that the grassy mound on Hornby is the product of a solitary individual’s labour. In a scene appearing near the mid-point of the video, a young woman (portrayed by Yoon’s daughter) approaches an opening in the forest. Shovel in hand, she stops and gazes at the forest floor before beginning to dig a hole and construct a mound with the dirt. The camera renders close-up shots of her face, her hands, her boots, and the blade of her shovel as it pierces the earth. As she pauses to dust dirt off her hands the screen divides in two picturing, on the left, an elderly woman (portrayed by Yoon’s friend and Hornby resident, Anne) clearing a path through snow. Each woman’s actions are mirrored as the sounds of their shovels and rhythmic breathing echo across the divided screen (fig. 3.4). Their relationship to one another is never made clear: the viewer does not learn if they are genetically related or if they are meant to represent the same person in different stages of her life. Rather than thinking in terms of a
linear chronology, the viewer is moved to focus on how each woman’s gestures resonate. What associations can be made by watching this meditative act, performed in two separate times? Throughout the video, the viewer witnesses this pair inhabiting the same sites on Hornby Island but in different seasonal timespaces—summer and winter. One is left with a cycle of gestures repeated continuously as the video begins and ends with the grassy mound and the entire work is played on loop when projected in a gallery.

Yoon inscribes the mound in many of her recent video and photographic works as a way to destabilize representations of the land by drawing overlaps between different sites and their histories. On Hornby, the mound comes into view at critical moments throughout the video, often marking the beginning of a split screen sequence. A formal strategy employed by the artist throughout this body of work, split screens make visible “what is unseen, yet not disappeared from this world”—in particular, overlapping histories and experiences of colonization, immigration, and war. Operating in tandem with the image of the mound, in Living Time, the split screen acts as a gulf that both separates and contains the four figures seen to be inhabiting Hornby and as a device that suggests connecting moments in time and inherited memories. Along with the pairing of the two women discussed above, Living Time also follows the mirrored actions of a young man in a brown coat (portrayed by Yoon’s son) and a soldier outfitted in digital camouflage (the uniform that has been used by the Republic of Korea Army since 2013). Like the pairing of the two women described above, the two men are often pictured walking along the same paths and through the same dense forests, but never in direct

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engagement with each other. Instead, divided by the split screen, their connections to each other and to their surroundings are evoked through gestures and glances, interspersed with imagery connecting separate times and places beyond Hornby. For instance, immediately following the video’s opening shot of the mound, the screen splits vertically into two picturing, on the right, grainy archival footage of three women wearing hanbok walking along a tree lined path in Korea and, on the left, the young man in the brown coat carrying a concealed figure on his back. On the right, wind shakes the trees and billows through the women’s clothing while the sounds of aircraft hum in the air. On the left, the young man maneuvers through snow-capped red cedars as if he is escaping capture. The heights of the cedars visually echo the vertical lines produced by the trees in archival footage, while the low rumble of the aircraft provokes a sense impending danger when juxtaposed with the scene on Hornby. The young man’s actions are then mirrored on the right side of the screen first by a sequence picturing Korean mothers carrying their children on their backs (fig. 3.5) and then by the soldier, who appears to be marching through the same snowy forest. Contrasting and overlapping actions that resonate across vast distances, the split screen gives shape to a sense of emplacement that bends, twists, and meets at intersecting points in time. Each time the screen divides in two a new image
or action is introduced, evoking a specific narrative or recollected memory. Images and actions parallel each other, suggesting connection despite disjuncture.

Whereas on Hornby, the grass mound marks paralleled times and spaces, on Vancouver Island engagement with the sand mound instigates a montage of experimental image, sound, and video footage, blending together the riffs in time and space caused by the camera’s function as an imperial image-making device. Upon completing their digging ritual, Yoon’s family leaves the mound to the elements and the viewer witnesses it slowly integrate into the surroundings. Rain drenches the sand and begins to flatten the mound’s rounded curve. A figure dressed in black clothing approaches and momentarily gazes at the ocean, performing the same act of looking that Yoon’s family performs in the opening scene (fig. 3.6). In an instant, the figure steps into the hole in the sand and disappears, causing a dramatic shift in tone. A pair of soldiers appear momentarily at the beginning of a montage sequence, overlaying a blurry shot of the forest (fig. 3.7) captured with Yoon’s handheld camera. The soldiers peer through binoculars as an aircraft flies over their heads. In another instance, a Great Blue Heron is pictured flying across the surface of water. Yet another “scene” features the elated faces of people celebrating the armistice that unofficially ended the Korean War. Interspersing imagery of flora and fauna on Vancouver Island with footage from documentaries about the Korean War, the montage moves through the many emotional and environmental sediments of war and migration, lingering on moments that preoccupy the mind, that mark the body, and that shape human and non-human ecosystems. The video entangles the Canadian state’s involvement in the Korean War—an extension of the nation’s mid-century

“peacekeeping” mission to save “weaker nations” from the threat of communism\(^{359}\) with the settler interventions reshaping Nuu-chah-nulth lands, linking Indigenous and Korean communities via devastating colonial and wartime relations. Pacific Rim National Park Reserve continues to resonate with Cold War anxieties. Located south of Radar Hill, which was once part of a system of early warning radar stations positioned along the 50\(^{th}\) Parallel (known as the “Pinetree Line”), the Park attracts tourists who come to gaze at a viewpoint that once accommodated a complex equipped with power generators and control rooms used to survey the coast. Though the buildings have been torn down, the Park’s relation to mid-century transpacific military histories lives on through a memorial erected to commemorate Canada’s involvement in the Battle of Kap’yong (April 22-25, 1951), a decisive action during the Korean War that helped push the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army north through the Kap’yong Valley. State-sanctioned commemorations to surveillance and military victories sit in vicinity of the site where Yoon’s family performs their own act of commemoration in connection to the sand and the sea. The continuous jostling of the artist’s camera, combined with the montage-style of editing, brings seemingly disparate forms—forests, beaches, soldiers, villagers, Great Blue Herons—into relation, creating a landscape that, similar to the split screens in Living Time, defies a sense of linearity and representation while still evoking specific historical narratives and memories.

\(^{359}\) Shipley, 219. Shipley notes that Canadian involvement in the Korean War is often spoken of as a “peacekeeping” mission despite the fact that the federal government deployed some 27,000 soldiers and spent close to $7.25 million in aid to South Korea between 1950 and 1953. The idea that Canada’s participation in this war is typically regarded as a peaceful intervention illustrates that Canadian peacekeeping in the world is closely linked to the nation’s colonizing and civilizing agendas. The settler state’s efforts are rooted in an ideology of saviourism rather than solidarity.
Shared between *Long View* and *Living Time*, the mound resonates further across the Pacific, evoking ancestral graves that dot Korea’s rural landscapes (fig. 3.8). Overgrown plots on grassy hillsides are lovingly cared for by family members, who visit these sites to leave offerings of food and soju. In Korea, burial mounds physically reshape the landscape by embedding lived experiences, memories, and familial relations with the earth. The Korean-language term for land—انتشار (ddang)—is often used “in relation to [Korean] lives,” referring literally to the ground or the earth as well as conceptually to a mainland, a place constituted by “the stories of all people who lived there.”

In their immediate surroundings, the mounds in Yoon’s videos additionally commemorate landmarks once common on Canada’s west coast. Burial caves, rock shelters, and shell middens are the physical elements of land-based rituals shared among diverse and

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interconnected Indigenous cultures in the Gulf Islands. As important sites of memory, burial sites were historically regarded as metaphorical villages where families cared for ancestors by offering grave goods and constructing monuments that echoed how they lived their lives, “making it impossible to extricate the dead from the social order of the time.”361 These practices stress maintaining tangible links between the living and the dead, composing a landscape through familial relations and inherited knowledge. In comparison, Koreans recognize the landscape as a source of life as well as a ritual space constituted by familial memories, stories, and care. Interring the dead is a spatial practice that expresses both the family’s past and its continuity. Burial mounds are therefore not just resting places—they are sites where the dead can participate in matters of the living by intervening in the cultivation of the land and affecting vital energy flows. To be emplaced in 땅 (ddang) means to be emplaced within a landscape that produces and is produced by simultaneous pasts and futures.

Ancestral burial mounds in Korea are continually disturbed through aggressive urbanization and military expansion reshaping physical space on the peninsula. Often, the families who care for plots that have been intruded are not notified that the land has been sold to developers.362 This uprooting of familial memory and story in Korea echoes

362 Moon Hyeong-gu 문형구, “34대 장손 눈앞에서 조상 유골 파헤치는 심정” [“The eldest son of a family’s 34th generation enraged to witness ancestral burial site unearthed without permission”], MediaToday.co.kr, 12 June, 2016, http://www.mediatoday.co.kr/news/articleView.html?mod=news&act=articleView&idxno=130401. The story cited here outlines just one among many instances of ancestral graves being disturbed by developers. In this example, Daemyong Ski Resort dug up a family’s grave site (including mounds that date back 300 years and 34 generations) without notice. While it is illegal to disturb ancestral grave sites in Korea, many large development companies shirk the law. The case has not been legally resolved. Further, this issue is not recent and does not just affect private citizens. Royal burial mounds and other heritage have been disturbed due to rapid development and urbanization, dating back to Korea’s colonization by imperial Japan.
similar displacements reshaping Indigenous lands in the Salish Sea. On Vancouver Island, Coast Salish burial plots fell victim to grave robbing and the colonial development of the city of Victoria throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Meanwhile, in recent decades, the push to support a growing tourism and retirement industry on Hornby and other neighboring islands has stirred disputes between private landowners and local First Nations governments as many proposed building projects would disturb existing funerary spaces. Tensions in British Columbia reminded Yoon of how burial mounds are slowly disappearing from the landscape in Korea. Evoking these burial practices as well as historical and ongoing land commodification between Korean and Coast Salish geographies, Yoon imagines a form of what Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson conceptualize as “place-based solidarity”, a process of working across geographic separations and coerced segregation, thinking through identity-related differences in order to contend with structures of power that divide people and lands both materially and ideologically. Yoon relates the “micro-specificity” of Korean burial forms with similar forms central to Coast Salish cultural life, in the process revealing larger macro-structures that produce barriers to imagining ways of relating beyond frameworks of settler colonialism and capitalism. To be clear, I do not read Yoon’s pairing of these forms constructed in separate places and for specific cultural rituals as a

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363 Justine Hunter, “The problems that arise when cemeteries are not cemeteries under the law,” The Globe and Mail, 9 January, 2015, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/the-problems-that-arise-when-cemeteries-are-not-cemeteries-under-the-law/article22388891/. Burial sites established prior to European colonization are often not legally recognized as cemeteries and maintenance of these sites depends upon where remains are found. If remains are found on Crown lands, for example, First Nations governments must negotiate their proper care with the federal government. However, if they are found on lands that are privately owned, the burden falls on the landowner, which becomes a fraught exercise in navigating settler and Indigenous worldviews regarding rights to the land.

364 Glen Coulthard and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, “Grounded Normativity / Place-Based Solidarity,” American Quarterly 68, no. 2 (June 2016): 250.
“move to innocence” that Iyko Day has warned about in her critique of the relational turn in Global Asias. Instead, I understand this practice of bringing into relation as method of building “solidarity through intergenerationality,” as Areum Kim suggests in her analysis of Yoon’s works, “a gesture to uncover and carry forward the past and future,” which has remained an important thematic throughout the artist’s career. Yoon’s works ask how far resemblance can take us as a practice of relation-making by drawing from her own bank of cultural forms and memories—situating her engagement with Nuu-chah-nulth lands within a particular lens of Korean diaspora. The mounds in her videos therefore sound between different experiences and knowledges, imagining overlapping histories of colonization, immigration, and settlement that call her viewer to engage with pasts “that are unfolding here, now, into calls for reconciliation, repatriation, decolonization, and reparations.”

Yoon’s mounds respond to the environments in which they are built, to the embodied histories located within these sites, and to the distant shores of places that are carried in the process of becoming displaced. Though quiet forms, they call upon the viewer to “listen to” rather than to simply “look at,” engaging the landscape through an additional sensory register connected to memory. The mounds situate the landscape in this way as a “testimonial object” bearing witness to how subsequent generations, as Marianne Hirsch suggests, “inherit not only stories and images from the past, but also our

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368 Campt, 6.
bodily and affective relationship to the object world we inhabit." Witnessing the repetition of these landmarks as well as the gestures performed by those who made them, the viewer can envision land-based rituals shaping elsewhere and think about their presence here as a visual poetics. A new narrative constituting a memory or an action is introduced each time these forms appear on screen. The act of pairing different times and spaces through associative imagery recalls the commemorative, site-responsive practice of embedding relations within 도 (ddang)—a practice suggesting that place is never devoid of embodied relations.

**Abstraction and the Politics of the Visible**

Landmarks and gestures repeated throughout Yoon’s videos connect land-based rituals and memories in a manner that undermines the scopic logics of the artist’s chosen medium. The abstract forms produced by Yoon’s camera—cut and spliced into crisp, high-definition filmic sequences—destabilize the landscape genre’s connection to social and political systems of containment, such as state-sanctioned policies of multiculturalism and legislation on immigration. These forms push against the shutter’s ability to order, make sense, and limit the terms through which minoritized subjects understand their many emplacements. Refusing a strict narrative structure, the videos emphasize a generative tension between desiring visibility while resisting the violence that occurs when diasporic subjects are captured on film and Othered.

Yoon’s video works rethink tensions between representational visibility and visuality. Employing abstraction as a formal language and a politics, the artist highlights

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369 Hirsch, 24.
visuality’s relationship to power, drawing on the embodied practice of sight to move beyond the burden of representation. Terms of “making visible” slide between the physiological operation of vision and the social politics of visuality: both involve the body and where it is situated in space and time. To make something or someone visible thereby signals differences “between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations—a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein.”

Yoon highlights how terms of visibility are always in various processes of becoming. Her works stage environmental affects between places and subjects, commenting on how individuals experience and regard where they are situated. For instance, in *Long View*, the act of looking is juxtaposed with the form of the sand mound to emphasize altered sightlines that bring about being-in-the-world. Thinking relationally, Yoon’s landscapes rescript paradigms of visibility and visuality as not solely a politics of recognition or access, but as a politics mindful of how representation can serve colonizing and neoliberal diversity agendas and reinforce systems of containment. With abstract forms, Yoon’s landscapes pinpoint this sense of becoming and situate it contextually. Abstraction reveals the locality of vision, presenting to the viewer only fragments—emotions, memories, time—to be reshaped. By paying attention to aesthetics and politics in the construction of landscape, Yoon deconstructs the act of seeing to bear witness to the constructed nature of images as they mark relations carried between one place and another.

Yoon has explored tensions produced in the act of making visible through a number of sites in East Asia prior to this current series of videos. In a series set in Seoul

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370 Foster, ix.
371 Min, 3.
and Beppu, Japan, the artist turns the viewer’s attention to specific sites bearing witness to the traumatic legacies of Japanese colonization, the Second World War, and the Korean War by staging how their geopolitics continue to abstract the relations diasporic Koreans have to colonial struggles reshaping lands elsewhere. Crystal Mun-hye Baik examines how this tension between making visible and forgetting enables a self-conscious reckoning with dominant histories of the Korean War alongside the way its memory is carried across generations and histories of Korean displacement. For Baik, the Korean War is “reencountered” by diasporic subjects in the everyday.\textsuperscript{372} It surfaces in through family relationships and immigration policies and as Korean-made products and media packaged for consumption by global audiences. Moving horizontally through or between politically charged sites, in her works set in Korea, Yoon ruptures the assumed verticality of urban and residential spaces by reorienting them as lateral topographies, evoking her family’s own memories of postcolonial and postwar Korea as a place

flattened by ongoing war, precarity, and ideological conflict. In *The dreaming collective knows no history* (2006), the artist, dressed in a manner similar to the anonymous figure appearing on the beach in *Long View* and carried through the snowy forest in *Living Time*, moves horizontally at street level between the American and Japanese embassies in Seoul (fig. 3.9). Angled at the ground, the camera follows Yoon’s field of vision. Wide shots emphasize the horizontal axis the artist travels upon as she makes her way through the throngs of passersby. Slow and deliberate, Yoon’s movements are accompanied by the sounds of the wheeled platform she uses to support her body as well as her heavy, rhythmic breathing—sounds that indicate the painful practice of reencounter, of digging up histories that remain buried beneath the asphalt. Presenting an altered vision, the artist positions her body as an artifact from the past, making this history of war feel distant. And yet, her body’s juxtaposition against contemporary Seoul—today a global city thanks in part to South Korea’s aggressive postwar revitalization efforts—gives form to reencountered modes of survival and instances of resurgence that refuse linear narratives of progress. Yoon’s gestures puncture the spatiotemporal rhythms of Seoul’s urban landscape, picturing for the viewer what it still looks like to move through the rubble.

Yoon sees her work as a means of tracing conditions of emergence rather than ascribing a totalizing vision to place and history. This understanding critically informs how the artist takes up Korean history as a member of diaspora rather than through an interest in staking a claim to representation. It further speaks to the necessary role of aesthetics in imagining belonging within and between simultaneous places. Liz Park

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373 Yoon, interview with the author, 8 July, 2020.
recognizes the aesthetics of Yoon’s horizontal gestures in her analysis of the series set in Korea and Japan:

Looking at the artist’s body, which scrawls long, ephemeral lines across the video frame, I find punctuated moments of rest, and wonder if she is inscribing invisible stories of her generation—of global migration and transnational subjectivity—onto the loaded sites she covers.\(^{374}\)

Park’s reading of the artist’s work as a method of inscription—of scrawling embodied traces of time and memory onto a politically loaded, urban topography—aptly suggests a form of emplacement. Pertinent to such methods of inscription is the artist’s impetus to explore how historical traumas are carried and reshaped through migration. Whereas *The dreaming collective* pictures the colonial and wartime topography of Seoul through Yoon’s laborious act of remembrance and reencounter, *Long View* and *Living Time* extend this image and bring it into conversation with other entangled geographies, genealogies, and politics. The videos are connected by the figure in black lycra, a presence in all three that de-stabilizes acts of looking intrinsic to terms of visibility. Portrayed by the artist, the figure derives in part from Yoon’s interest in examining “the body as a sign in specific sociocultural contexts”\(^{375}\) and staging how identifications and identities assigned to the body radically shift as it moves through and occupies different times and spaces. Donning unisex clothing, the artists resists racialized and gendered images of Asian bodies in Western media—images that stereotype them either as enemies of war, or as highlight sexualized hyper-feminine victims. The artist instead renders herself almost like a blank slate, a seemingly unmarked being navigating her surroundings. In Seoul, focus on this figure at ground level “formally topples the


\(^{375}\) Gagnon and Yoon, 54.
verticality of [officially sanctioned] memorials and challenges their immobility and objecthood,” highlighting the rigorous labour needed for the kind of remembrance work that upends state agendas that obscure historical traumas. On Long Beach, the same figure initiates the montage sequence that performs a different kind of commemorative labour—the piecing together of landmarks in an effort to draw relations between different environments and their histories. Finally, on Hornby Island, this figure is carried through the forest by Yoon’s son, a gesture that pictures the resonances between parents and children as another kind of spatiotemporal rhythm, recalling embodied traces and simultaneous versions of each other—and their pasts—as they age. While *The dreaming collective* brings into focus hauntings from an unstable diasporic homeland, *Long View* and *Living Time* expose how these hauntings resound in a place of settlement. The movement and placement of the artist’s body in each is a gesture that resonates in the landscape, illustrating how representations of place and memory are not static.

Similarly, in *Other Hauntings* (2016), Yoon confronts the challenges involved in picturing subjectivity and place beyond the visual languages and paradigms made available through dominant modes of representation and the politics of the visible. Set on Jeju Island, the largest island in South Korea, *Other Hauntings* consists of a *Dance* and a *Song*. In both parts, the artist responds to the work of activists on the island (many of whom are members of various diasporic communities) resisting interference from the central government and the threat of environmental loss. Keeping with her interest in the poetics and politics of emplacement, Yoon uses her camera to map community memories, rituals, and acts of care. She explores how formal strategies suggesting opacity and

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376 Park, 109.
absence, which negate the documentary impulses of video and activism, can engage critically with political histories, especially those that imagine specific landscapes and subjects as Other within the ethnonationalist state. Like in Long View and Living Time, with Other Hauntings the artist does not attempt to replicate the same problems of extraction and consumption that have been brought to light through the work of Jeju’s activists. Rather, the artist works alongside this community to highlight the effects of the visual on the spatial transformations threatening to erase Jeju’s geographic and cultural history. Responding to Jeju as a member of diaspora, Yoon devises methods to abstract the visual and shift focus to knowledges that extend the island’s relations with and against the ocean currents connecting it to geographies beyond.

The first part of Other Hauntings—Dance—focuses on Tera, a resident of the village of Gangjeong. Seated on a bench in front of a nondescript building in town, Tera tells the story of Gureombi, a sacred and ecologically sensitive coastal lava rock that has been endangered by commercial development and military intervention (fig. 3.10). Though the Jeju Provincial Government designated the island’s coast a protected area in 2001, this status was lifted in 2009 when part of the coastal area near Gangjeong was identified by the central government as a viable site for a mixed-use military and commercial port. Defying the Jeju governor’s emergency appeal to suspend the controversial project, construction of the Jeju Civilian-Military Complex Port commenced in March 2012 with a blast into Gureombi’s bedrock.377 Once occupying 1.2 kilometres of coastline, Gureombi now consists of only a narrow strip of rock wedged between the naval base and a beachfront resort. Jeju residents and their international allies have staged

Figure 3.10: Jin-me Yoon, video still, *Other Hauntings (Dance)*, 2016. Single-channel video, 8:14. Courtesy of the artist.

Figure 3.11: Jin-me Yoon, video still, *Other Hauntings (Dance)*, 2016. Single-channel video, 8:14. Courtesy of the artist.
daily demonstrations for over a decade, voicing their concerns for Gureombi and Jeju’s entire coastal region by organizing marches, prayer circles, petitions, art projects, and other forms of non-violent resistance. Gureombi is a culturally significant landmark and a spiritual place central to the ecological survival of the island and the life systems and waterways that connect to others in East Asia and the Pacific. Surrounded by underwater coral beds, Gureombi is interconnected with two of Jeju’s most significant, life-giving sites, acting as a natural filtration system that circulates fresh spring water flowing directly from Hallasan (the island’s giant dormant volcano) through Gangjeoncheon stream. Both the stream and the mountain are often promoted by local and national authorities as significant natural landmarks and tourist attractions.

Tera shares Gureombi’s story in order to emphasize the vital relations intertwined with its survival. Notably, in Other Hauntings (Dance), Gureombi’s physical form is never pictured. Instead, an unseen man asks whether it still exists, and what it looks like now that it has suffered damage from the military base. Tera responds to his questions, using her entire body to map the sacred rock formation from memory. Evidencing her former life as a professional dancer, her gestures are graceful and purposeful, punctuating her speech to convey Gureombi’s significance as a site where Jeju’s histories and syncretic belief systems become part of the landscape. Some motions are repeated throughout her dance, such as the tender and thoughtful way she uses her hands to describe the relationship between the rock and the ocean, as well as the circular movement she performs to convey how water from Hallasan circulates. Like in Long View and Living Time, these small repeated gestures are meant to resonate and speak to

378 The website, “Save Jeju Now” documents the efforts of local activists and their international allies: http://savejejunow.org/.
the landscape as a layering of intimate relations. Tera’s subtle movements precede
Gureombi’s visibility, performing instead the possibility of apprehending its form through
physical and affective “touches”—small gestures of familiarity and longing that cannot be
easily articulated.379 Her ability to map Gureombi and its connections to the ocean and the
land results from her intimate knowledge of the site and her experience of having
performed a sacred dance on the rock formation before much of it was extracted.380

Mounted on a wobbly tripod, Yoon’s camera frames Tera with a medium shot
that situates her in her surroundings. As the tripod stutters in the wind, the viewer notices
subtle, shaking movements around the edges of the video’s frame. This shaking causes
Yoon (who is translating Tera’s speech) to comment off screen: “whoa, it’s windy today.”
Though the camera renders Tera’s dance, the faulty tripod helps the viewer experience
her environment by conveying what cannot be seen. The presence of wind—marked by
the shaking edges of the frame—accents Gureombi’s absence and renders this landmark
contextually rather than solely indexically. Displaced and dematerialized from the
camera’s vision, Gureombi is not removed from memory nor from existence. Instead, the
affective landscape evoked by Tera’s dance emphasizes how the camera may be used to
negotiate “between the captured imagery and the vast exterior that is left out.”381 Such
efforts to both conceal and reveal render lens-based art a metaphorical practice
highlighting the sociopolitical conditions of image-making. As such, images that function
contextually expose the gulf between what is lived and what is seen. The shutter’s ability
to instantaneously filter out localized and embodied knowledge is altered when the artist

379 Campt, 10.
381 Chang Tan, “Politics of the (In)Visible: Yumen and Zhang Hui’s Anti-Art Photography,” Art Journal 79,
no. 2 (Summer 2020): 25.
presents an image that resists standing in as a representation of its subject matter. Focusing on Tera’s dance and how she experiences her environment, Yoon’s camera not only points to what lies beyond the frame but also devises a strategy for detailing geological and sociopolitical change without consuming Gureombi.

Tera’s commentary on the military’s encroachment underscores Yoon’s interest in conveying the unseen. While she details the tensions between soldiers and villagers as well as the ways in which Gureombi physically “supports” the naval base, an apparition wearing army fatigues and seaweed in its air slowly fades into view and begins to mirror her gestures (fig. 3.11). The silent, ghostly presence overlaps her, becoming completely visible as Tera explains, “[until] five years ago, you could see the ocean and Gureombi […] but now Gureombi [is] below the surface.” While this presence appears to momentarily eclipse her, it never completely aligns with Tera’s body and begins to slowly vanish as Tera performs Gureombi’s future. The figure’s visual non-alignment works in tandem with Yoon’s translation of Tera’s speech (which is heard on a delay), highlighting Jeju has become a palimpsest—each additional layer of knowledge and experience, each action and utterance, bears traces of the island’s past that directly affect those in the present working to ensure its future. The gestures of both Tera and the military ghost echo each other, highlighting the complicated entanglements between Jeju’s militarization and its effects on those who must continually resist acts of historical erasure and ecological degradation.

**Unfixing the Instantaneity of the Shutter**

Yoon’s landscapes recast established terms of representation and visibility in Asian Canadian contemporary art, acknowledging “the generative possibilities of multiple
meanings” of the visual and the affective work of thinking through resonance. In each of the works examined in this chapter, Yoon traces diasporic subjectivity as it evolves within and between sites of arrival and departure subject to continuous change. Her works do not attempt to resuscitate terms of diasporic subjectivity, but rather allude to wider structures stitching together different sites of emplacement, zooming in on histories that have separately informed the island geographies present in her works while also highlighting their interconnections.

This chapter has so far mapped resonance as a visual strategy, examining Yoon’s use of abstraction and advanced formal techniques and how they make possible the ability to move beyond multiple burdens of representation: in particular, those shouldered by diasporas, those constructed through the genre of landscape, and those carried by the violence of lens-based media. The rest of my discussion shifts back to the auditory registers evoked by the term “resonance”. Combining sound and image, Yoon’s landscapes reflect what Campt refers to as “haptic encounters,” visualizations foregrounding the frequencies of the land and how it “moves, touches, and connects” us through memory. While Campt urges her reader to listen to static images, I want to think about the use of sound in Yoon’s videos and how it attunes the viewer to an altered sense of temporality. My interest in Yoon’s use of sound builds on my analysis of sound in Horra’s installation discussed in Chapter 2, where sound fabricates a phenomenological, affective experience of history. By imploring the viewer to look and to listen, Yoon’s video works present the past and present as different, yet interconnected,

382 Meskimmon, 92.
383 Campt, 9. Dylan Robinson also theorizes decolonial practices of listening that enhance one’s understanding of their subjective position to the land. See Dylan Robinson, Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).
frequencies—undoing “embedded and received ways of seeing the world.”

*Other Hauntings* and *Living Time*, in particular, disrupt the assumed neutrality of Yoon’s chosen genre and medium by employing a number of auditory techniques that counteract the existential rifts caused by the instantaneous click of the camera’s shutter. An attention to abstract form enables the artist to chart the historical conditions and expansive contexts that surface in these works, sounding between places and subjects. Thus, while *Other Hauntings (Dance)* gives Gureombi a form through Tera’s gestures, *Other Hauntings (Song)* provides Gureombi with a voice. The two parts complement one another as they each reflect how diasporic activists on Jeju understand the island’s overlapping geographic, cultural, and political histories through their care for the sacred rock. The two parts are further brought into relation with the landscape on Hornby Island through Yoon’s investigation of parallel militarized histories, evoked in *Living Time* via visual and auditory techniques alluding to processes of environmental degradation and military intervention.

*Other Hauntings (Song)* opens with a montage of blurry footage captured with Yoon’s handheld device. Birds chirp as a lush forest trail comes into focus. The camera follows a young man named Byeong-sung as he ambles along the trail, stepping purposefully over the rocks that dot his path. This scene is briefly interrupted by a wide panning shot of a nearby beachfront resort. In an image that sharply contrasts the overgrowth of the forest path, the camera lingers on resort workers and guests walking through manicured gardens and along a paved driveway. Byeong-sung is then seen again at the end of the path, approaching the coastline. He rests at the ocean’s edge and

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384 Min, 18.
produces a long, hollow tube made from construction pipe, positioning it beneath the water’s surface (fig. 3.12). Through the tube he sings directly to the remaining parts of Gureombi. His song is one of protest, echoing a ritual performed by Father Moon, a Catholic priest and local activist. A leading voice in the protests against foreign military presence in South Korea, Father Moon positions himself each day outside the entrance to the Jeju naval base and sings a song that repeats the phrase, “Peace, Gangjeong, Gureombi, our love.” Here, Byeong-sung redirects Father Moon’s song towards Gureombi itself. The viewer hears only the warbled sounds of the young man’s breath submerged under the water, as if the lyrics are meant to become embedded with the rock.

As Byeong-sung sings to Gureombi, Yoon records his surroundings. Panning toward the horizon, her camera zooms in on a warship as it slowly approaches the heavily guarded port. Warships, coastal surveillance towers, and soldiers on lookout appear in Other Hauntings (Song) as visual reminders of systemic militarization and nation-
building, recalling Korea’s constructed sense of place constituted by decolonial struggle, authoritarian capitalism, national partition, and continuous cold war. Deeply entangled with Korea’s postcolonial history is the notion that economic development and militarization was necessary in order to reconstruct Korean subjectivity and to enter into emerging global geopolitical structures dividing the world into developed and developing nation-states. The governments of Rhee Syngman (1947-48; 1952-60) and Park Chung-hee (1961-79) supported undoing Korea’s colonial past through an “economic miracle” and by promoting an anti-Communist national identity in opposition to a constructed Communist Other. Historian Seungsook Moon suggests that this conception of the nation “enabled the modernizing state to deploy disciplinary techniques of surveillance and normalization, as well as institutionalized violence, in its remolding of individuals and social groups.”

Jeju Island has shared with North Korea and other municipalities in the south the designation as the nation’s Communist Other at various moments in its postwar history. Current strategies to militarize this space are connected to the island’s traumatic history and rationalized by appealing to this sense of national self. In particular, Jeju Island’s landscape remains haunted by the violence of the 1948 Jeju Massacre, an event that caused between 25,000 and 30,000 deaths as the result of a counterinsurgency launched by Rhee’s government to quell local Communist support. Violence

386 Hun Joon Kim, *The Massacres at Mt. Halla: Sixty Years of Truth Seeking in South Korea* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), 35-37. The events that have come to be known as the Jeju Massacre stemmed from armed protests organized by several local leaders of the Communist Party. On the 3rd of April, 1948 communist guerrillas enacted a series of coordinated attacks on police stations in villages across Jeju Island. Municipal police were targeted because they were regarded as right-wing supporters installed by the US military to quell civilian rebellions and to ensure the creation of an anti-Communist government. Conflicts between civilians and the government were commonplace in Korea between 1945 and 1948. The combination of American and Soviet military occupation, power struggles between high-ranking politicians, and failed attempts to re-establish a unified government were cause for civilian dissatisfaction. Efforts to suppress the uprising continued to escalate in the months following the founding of the First
committed against the island’s residents was framed as a necessary intervention into what authorities believed would lead to widespread uprisings in support of a Communist regime. The South Korean Government did not take responsibility for its role in the deaths of tens of thousands of civilians until 2005, when, after a series of legal investigations, it officially apologized for causing Jeju’s suffering.\(^{387}\)

Tracking the warship, Yoon turns the camera’s gaze back upon a form that both stands in as a marker of the nation’s vision of itself and that alludes to multi-national interests in militarizing the Korea Strait. Since the completion of the Jeju Civilian-Military Complex Port in 2016, Jeju residents have witnessed an increase in domestic and foreign military presence. American and Canadian warships frequently occupy the surrounding waters and the US and Canadian navies participate in joint exercises with the South Korean Navy. Members of the Gangjeong Village Association and other local activists continue to protest these interventions, stressing not only the environmental damage to the coast but also the threat that foreign presence will turn the island into an epicenter for military frictions in Northeast Asia. Foreign naval presence further recalls the deep wounds that continue to scar the island as the result of the 1948 Massacre: the arrival of the USS \textit{Stedham} in March 2017 marked the first time an American military craft had docked in Jeju since the arrival of the USS \textit{Craig} in May 1948.\(^{388}\) While the

\(^{387}\) Hun Joon Kim, 83-85.
warship in *Other Hauntings (Song)* recalls what the landscape remembers and endures through these political entanglements, its presence here is not meant to illustrate a failure to preserve the island. As Yoon casts her camera’s gaze upon this form, mimicking an attempt to document it, Byeong-sung’s warbled song continues to punctuate the scene, drawing attention back to what exists beyond the frame; to practices that relate memory of Jeju’s past to its condition in the present. This is a powerful gesture that, like the wobbly tripod in *Other Hauntings (Dance)*, re-inscribes the camera as an active rather than passive image-making device, a strategy that enables the artist to account for Jeju’s entangled histories in a relational, non-extractive way. Subverting colonial, militaristic, and touristic imaging strategies at work, *Other Hauntings (Song)* produces a formal language that not only complicates Gureombi’s invisibility with an altered vision, but maps Jeju Island’s historical conditions and geospatial connections to other landscapes embedded with memory, within and beyond East Asia.

Inverting and returning the gaze, Yoon’s camera evokes contemporary politics in the Korea Strait, making them resonate with histories of war and nation-building. This brief practice in *Other Hauntings (Song)* is expanded in *Living Time* where the artist pictures Hornby Island through carefully composed cinematic frames, employing a significant number of slow panning shots that render the island’s red cedar forests, misty seascapes, and rocky coastlines. Taking in sites all over the island, the camera at first seems to be mimicking the colonial “surveying eye,” a way of seeing that presupposes the land as an emptied site that must be occupied, developed, and safeguarded. This way of seeing is an extension of what Aileen Moreton-Robinson refers to as the possessive logics of settler colonialism, or the ways in which the settler state rationalizes land and all that is contained within it. Through acts of surveillance, categorization, and consumption, land
becomes part of the common-sense knowledge, legal decision making, and the socially produced conventions that naturalize settler claims to history and belonging. Representational vocabularies of the genre of landscape impose the surveying eye’s function as a structural mechanism rather than a passive bodily operation. By imagining and picturing empty landscapes, white settler artists in Canada were able to assert a sovereign relationship with the Indigenous lands they occupied. Landscapes could thereby stand in as the nation itself, promoting “the ideal image of an ordered universe, its limits fixed and identities secured.” In the process of rationalizing these possessive terms, the surveying eye is cast as neutral. Yet, it is anything but. The practice of “taking in” the land, of filtering it through one’s gaze (and one’s brush or lens), and of using it as a form representing home and history, culture and capital, is a practice of violence. As a materialization of imperialism, the camera’s shutter does the taking. In order to unlearn this process, the shutter’s neutrality must be acknowledged as a technological function that deploys the violence of the surveying eye.

Yoon’s impetus to slow down and compose wider, longer shots actively engages with this way of seeing and questions its authority. The artist attempts to destabilize and unlearn this possessive practice through formal techniques that defer the shutter’s time, bringing forth imagery that summon interconnections and conditions of the landscape. Her works draw associations, offering, as Manning writes about contemporary landscape art, “an opportunity to rewrite and relocate territory in our political imaginations.” In Living Time, auditory transitions between scenes formulate connections between times.

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389 Moreton-Robinson, xii.
390 Manning, 2.
391 Azoulay, 7.
392 Manning, 3.

Figure 3.14: Jin-me Yoon, video still, *Other Hauntings (Song)*, 2016. Single-channel video, 7:58. Courtesy of the artist.
and spaces separated in the moment the camera asserts its gaze. The initial panning shot that laboriously tracks Hornby’s coast brings this space into view first through the sound of sea lions yelping as they sunbathe on rocks. Their guttural cries can be heard as the scene moves from the snowy forest to the rocky coast, before these animals are made visible (fig. 3.13). As Yoon’s camera approaches the shore, these sounds are drowned out momentarily by a recording of a nineteenth-century hymn, “Onward Christian Soldiers,” which is audibly stretched until its melody is almost indistinguishable from the low rumble of aircraft that can be heard in the distance. Sounds of aircraft recall the air traffic from a nearby Canadian Army base in Comox. Combined with the hymn, which is associated with the US Army, these sounds bring into relief what lies beyond the neutral gaze of the camera’s roving eye: processes of militarization that serve to safeguard the settler state as well as to extend modern imperializing missions outward, like many wars fought to preserve a Christian world order.

Echoing the stretched audio in Living Time, the presence of the warship, combined with the sound of Byeong-sung’s breath submerged underwater in Other Hauntings (Song), instigates a sequence of experimental imagery not unlike the abstract and associative forms witnessed in Long View. Yoon’s jostling camera produces long vertical

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393 Yoon, interview with the author, 8 July, 2020. Hornby Island is located in close proximity to CFB Comox, a Canadian air base constructed as part of the federal government’s wartime efforts to safeguard the west coast from Japanese invasion. The Comox base was closed in the years immediately following the Second World War, only to be reopened again in the early 1950s as tensions mounted in Korea. During the Korean War, the Comox base became a permanent station for the Royal Canadian Air Force’s operations in the Pacific. Yoon notes that the airspace above Hornby is frequently disturbed by heavy traffic from the base.

394 The hymn has also been adopted at specific moments in history as a rousing cry in demonstrations against state violence. Notably, it was appropriated in the 1950s by participants of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a mass protest orchestrated by Black American organizers which was foundational for mobilizing the American Civil Rights Movement. See Stanford University, n.d. “MIA Mass Meeting at Holt Street Baptist Church,” The Martin Luther King Jr. Research and Education Institute, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/mia-mass-meeting-holt-street-baptist-church, accessed 12 July, 2021.
strands of light that leap from Jeju’s rocky coast and merge the still visible parts of Gureombi with the blue sky (fig. 3.14). Through this blurring effect, Yoon imagines that Gureombi is “speaking back,” responding both to Father Moon’s song and to the warships encroaching in the distance. Visual stretching refuses the surveying eye’s ability to render Gureombi—as well as the entirety of Jeju Island—an Other in need of safeguarding. Yoon’s play with form between these two videos highlights how militarization continues to shape relations between Pacific geographies. Disturbances on Jeju are linked to those taking place around the Gulf Islands in the Salish Sea, which remain the site of tactical warfare training for the Canadian and US navies. In late 2019, a South Korean destroyer, Munmu the Great, accompanied the HMCS Ottawa on its homeward journey from Jeju to a port in Esquimalt, on Vancouver Island. For diasporic subjects grappling with displacement caused by war, these sights and sounds and their encroachment on the land are reminders of traumas endured. By rethinking the landscape and its trauma through abstract and associative forms, Yoon disentangles the effects of militarization and its safeguarding of settler claims to territorial sovereignty—claims that are reinforced through acts of surveillance and representation (in art and photography) both “at home” and abroad. The artist highlights militarization as a simultaneous rather than successive action; a process that will continue to shape diasporas to come.

The stretched visuals and audio in these works reflect how seemingly quotidian landmarks and occurrences—images of water and coast, the lyrics and melodies of

popular songs, the sounds of aircraft and wildlife—can trigger associative connections. Yoon further reinforces associations between the land and wartime in Living Time as her long shot of Hornby’s coast dissolves into a split-screened montage juxtaposing footage of napalm bombs, Hornby’s seabed, and a home movie featuring the artist’s children in their youth, playing with rocks and sea creatures on one of the island’s beaches. Footage of an air raid, sourced from a documentary of the Korean War, is paired with scenes from the first touristic film produced on Hornby (fig. 3.15). Shot in the early 1940s, the film takes in sites around the island in a manner similar to Yoon’s roving camera, reinforcing the connection between passive “seeing” and representational constructions of the landscape. “This rather weathered film is a travelogue”, a snapshot of island life that presents an idealized image of Hornby as it follows settler residents who fish, chop wood, and comb the beach. The pairing of footage of war and tourism sheds light on the camera’s ability to reframe the land to suit narratives of progress. Whereas in both parts of Other Hauntings, these narratives of progress are undermined through failed efforts to obscure the damaged landscape, here narrative logics are deconstructed for the viewer.

Interrupting her cinematic camerawork with moments of degradation—underscored by the imagery presented in the archival footage and the travelogue as well as the contrast between the grainy, low-resolution of these films from the past with the stunning high-resolution of the artist’s film recorded in the present—Yoon acknowledges how histories resonate and continue to impact the way knowledge of the land is carried.

Yoon’s focus on the relational experience of militarization in Korea and Canada, and its endured effects on subjects and their environments, foregrounds her concept of “vertical time.” Vertical time is a sense of lived time and emplacement within interrelated, geological, and genealogical time; a palimpsest of embedded histories and relations across sites of migratory departure and arrival. Thinking about temporality through a vertical axis requires unlearning linear chronologies of colonialism and capitalism, which are conditioned by a desire to belong to a world where violence is relegated to a distant past. Vertical time brings this past forward but does not dwell upon it. By constituting landscape relationally, Yoon acknowledges both the before and the after of migration and the inescapable lure of returning to a time before displacement. In her video works, landmarks and bodily gestures function in concert with the stretched audio, abstract imagery, and documentary footage the artist uses to splice together associative sequences, offering departure and arrival as layers of the subject rather than as specific, life-defining moments or as transition points marking one’s turn as Other. For Yoon, emplacement is a process that involves tuning into everyday sights and sounds that trigger all that we carry as we embed ourselves within our surroundings. Her landscapes therefore do not attempt to salvage a time before, unmarked by imperial violence and

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398 Yoon, interview with the author, 8 July, 2020.
land-based traumas captured by the camera’s shutter. Instead, they are informed by
worldmaking practices that picture the imagined and changing nature of a place.

Conclusion

Back on Vancouver Island, Yoon’s camera carefully tracks the movements of her family
members as they engage with the sand and as they cast their gazes across the vast ocean
that stretches beyond them. Slowly and deliberately turning their bodies, they each
reorient themselves with and against the shoreline in an act that imbricates each subject in
hidden spatial connections marked by the meeting of the sand and the sea. This gesture of
turning—of slowing down and contemplating their surroundings—recalls the ways in
which diasporas are continuously shaped by “the seemingly inexorable march of
history”. As Yoon’s daughter thoughtfully pats down the sand, the camera moves from
a number of close-up shots of her face and hands to a wide shot that situates her body in
relation to the mound and to her family. Her grandparents take a break from digging the
hole while her brother stands up from his seated position in the sand and walks out of the
frame. Her grandfather offers her his shovel, which she uses to smooth the mound’s
rounded top. The camera aestheticizes their gestures as the family forms this ritual space
through their interactions with their surroundings and with each other.

This sequence from the opening moments of Long View encourages thinking about
how particular transpacific geographies in Korea and on Vancouver Island have been
undone through layered forces of colonialism, war, and militarization. Long Beach, as
well as the entire western side of Vancouver Island, was identified in the 1930s as a site
in need of colonial and military interventions when wartime planning officials deemed

coastal regions in British Columbia vulnerable to seaborne attacks in the event of war with Japan. Located in proximity to a Canadian army base in Tofino, Long Beach was used for live-fire training and bombing practice throughout the Second World War. Its landscape still contains remnants from the war, including live explosives discovered in sand dunes. The family’s hole recalls how Long Beach has been violently reshaped by its militarized history, a history informed by settler narratives of possession (the supposed need to safeguard settler claims to land). However, in reproducing this form, each member of Yoon’s family performs their own way to situate the relations they carry—relations that connect them to a global diaspora that developed as a consequence of Korea’s own geopolitical struggle. Whereas the holes produced by strife in Korea and on Vancouver Island leave the landscape with permanent scars, the hole dug by Yoon’s family is temporary. When the tide comes in, both the hole and the mound will wash away and return to the sea.

According to Mitchell, the task of the artist in the twenty-first century is to disrupt and reframe “whatever perspective seems to have been embedded in the landscape as the ‘natural’ way to see it.” Site-responsive art is uniquely suited to this task of unmaking and rewording the worlds constructed by colonialism, rethinking the twinned visibility of places and the subjects inhabiting them. A site response thinks through the landscape, feeling for colonial hauntings, diasporic erasures, and soundings of place and history that defy burdens of representation and politics of the visible. Thus, in the process of thinking through the landscape, Yoon attempts to destabilize and unlearn the possessive logics of

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her medium, pushing the camera to produce a formal language that can engage with spatial ruptures caused by displacement and deterritorialization while also relating to—and mapping the discrete histories between—sites where Asian diasporas resettle. Her works rethink how diaspora is often stabilized in a manner similar to the imperial image-making functions of the camera, through colonial representations that narrate moments when diasporic subjects become Other. Focusing on her family members and how they relate to each other and to the land, Yoon’s video works dislodge contemporary art’s emphasis on place as a nomadic concept—always “conquering” new territories, new markets, new audiences—and reconceive it as something in the process of continual transformation so that processes of identification tied to the land can be grasped as place-based solidarities. Evoking landmarks and gestures, abstract forms, and obfuscated imagery, the artist produces landscapes that resonate; that re-imagine Asian Canadian connections with place through associative means, highlighting both contextualized encounters and overarching structures of diasporic subjectivity and their terms of visibility.

Though mindful of the historical and subjective conditions of diaspora constituted through territorial dispossession (whether forced or voluntary), as well as the politics of representation that have underwritten the experiences and political positionings of Asian Canadians, the artist insists that diaspora does not solely mark a relationship to a past elsewhere nor an inability to move away from identarian formations. Her video works are informed by the urgency of diasporic encounters. To echo Mercer, Yoon’s video works formulate an aesthetic “call-and-response” where form “draws attention to the material

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402 Coulthard and Simpson, 254.
entanglements of cultural identities, which is unthinkable for essentialist or separatist ideologies that require monologic notions of ‘pure’ origins and symbolic unanimity.\footnote{Mercer, \textit{Travel and See}, 230.}

The viewer witnesses this call-and-response through forms such as Tera’s dance and the strands of light jumping of Gureombi in \textit{Other Hauntings}, via the stretching of coastline, audio, and archives in \textit{Living Time}, and through the sand mound juxtaposed with the hole in \textit{Long View}. While all of these forms evoke an elsewhere and a before, they also speak to a here and now. Informed by a rethinking of the landscape through associative means, Yoon’s works build a world through continuous and simultaneous interconnection, extending the worldliness of site-responsive art.
CONCLUSION:

Worldmaking beyond Multiculturalism

_A ubiquitous apparatus of liberal democracies today, to both compensate for past exclusions and respond to the challenge for inner diversity, is the principle of multiculturalism. Multiculturalism introduces a relativist pluralism of the current moment in wherein all styles and beliefs are considered equally valid and where the prerogative of judgment is frequently ceded to the art market. Together with other kinds of cultural media, such as music, cuisine, or festivals, art too is called upon to provide the visible ‘evidence’ of a given society’s multiculturalism._


To conclude, I return to the Carleton University Art Gallery, the site that opened this inquiry into the worldmaking capacities of Asian Canadian contemporary art. On a chilly afternoon in early November 2017 the gallery’s double storey exhibition space—the same space that will soon house Linda Sormin’s _Fierce Passengers_ in a few short months—features _Animate_, a two-artist exhibition curated by contemporary art scholar Alice Ming Wai Jim. Featuring drawing works by Jakarta-born and Vancouver-based artist Diyan Achjadi and two short animated films by Mongolia-born and Berlin/Montreal-based artist Alisi Telengut, _Animate_ reflects on globally-oriented and yet deeply local interconnections between colonialism and climate change, exploring how each artist addresses the effects of forced human migration on non-human worlds. On this particular day, I am attending a guided walkthrough of the exhibition with a group of undergraduate students enrolled in a course on Asian art history (for which I am a teaching assistant). The students are keen to discuss how the artists have incorporated imagery from folklore, religious artworks, and design in their works. As Jim writes, both artists speak to “the complexity of designs and forms of expression that have been exchanged, transformed, or
at times disputed through centuries-old circuits of migration.” Their works seek to build worlds connecting past and present, human and non-human, worlds that are continually in processes of becoming. Achjadi’s wallpaper installation, *Java Toile* (2015) (fig. 4.1) resembles the form of Toile de Jouy, a decorative pattern that consists of an off-white background with colourful imagery depicting pastoral landscape themes. Toile de Jouy is an eighteenth-century invention linked to French fascination with chintzes (a printed textile that originated in the sixteenth century from Golconda, present-day Hyderabad), which were introduced in France during the seventeenth century. Here, the students spot miniature forms of a stupa and they remind them of the Great Stupa at Sanchi, a Buddhist complex and pilgrimage site founded in the 3rd century BCE by Mauryan emperor Ashoka. The stupa is patterned throughout with depictions of animals, such as rhinoceroses, elephants, and tigers, which are either endangered or nearing extinction due to human interference through harmful practices of hunting and deforestation. *Java Toile* reinvents an artistic medium connected to empire by evoking Indonesian religious practices (encompassing Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and animistic folk traditions), the cultural consumption of Asian visual cultures, and the extractive practices of colonialism and global capitalism. Her work signals a process of reworlding similar to Karen Tam’s own use of Chinese art and chinoiserie as objects with social lives, underscoring embedded imperial histories of art and design.

Meanwhile, Telengut’s video, *Nutag-Homeland* (2016) (fig. 4.2) offers a poetic meditation on carrying the burdens of forced migration and displacement. Her video works comprise richly coloured and painted scenes that the artist animates by hand,

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Figure 4.1: Diyan Achjadi, *Java Toile*, 2015. Toner print on Tyvek, 9 sheets each 144” x 40”. Photograph by the author.

Figure 4.2: Alisi Telengut, still from *Nutag-Homeland*, 2016. Hand-painted film animation, 6:00. Photograph by the author.
recording her work beneath a camera positioned above her tabletop canvas. Her work is painstaking: she animates each sequence frame by frame, using a single piece of paper. Each additional layer of paint becomes a sediment of memory and movement. As Jim notes, the Mongolian term nutag can mean “the place where one lives” or “the place where one is born.”

Telengut evokes the term’s double meaning in this work, which reflects upon the mass deportations of the Kalmyk (a Mongolian ethnic group) peoples from the Soviet Union during the Second World War. Like Tsui’s Retainers of Anarchy, with Nutag-Homeland Telengut blurs boundaries between diasporic and nationalist conceptions of a homeland. The act of hand-painting and hand-animating each scene produces a meditative commentary on the erasure of culturally-specific ways of life and belonging. In a space like Ottawa, the works in Animate link the reimagining of worlds in flux to a place in the process of grappling with its own histories of forced separation and expulsion, histories which are often reflected in the co-option of Anishinaabe terms as names for urban development projects—efforts that are often not supported by the Indigenous elders and the communities for whom those terms actually mean something.

The works by Achjadi and Telengut in Animate suggest how site-based matters can travel and yet still be deeply situated in one place and another.

Like the rest of the works by Asian Canadian artists examined in this dissertation, Java Toile and Nutag-Homeland highlight how worldmaking is a portable and yet deeply situational action. As Monica Juneja suggests in the epigraph above, multiculturalism

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406 Here, I am referring to the controversial plan for “Zibi,” a recent proposal by Windmill Development for a massive urban renewal project to be built on Chaudière and Albert islands, in the Kichissippi River. “Zibi” is an Anishinaabe language term for “river” used specifically by the Kitigan Zibi nation, which was not consulted by Windmill Development in the process of naming this new site. See Elizabeth Payne, “Kitigan Zibi chief says he won’t support Windmill development,” Ottawa Citizen, 26 February, 2015, https://ottawacitizen.com/news/local-news/kitigan-zibi-wont-support-windmill-development.
within liberal democracies has produced an incredible burden of representation for racialized diasporic artists navigating demands of both “official” national constructions of art seeking to pluralize the canon and a contemporary art market that continues to assert its influence through all corners of the globe. Juneja explains that calls for representation ultimately place upon artists “the expectation […] that their art would function as a surface from which a clear national, ethnic, or religious identity could be read off.” While some artists have responded to these calls by mobilizing methods that question easy associations between an artist’s work and their identity, others attempt to completely circumvent these calls to produce works that do not comment on identity at all. My conceptualization of worldmaking as a situated action attempts to grapple with these many lines of thinking about the burdens of representation shouldered by Asian Canadian artists and the work that they are expected to perform. I offer in my study of Asian Canadian contemporary art a model to trouble the relationships between national formations and global diasporas, thinking beyond multiculturalism’s binary models of inclusion/exclusion that remain both in practices of nation building and the study of contemporary art through a globalizing lens. To be clear, I do not advocate to abandon either of these formulations. The nation persists as a political structure that impacts our understanding of self, place, and history—a theme not just in Canadian art, but in global histories of art, as Martha Langford points out, “both as a cartographic fact and as a generator of spatial metaphors that binds its narratives, though with a stress on interstitial spaces, within and without the state.”

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through global frameworks accounts for interconnectivity further afield, scaling up what it means to live in communion with others—both human and not. I situate my study of Asian Canadian contemporary art between these formations in order to reimagine worldmaking in diaspora as an interaction between more than one sense of place and time, calling attention to historical and subjective formations that linger and resonate. For Kwon, the site is one such formation that is continually reencountered in contemporary art despite best efforts to bring about the “liberating effects” of deterritorialization.409 While attention to global flows often requires a level of disconnection from the ground, we are always pulled back to it in some way.

By examining the situated worldmaking strategies of the artists discussed in this dissertation, I aim to rethink how the study of contemporary art has reshaped global formations over the last few decades. Whereas scholars have traced the impacts of globalization on art—focusing, especially, on its making, its reception, and its circulation—these studies commonly reinforce an understanding of art’s worldly force as a product of top-down processes of globalization: flows of culture and capital that start from a Western centre and extend outward in centrifugal motion. Hans Belting and Andrea Buddenseig, for example, note that contemporary art has become synonymous with globalization. In their introduction to the exhibition *The Global Contemporary: Art Worlds after 1989* (2012) they exclaim that contemporary art “is expanding all over the globe,” and that the term “contemporary art” itself implies “art after modernism.”410 Like the after in Kwon’s “One Place After Another,” theirs is a product of thinking

409 Kwon, 165.
successively. Their after—both the time “after modernism” that they theorize and the “after 1989” evoked in the title of their volume—implies more than chronology: it articulates an ideological position on a specific kind of art and the places from where it is made that shapes the way we think about artmaking in the present. Indeed, as Johnathan Harris demonstrates, it is virtually impossible to disentangle this disciplinary construction from its interactions with institutions and multicultural sites of capitalist production.

Examining the representative functions of contemporary art-making in five geopolitical locales in Asia (specifically, Hong Kong, South Korea, India, the People’s Republic of China, and the State of Palestine), Harris explores how the centrifugal motion of globalization has touched the art worlds in these places, allowing them to flourish due to artists’ interactions with art markets within and beyond their borders.411

Though Harris questions who benefits from the growth of Asian art markets and leaves room to examine a broader meaning of contemporary art beyond its chronology (“after modernism”) and its commodification, his study supports the idea that the visibility of Asian and Asian diasporic art within this globalized system is a sign of progressive inclusivity. Such terms of being-in-the-world—which position multiculturalism and globalization as the structural logics that can break down art history’s exclusionary, colonial barriers—continue to emphasize paradigms of making visible as a corrective method. When artworks are expected to enter into a sphere of representation, their worlding force is measured by their ability to perform locality in a visual language that can be easily identified and digested. This burden of representation has in many ways affected the study of Asian Canadian art by reinforcing its liminal

position, marking Asian Canadian art as part of a history of redress and reconciliation related to the project of official multiculturalism.\textsuperscript{412} Official narratives of reconciliation reinforce, as Métis artist and scholar David Garneau suggests, “a false understanding of our past [that] constricts our collective sense of the future,” obscuring the real work of “conciliation” (of “bringing into harmony” rather than repairing an existing reciprocal relationship that never actually existed) that needs to take place.\textsuperscript{413} Reconciliatory gestures relate to the study of art in Canada because they often bolster widespread belief that a more equitable field has already been achieved.\textsuperscript{414} Whereas a top-down, market-

\textsuperscript{412} Here, I would like to acknowledge the how the history of redress movements in Canada is entangled with Asian Canadian histories. In September 1988, the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), bolstered by decades of grassroots campaigning, successfully negotiated an official apology and reparations for the dispossession, forced relocation, and internment of Japanese Canadians between the years 1941 and 1949. The same year also witnessed the ratification of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, which committed to law the federal government’s policies regarding cultural, religious, and linguistic pluralism. The NAJC’s campaign for redress is interconnected with the Canadian Multiculturalism Act because organizers invested their calls for redress within the wider project of official multiculturalism, recognizing “the power that nationalism had in shaping […] the lives of Japanese Canadians who were forever marked by the mass uprootings of the 1940s” (Miki, \textit{Redress}, 11). The NAJC made a successful case for redress by appealing to the nation’s constructed sense of benevolence and by situating redress within its core democratic values. The Japanese Canadian redress movement helped establish a framework for the restorative movements of other minoritized and diasporic communities in Canada, which have been met with a range of responses, from official and unofficial apologies, to reparations and promises to commit to ongoing reconciliation efforts.


\textsuperscript{414} For more discussion on how reconciliatory gestures impact efforts to diversify Canadian arts institutions, see Anne Dymond’s data-driven study on the representation of gendered and racialized artists in Canadian museums. Surveying solo artist exhibitions by women and racialized and Indigenous artists mounted between 2000 and 2010, Dymond reports that, in general, major public galleries such as the National Gallery of Canada and the Vancouver Art Gallery fared worse than smaller artist-run centres and university galleries, with (on average) less than 40 percent of solo-shows going to living female artists (of this percentage the majority of solo exhibitions went to female artists who identify as white; the number of racialized and Indigenous female artists was even more abysmal). Her study breaks down how the accepted notion of arts institutions as “tastemakers” has obscured the power these institutions have to set the parameters for inclusion. Taste has long been used to deflect and minimize criticism and to refuse acknowledgement of the ways in which pre-established notions of artistic merit and genius reproduce gendered and racialized hierarchies. Dymond concludes her study by calling for more consciously equitable and intersectional curating practices, noting that the “histories created by our public institutions feed narratives that become our shared histories” (171). Anne Dymond, \textit{Diversity Counts: Gender, Race, and Representation in Canadian Art Galleries} (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2019).
driven conception of the globe renders art as a form that maps circulations of culture and capital, a similarly conceived construction of the nation mirrors the parameters of what constitutes a nation’s art with the parameters of desirable and undesirable citizenship. Both these distinctions flatten relational thinking through and with a locality and its expansive connections outward. As Kwon suggests, site-oriented practices that encounter time and place in the multiple confront the expectation to stand in as a marker of representation. Emphasizing relationality, site-responsive artworks “can turn local encounters into long-term commitments and transform passing intimacies into indelible, unretractable social marks,” resisting the urge to generalize.415

By thinking through worldmaking as a site-responsive action, I view the capacity of Asian Canadian contemporary art to stress the dynamic ways global diasporas relate to each other and enact their constitutive roles in contemporary life. My attention to worldmaking in this regard parallels the shift from a definition of diaspora as a category of identity to a processual understanding of diaspora as a condition or form of subjectivity that is continuously evolving. I seek to relate this processual understanding of diaspora to the construction of Canadian art, to likewise formulate Canadian art history as a practice that is continuously evolving and questioning the limit terms of the settler state. The artists in this dissertation enact worldmaking by historicizing simultaneous spaces of diasporic dwelling, recounting the multi-temporality of diasporic time, and expressing resonant experiences of migration, settlement, and emplacement. Karen Tam’s installation works situate artworks as social objects rethinking the dwelling spaces of diasporic communities as significant sites for the formation and study of art history. The

415 Kwon, 166.
artist specifically examines the multivalence of art objects and spaces that are racially and aesthetically coded as “Chinese” as a way to re-vision Asian art within the settler nation, correlating the imperial legacies of Canadian art museums with the exclusion of Chinese migrants. Her focus on the site of Lee Nam’s art studio in Victoria’s Chinatown grounds these overlapping systemic histories, seeking alternate points of connection and ways to engage with the historical conditions of Asian Canadian art in the present. In a similar vein, in their multimedia installation works artists Howie Tsui and Dipna Horra story through site-based memories, narrating time in diaspora as an engagement with multiple and discrepant temporalities: the desynchronization of the putative homeland and the site of re-settlement as well as times of movements made in haste and of remaining in stasis. Through strategies of repetition, telling the same stories over and over, both artists illustrate how the site of home in diaspora is often a residual temporality. For Tsui, this is witnessed through the temporal framework of a handscroll, an art format deriving from East Asia that he manipulates to tell a story about a disappeared home that once existed on the threshold of legality between Hong Kong and the People’s Republic of China. For Horra, the residual temporality of home is experienced through the phenomenological properties of sound. The sounds of her family’s migration stories fill her sparsely furnished installation evoking a home-like space that invites viewers to perform a teatime ritual and participate in her family’s practice of oral storytelling. Finally, Jin-me Yoon’s video works extend the discrepant temporalities examined in the first two chapters through a focus on how the landscape operates as an object of memory and as a storied place in the imaginations of the nation and its global diasporas. Using advanced formal techniques, Yoon confronts the representational and extractive logics of her lens-based medium as well as the genre of landscape. Her videos refuse the extractive colonial
“seeing eye”, instead abstracting the form of the landscape, enabling the viewer to feel its connective and changing rhythms. Her attentiveness to abstract form is enhanced by her deep research into the transpacific sites featured in her works. This unique response to the site enables Yoon to picture how emplacement within the landscape shapes diasporic subjectivity as a kind of political and poetic resonance, a relational recurrence with where one is situated.

As a situated action, worldmaking in Asian Canadian contemporary art reconfigures the diasporic lens, which often suffers from the temporal maladjustment of perceived sitelessness. The artists examined in this dissertation illustrate how worldmaking operates in diaspora as an encounter with time, space, and materiality—of being physically situated in one place and yet psychically connected to many others. Objects, stories, and landscapes are carried through migratory journeys across oceans and through personal journeys to redefine a sense of belonging in time, serving as formal connecting globally-oriented diasporas to shared worlds. Through strategies of making objects and space, repeating stories, and abstracting the visual power of landscapes, the artists in this dissertation immerse viewers in spaces where they see this formal relation-making at work: where they witness not only a site in flux, but also collaborative practices of constituting community. As an analytic to the study of site-responsive artworks, worldmaking reconfigures simultaneity across multiple temporally and spatially bordered zones, rethinking terms of representation, visibility, and inclusion within and between distanced places.
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