

Envisioning Diasporic Art:  
Chinese Canadian Art in the Global Contemporary

by  
Muhan Zhang

Department of East Asian Studies  
McGill University  
Montreal, Quebec, Canada  
April, 2018

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements of the degree of Bachelor of Arts, Joint Honours in  
Art History and East Asian Studies.

© Muhan Zhang

## **Abstract**

This thesis begins by observing the inherent difficulties of conceptualizing groups of artists in terms of their perceived ethnic, cultural, or national identities as well as the limited scholarship in the tentatively termed fields of Chinese Canadian and diasporic Asian art. Through a comparative case study of several installation works by artists Gu Xiong and Karen Tam, based respectively in Vancouver and Montreal, the present study seeks to demonstrate the rich potential of academic and curatorial praxes based in notions of diaspora or transnationalism. The selected works of art self-consciously reflect on the experiences and histories of Chinese peoples and cultures in North America; by actively engaging these experiences and histories in the analysis of these works, this thesis attempts to demonstrate the relevance of cultural or anthropological approaches to the understanding of contemporary art in a global context.

## **Abstrait**

Cette thèse débute par une observation des difficultés inhérentes dans la conceptualisation de groupes d'artistes en termes d'une perception de leur appartenance au niveau ethnique, culturel ou national, ainsi que le discours académique limité dans les domaines de l'art sino-canadien et de l'art asiatique diasporique. À travers une étude de cas comparative de diverses installations par les artistes Gu Xiong et Karen Tam, basés respectivement à Vancouver et Montréal, cette étude désire montrer le riche potentiel d'une praxis académique et curatrice basée sur les notions de diaspora et de transnationalisme. Les œuvres sélectionnés réfléchissent de façon consciente sur l'histoire et les expériences des Chinois en Amérique du Nord: en incorporant ses composantes dans l'analyse des œuvres, cette thèse tente de démontrer l'importance des approches culturelles ou anthropologiques dans la compréhension de l'art contemporain dans un contexte global.

## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to thank my advisors, Professor Jeehee Hong and Professor Chriscinda Claire Henry, without whom this thesis would not be possible. Their guidance as teachers and mentors over the course of not only this project but also several other classes throughout my undergraduate career has been absolutely priceless. Thank you both for pushing me to always seek to be more precise in my writing, more rigorous in my research, and more exacting in my methodologies. Your respective classes and careers have inspired me more than you can know.

I must also thank Professor Laura Madokoro, whose seminar on Asian diaspora was incredibly influential on this thesis and whose general kindness and generosity in supporting my research was astounding. I likewise thank Professor Brian Bergstrom for inspiring me to pursue my Joint Honours degree through his course on Japanese visual culture which I took in first year, as well as for being a constant mentor over the past four years. I express my gratitude also to the librarians and staff of the McGill Library for recognizing this project in the inaugural Library Undergraduate Research Award.

Among my peers, I am endlessly grateful to my friends and classmates in the honours seminar as well as across the Art History and East Asian Studies departments for being sounding boards for my ideas not to mention some of the best partners in co-suffering. Special thanks to Jean-Félix Caron for providing the French translation of my abstract. Finally, thank you to my mom Janet and my siblings Rachel and Carlin for their love and support from all the way across the Pacific.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	i
Introduction .....	1
Chapter 1 Questioning Diaspora, Global Chinese Art, and the Global Contemporary .....	4
Chapter 2 The Positionality of Chinese Art and Visual Culture in Canada.....	10
Chapter 3 Transnationalism in contemporary artistic practices.....	19
Chapter 4 Mechanisms of a Chinese Canadian art world .....	27
Chapter 5 The Politics of Representation in Global Contemporary Art .....	33
Conclusion .....	39
Works Cited .....	41
Appendix .....	45

## Introduction

Since the 1980s, North America has seen an influx of immigration from mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, and a significant corresponding increase in the overall ethnic Chinese population. However, while these developments have seen the recent crystallization of diasporic and transnational Chinese cultures, communities, and consciousness across Canada and the United States, the history of overseas Chinese goes far back into the history of the racial, social, and cultural formations of these settler-colonial nations itself. As Kay Anderson wrote in her seminal essay on the development of Vancouver's Chinatown, the socioeconomic realities as well as the visual and material cultures of Chinese in Canada have been and continued to be forged by both the positive, practical benefits of ethnic consolidation and the social and institutional discrimination many immigrants and minorities face.<sup>1</sup>

In the diverse landscape of contemporary Canadian art, many artists are presently engaging with notions of culture and identity through their artworks and thus participating in these ongoing discussions through artistic media. Among these artists are Gu Xiong and Karen Tam, whose respective oeuvres share a specific thematic concern for Chinese Canadian histories and experiences. Gu Xiong is a Vancouver-based artist originally from Chongqing, China who has exhibited across major cities in Canada and China since the 1980s and is currently a Professor of Visual Art at the University of British Columbia. Karen Tam has likewise exhibited on both sides of the Pacific, as well as in the United Kingdom where she completed a doctorate in Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2014. Active since the 2000s, Tam lives and works in her hometown of Montreal. Drawing upon a range of personal experiences and artistic interests, each artist presents different facets of Chinese Canadian culture on local and global

---

<sup>1</sup> K. J. Anderson, "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4, (1987): 580-598.

scales. While Gu Xiong draws from his own experience of immigration to reflect on the plight of recent immigrants, Karen Tam reaches back into history to recreate and interrogate discriminatory forces on the development of Chinese culture in the West. Working frequently in immersive multimedia installations and exhibiting in different places around the world, both artists additionally share a fundamental concern for how place and position affect the dynamics between people, objects, and sites.

### *Aims and Organization*

In view of recent expansions in transnational and diasporic studies, as well as notions of the global and globalization with regards to contemporary art, works by artists like Gu and Tam are ripe for new art historical investigation. As Margo Machida writes, scholarship in Asian American and Asian Canadian art remains sparse and unconsolidated.<sup>2</sup> In particular, I find that both this emergent field of academic scholarship and its active evocation in artistic institutions and exhibitions lack a consistent logic for grouping artists and artworks in such a fashion. Indeed, there are many so-called “Asian” or “Chinese” artists in North America who do not self-consciously invoke their personal identity or heritage in their works. And yet, the proliferation of exhibitions, artist centers, essay collections, and more, evoking the racial, ethnic, or cultural labels of “Asian,” “Chinese,” “Asian American,” “Chinese Canadian,” “diasporic Chinese” and so on underlines their increasing popularity in the contemporary art world.

Examining select installations by Gu Xiong and Karen Tam in conjunction with various institutions and networks in exhibiting their works around the world, I will seek to establish a conceptual framework for the study of artwork and exhibitions by artists of the Chinese diaspora.

---

<sup>2</sup> Margo Machida, “New Critical Directions: Transnationalism and Diaspora in Asian American Art,” *Notes in the History of Art* 31, no. 3 (2012): 23, accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2320859>.

In Chapter 1, I will provide an overview of scholarly investigations of the Chinese diaspora as well as recent treatments of Chinese/Asian/Canadian/American artists, works, and exhibitions in the global contemporary art world. In Chapter 2, I will introduce specific works by my chosen artists and outline one of major methods for analysis: that of “positionality,” through the specific positional evocations of Chinese Canadian history and experiences in Gu and Tam’s works. In Chapter 3, I will examine transnationalism in Gu and Tam’s respective artistic practices. Subsequently in Chapter 4, I will describe how specific structures and institutions in the contemporary art world impact the ways in which Chinese and Asian Canadian artists create and exhibit their work, and examine two group exhibitions including Gu and Tam’s works in particular. Finally, in Chapter 5, I take a look at how the politics of representation in the global contemporary art world implicates diasporic Chinese or otherwise marginalized artists.

By outlining a variety of dynamics through specific examples from Gu Xiong and Karen Tams’ oeuvres, I hope to demonstrate both the critical importance and the fraught instability of exhibiting contemporary art under notions of racial, ethnic, cultural, or national categories such as “Chinese Canadian.”

## Chapter 1 Questioning Diaspora, Global Chinese Art, and the Global Contemporary

### *On diaspora and transnationalism*

The notion of a Chinese “diaspora” must itself be investigated; a term traditionally associated with the Jewish diaspora, it has in the last few decades been increasingly applied to many other internally and comparatively diverse groups with varying conditions and histories of migration, dispersion, and consolidation.<sup>3</sup> Major theorist of Chinese diaspora, Wang Gungwu posited the language of diaspora to a productive replacement of previous terms such as the Chinese transliteration of *huaqiao*,<sup>4</sup> or its English translation “sojourner,”<sup>5</sup> both of which inaccurately characterize all overseas Chinese as temporarily displaced and can play into negative stereotypes of overseas Chinese as perpetual foreigners. While Wang cautions against homogenous applications of “diaspora” and “Chinese,”<sup>6</sup> harsher critiques like Shu-mei Shih advocate for abandoning both terms entirely for the more prosaic “Sinophone” or “Sinitic.”<sup>7</sup> Responding to more recent literature on transnationalism and globalization, Ien Ang continues to problematize both “Chinese” and “diaspora,” going beyond acknowledgement of difference in cultural pluralism to emphasize fluidity and hybridity of individual identifications with notions of “Chineseness” and belonging.<sup>8</sup> For the purposes of this thesis, I will both utilize and continue to problematize the notion of “diaspora.” In accordance with the wide-ranging applications of the term – especially in

---

<sup>3</sup> James Clifford, “Diaspora,” *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 302-338, accessed July 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365>.

<sup>4</sup> Wang Gungwu, “A Single Chinese Diaspora? Some Historical Reflections,” in *Imagining the Chinese Diaspora: Two Australian Perspectives*, eds. Annette Shun Wah and Wang Gungwu, (Canberra: Centre for the Study of the Chinese Diaspora, Australian National University, 1999), 2-6.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Siu, “The Sojourner,” in *American Journal of Sociology* 58, no. 1 (1952): 34-44, accessed July 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2771791>.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Gungwu, “The Question of ‘Overseas Chinese,’” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 3 (1976): 101.

<sup>7</sup> Shu-mei Shih, “Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production,” in *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays*, eds. David Dewei Wang and Jing Tsu, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 29-48.

<sup>8</sup> Ien Ang, “Undoing Diaspora: Questioning global Chineseness in the era of globalization,” in *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West* (London: Routledge, 2001), 75-92.



the field of global contemporary art as I will discuss shortly – the working definition of “diaspora” I will utilize in this thesis will be: the generally dispersed peoples of some common ethnic, national, or cultural origin. The common experience of marginalization that follows from linguistic, cultural, and ethnic difference from the local majority is also, I will argue, intrinsic to diasporic experiences. Acknowledging all the difficulties and inconsistencies in different understandings of diaspora, I will use the term as it relates to a Chinese diaspora or diasporic Chinese sparingly, giving additional explanation wherever possible.

Studies in transnationalism, meanwhile, are similarly concerned with “the movement of people, goods, money and ideas across national spaces” and attached specifically – as Glen Peterson puts it – to the notion that “migrant spaces...cannot be contained within jurisdictional boundaries or cultural imaginaries of nation-states.”<sup>9</sup> In this thesis, I intentionally utilize the term “transnational” – in some instances even to substitute other terms like “diaspora” or “transcultural” – for its association with a theory of people, culture, and ideas existing between, across, and generally beyond national borders. In the realm of art history, I observe scholars of Asian American and diasporic Asian art such as Margo Machida also using the term “transnational” in conjunction with “diaspora.”<sup>10</sup> I will discuss the inconsistencies in this area of scholarship in the following section, however it is noteworthy that both terms are being increasingly mobilized in this growing field in both academia and contemporary art.

### *On “Asian American” art*

---

<sup>9</sup> Glen Peterson, “House Divided: Transnational Families in the Early Years of the People’s Republic of China,” *Asian Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (2007): 25.

<sup>10</sup> Her essay “New Critical Directions: Transnationalism and Diaspora in Asian American Art,” which I cite frequently, is only one example.

Meanwhile in the field of art history, multiple scholars have remarked on the paucity of scholarship on Asian American<sup>11</sup> and Asian Canadian art.<sup>12</sup> Art historian, Margo Machida notes the problematics of basing a scholarly field on an ill-defined racialized category but maintains the productivity of such specificity in the study of Asian American art.<sup>13</sup> The importance of positioning artists in this manner not only recognizes the racially stratified nature of the local and global societies within which art production and institutions are embedded,<sup>14</sup> but moreover allows for analysis of contemporary art which directly engages culture as its object. Hal Foster notably observed in 1994 a turn in contemporary art towards ethnography or anthropology, which, like the unconscious for surrealists or primitivism for abstract expressionists, is providing inspiration for artists working in increasingly global, transnational, and cross-cultural contexts.<sup>15</sup> A “global Asia” or “global China” inclusive of Asian or Chinese peoples and cultures outside of geographic Asia is one alternative to traditional models of knowledge.<sup>16</sup> However, notions of internationalism, cosmopolitanism, or multiculturalism are insufficient to account for the nuances and complexities of inter-cultural and inter-racial relations. Specifically, with regards to contemporary Chinese art around the world, I support curator Hou Hanru’s belief that we must go beyond existing axes of postcolonial theory or multiculturalism to examine complex dynamics undercutting global art markets, institutions, exhibitions, and even individual works.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Machida, “New Critical Directions,” 23.

<sup>12</sup> Christopher Lee, “The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies,” *Amerasia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 1-18, accessed November 30, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.33.2.c8053m5q76215018>.

<sup>13</sup> Machida, “New Critical Directions,” 24.

<sup>14</sup> Peter S. Li, “A World Apart: The Multicultural World of Visible Minorities and the Art World of Canada,” *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (1994): 368.

<sup>15</sup> Hal Foster, “The Artist as Ethnographer?,” in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press 1994): 12-19.

<sup>16</sup> Lily Cho and Susan J. Henders, *Human Rights and the Arts: Perspectives in Global Asia* (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014): 15-16.

<sup>17</sup> Hou Hanru, “Entropy; Chinese Artists, Western Art Institutions: A New Internationalism,” in *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press 1994): 80-88.

Noting the respective political and cultural hegemonies of the United States in North America and mainland China or ethnic Chinese in East Asia, I wish to make explicit my emphasis on Chinese Canadian art for the present thesis. This narrowed focus follows from my choice of two Chinese Canadian artists as case studies or jumping-off points to examine the above-mentioned topics. It is my hope that this specificity will circumvent many inconsistencies in the use of terms like “Asian American” and “diasporic Chinese” in the contemporary art world and moreover make evident the underlying instability of such categories. Indeed, in the art world, Chinese artists with varying affiliations to the United States, from those born and raised in the United States to those who have only occasionally exhibited in American galleries to those who are perhaps more accurately described in terms of their affiliation with Hong Kong, Taiwan, or Canada, are all commonly pigeonholed under the term “Asian American.” Multiple major exhibitions of “Asian American art,” including the watershed 2008 historical survey exhibition at de Young museum in San Francisco titled *Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900-1970* are guilty of this lack of nuance.<sup>18</sup>

#### *On “contemporary Chinese” art*

On the flipside, major exhibitions of the increasingly prominent body of contemporary Chinese art on both sides of the Pacific also claim many of these same artists in the name of “contemporary Chinese art.”<sup>19</sup> Curator of Asian art at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, Alexandra Munroe, recently noted in an interview with Artnet News the contrived nature of this very vast and global category. And yet, when asked why the massive 2017 Guggenheim

---

<sup>18</sup> Other examples include: *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now*, Asia Society and Museum (2006, New York).

<sup>19</sup> Examples include: *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*, Museum of Modern Art (1999, New York).

retrospective *Art and China after 1989: Theatre of the World* was not travelling to China, Munroe responded: “This [exhibition] isn’t made for China. This show is made for an American audience.”<sup>20</sup> This statement echoes the ambivalence and contradictions inherent to such global but uniquely racialized categories as “Asian American,” “contemporary Chinese,” or “Chinese Canadian” art which have yet to be thoroughly examined in light of the global contemporary. Indeed, artists originating from mainland China like Ai Weiwei, Xu Bing, and Cai Guo-qiang have been known to live, work, and exhibit outside of China for decades.<sup>21</sup> Younger generations of artists not only continue to work and exhibit internationally but are also more than able to reach a global audience through non-site-specific platforms online. These shifts in light of globalized transportation and communications technology fly in the face of assertions like Munroe’s of a strictly “Chinese” or “American” audience. The inconsistency of these categories thus demonstrates not only a lack of critical engagement with notions of ethnic, national, and cultural identity in the art world but also the increased instability of such identities in a global context.

#### *On my selection of Chinese Canadian artists*

With these considerations in mind, my aim in selecting Karen Tam and Gu Xiong for this study on so-called Chinese Canadian and diasporic Chinese art is twofold. First of all, as I mentioned previously, the specificity of Gu and Tam’s affiliations with the Canadian context allows me to address the precise ways their biographies intersect with their artistic practice and artworks, as opposed to making sweeping statements on larger groupings of artists around the

---

<sup>20</sup> Andrew Goldstein and Alexandra Munroe, “The Guggenheim’s Alexandra Munroe on Why ‘The Theater of the World’ was Intended to Be Brutal,” *Artnet News*, September 26, 2017, accessed September 30, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/alexandra-munroe-theater-of-the-world-interview-pt-1-1095470>.

<sup>21</sup> For more information refer to: Gao Minglu and Norman Bryson, *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (Museum of Modern Art, 1999).

world. Secondly, both artists directly address experiences and histories of diaspora, transnationalism, and globalism in their works, making them ideal case studies for the impact of trans- or cross-culturalism and globalisation on contemporary art. Notably, Gu and Tam are both self-conscious of the different ways their works may be perceived in different contexts and by people with different backgrounds. This awareness plays out in very concrete ways in the artists' creation of their works as well as the organization of their exhibitions in a variety of artistic institutions and geographical locations across mainland China and other "Sinitic"<sup>22</sup> cultures, Canada, and other international contexts. Finally, Gu Xiong and Karen Tam have previously exhibited together in group exhibitions of Chinese or Asian Canadian artists; by conducting a more systematic evaluation of how and why artists such as Gu and Tam are grouped together, I hope to begin formulating a more consistent methodology regarding diasporic artists and transnational modes of global contemporary art production and exhibition.

---

<sup>22</sup> I use "Sinitic" here in Shu-mei Shih's sense of the term as incorporative of diverse peoples from a variety of cultural contexts within as well as beyond mainland China; Shih, "Against Diaspora."

## Chapter 2 The Positionality of Chinese Art and Visual Culture in Canada

Gu Xiong and Karen Tam directly reference histories and experiences of Chinese peoples in Canada in their works. While either artist refers to their own experiences and identities as Chinese Canadians to varying degrees in different works, they both investigate the position of Chinese people and culture in Canadian society through installations that engage found objects, fabricated artworks, and diverse spectators in dynamic spatial relations. In this chapter I will first provide a brief introduction to the four main installation works that will be discussed throughout this thesis. Next, I will outline one of the major theoretical bases of my methodology: that of “positionality.” The remainder of this chapter will analyze two installations, one from each artist, in greater detail and illustrate this notion of positionality through the specific history of Chinese migration to and settlement in Canada as evoked in these aforementioned two works.

### *Introduction to the works*

Gu Xiong’s exhibition *Pins* (2017) utilizes ‘pins’ as visual and material metaphor for the acute pain, embarrassment, and helplessness experienced by immigrants (fig. 1). In a recent solo retrospective in his hometown of Chongqing, China, titled *Gu Xiong: Migrations* (2017), Gu exhibited *Pins* as well as the work *Yellow Cargo* (2016-2017), in which a video of the Yangtze river is projected onto 1,500 export boxes arranged in the shape of a cargo ship (fig. 2). Karen Tam, meanwhile, has recreated many different sites of Chinese-Canadian or American cross-cultural encounter including the Chinatown curio shop (fig. 3), Chinese restaurant (fig. 4), opium den, and karaoke lounge. In *Terra dos Chinês* (fig. 3), as in her other installation works of this genre, Tam questions notions of authenticity and visual cultures of Orientalism by displaying

assortments of chinoiserie decorative objects alongside recreations made of materials like papier-mâché and wax.

### *Defining positionality*

Each of these installations self-consciously engage with positionality, which I will define loosely as the relative position of people, objects, sites, and ideas to one another with regards a variety of contextual concerns. Writing on positionality as it relates to academia and the research process, Dongxiao Qin defines positionality as “how people view the world from different embodied locations,” noting in particular one’s social, intellectual, and spatial locations and how they may affect one’s position in “social processes of difference” and “hierarchies of power and privilege.”<sup>23</sup> Meanwhile, in her book, *Unsettling Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*, Margo Machida specifically utilizes this concept in her own study of contemporary Asian American artists. Echoing Qin’s more general definition of positionality, Machida emphasizes how

...contemporary identifications and affiliations are complex, multidimensional, and fluid – a continually evolving play of positions constituted through and derived from transactions with language, art, customs, ideas, politics, spirituality, and history...Simultaneously mediated by tradition and change, interpellated by operations of power, and increasingly shaped by the imperatives of a globally dispersed yet ever more integrated world economy, such positionings index the continuum of circumstances, experiences, and narratives by which individuals and groups both make and take meaning from their times, their journeys around the planet, and the places in which they live.<sup>24</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Dongxiao Qin, “Positionality,” in *The Wiley Blackwell Encyclopedia of Gender and Sexuality Studies*, eds. Angela Wong et al. (New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016), accessed March 30, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118663219.wbegss619>

<sup>24</sup> Margo Machida, *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*. (Duke UP, 2008) 18.

Taking inspiration from Machida's use of positionality, I will evoke positionality in my thesis not only as it concerns people (such as the artist, curator, or viewer), but also with regards to objects (within or constituting a work) and sites (galleries, art institutions, cities, countries) in how they too may embody or be entangled in such "plays of positionality."<sup>25</sup> This understanding of objects derives additionally from Alfred Gell's theory of agency in which he conceptualizes art objects as occasionally substituting persons or "social agents" in matters of anthropology and anthropological art history.<sup>26</sup>

The positioning of objects, in particular, constitutes a significant component of Gu and Tam's installation works. A Chinese-English dictionary placed on a bed of pins (*Pins*, fig. 1.2) or an intricate jade pendant placed next to its wax copy (*Terra dos Chinês*, fig. 3.2) generate new levels of meaning for each object. The immersive and multi-media nature of these installations moreover provides a wealth of opportunities for the viewer to contemplate their own positionality in relation to these objects; a pile of cargo boxes (*Yellow Cargo*, fig. 2) can look from various vantage points like a cramped storage facility, a precariously assembled children's box fort, or a looming representation of Chinese export markets. Tam and Gu's careful manipulation of found and art objects within their various exhibition spaces thus emphasize the embeddedness<sup>27</sup> of objects within structures of culture, economics, and politics.

Furthermore, the installations introduced in this thesis have each been exhibited in a wide variety of geographical locations and artistic institutions. As such, each installation exists not only in its singular, site-specific form, but also as the cumulative interrelations of its unique, successive iterations across time and space. The constant re-exhibition of each installation therefore

---

<sup>25</sup> Machida, *Unsettled Visions*, 18.

<sup>26</sup> Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford University Press, 1998; 2013) 5.

<sup>27</sup> Qin, "Positionality."



constitutes an added dimension of positionality as it relates to the different audiences local to each exhibition, the different objects included in each installation in a series, the different physical dimensions of each exhibition space, and the different institutional structures surrounding the organization of each installation. In this manner, Gu and Tam are able to evoke positionality not only in individual spectators' interpretation of the objects included in a work, but also in the varying demographic, linguistic, and cultural atmospheres of each exhibition context. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, these serial exhibitions can also be considered as evidence of the transnational networks the artists and their larger diasporic communities have cultivated, illustrating the structural positionalities of different agents, institutions, and systems within the global contemporary art world.

To provide closer examination of the specific positionalities created in relation to the Chinese Canadian context, I will focus on Gu's *Pins* and Tam's *Terra dos Chinês* for the remainder of this chapter. Engaging with the specific politics, history, and visual culture of Chinese in Canada, these works demonstrate the importance of spatial and social positionality to the analysis of global contemporary art.

#### *Gu Xiong's Pins (2017)*

In a poem which accompanied the *Pins* exhibition and was displayed in both English and simplified Chinese, Gu writes:

A little pin  
A little pain  
It always follows me  
Wherever I go  
[...]  
When I cannot pronounce a word  
Pain fills my tongue

一根小针  
一点疼痛  
无论我走到哪里  
它们总是伴随而来  
[...]  
当我不能发音时  
我的舌头像针刺般的痛

When I cannot understand what  
people say to me  
Pain fills my ears  
When I do not understand the world  
around me  
Pain fills my heart  
[...]  
Year after year  
I push through all the pain  
It comes and goes  
Disappears and returns  
At last  
Pins and pain melt into one  
Becoming  
My strength

当我听不懂别人对我说什么  
我的耳朵像针刺般的痛  
当我不明白周围发生的一切  
我的心像针刺般的痛  
[...]  
一年又一年  
我经历了无数的痛苦  
它们来了又退了  
消失了又重来  
终于  
针和疼痛融为一体  
变成了  
我的力量<sup>28</sup>

In addition to illustrating the thematic concern with language and communication in immigrant experiences, this poem also makes direct allusions to specific components exhibited in other media in the installation. The video works *Pins* (fig. 1.3) and *Holding* (fig. 1.4) respectively show a single pin pricking a woman's outstretched tongue and a large quantity of pins being poured into a pair of cupped hands to the point of overflowing, before then being just as gradually released. The acute pain of not being able to communicate and the weight of holding onto the multiple and collective pains of immigration are thus presented in an intensely visceral and evocative way. Gu has written about the hardships of his own immigration, working low-paying jobs, including at one time as a busboy at a cafeteria in the University of British Columbia where he now works as Professor of visual art.<sup>29</sup> In another portion of the installation, an assortment of artefacts including an open suitcase, a weathered Chinese-English dictionary, and a handwritten letter addressed to “亲爱的爸爸” (“My beloved father”), are positioned amidst thousands of upright pins stuck into

---

<sup>28</sup> Gu Xiong, “Pins,” accessed December 9, 2017, <http://guxiong.ca/en/writings/pins-2/>.

<sup>29</sup> Gu Xiong, “My Migrations: From Yangtze River to Fraser River,” *Migrations catalogue*, 13-16, accessed December 10, 2017, <http://guxiong.ca/en/catalogue/gu-xiong-migrations-catalogue/>.

the display surface (fig. 1). While the video works present abstracted representations of an immigration experience, these artefacts, apparently taken from Gu's own immigration to Canada in the 1980s, depict an intimate personal history.

In this manner, Gu not only demonstrates the intensely uncomfortable hardships of immigration, but also situates it in the specific space-time between mainland China and Canada in the late twentieth century. Indeed, this period saw a massive influx of Chinese immigration to North America; major shifts in global economies as well as migration policies resulted in the immigration of over 500,000 Chinese to Canada between 1968 and 1994, after which immigration from mainland China and well-educated, middle-class, and urban backgrounds continued to rise.<sup>30</sup> However, while this sudden growth resulted in significant changes to the ethnic landscape of cities across Canada as well as a growing number of Canadian-born Chinese and a growing Chinese Canadian identity, as Gu demonstrates in *Pins*, this process was borne of the suffering, resilience, and labour of first generation immigrants. Thus, in spite of the relatively more diverse and tolerant societies and the context of increased communications technology and mobility of the turn of the millenium, Gu nevertheless presents the uneasy positionality of Chinese communities in Canada. This uneasiness extends from the pains of individual experiences, such as those represented in *Pins*, to an ontology and epistemology of difference which pervades Canadian and global ideologies of multiculturalism.<sup>31</sup> This emphasis on difference or distinctness of cultures, while falling short of replicating the targeted racisms of white settler-colonialism, nevertheless prevents a more flexible and nuanced understanding of global, transnational, and cross-cultural experiences.

---

<sup>30</sup> Peter S. Li, "The Rise and Fall of Chinese Immigration to Canada": Newcomers from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China and Mainland China, 1980–2000," *International Migration* 43 (2005): 9-10, accessed October 31, 2017. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2005.00324.x.

<sup>31</sup> Ang, "Undoing Diaspora," 87.

*Karen Tam's Terra dos Chinês (2012-2016)*

A multicultural or culturally pluralist theory of difference additionally replicates other detrimental notions of cultural “authenticity” which are prevalent in the history of Chinese in North America. Karen Tam investigates the historical and contemporary visual cultures of Chinese and Oriental “authenticity” in *Terra dos Chinês* (fig. 3). A recreation of the Chinatown curio shop, a staple of the historical ethnic urban enclaves in major metropolitan cities across the continent, *Terra dos Chinês* uses mimicry and parody to reveal the falsehood of cultural authenticity. *Terra dos Chinês* displays objects like snuffboxes, cloisonné vases, and blue-and-white porcelain (fig. 3.3) that harken to the centuries-old tradition of chinoiserie in European decorative arts.<sup>32</sup> This visual and material culture of Orientalism traces back to the eighteenth century, a time in which exotic objects from or evoking “the Orient” (including but not exclusive to cultures of East Asia) were in high demand in Europe. The proliferation of chinoiserie objects, made in Asia according to European designs or in Europe itself, has continued from this initial era of European imperialism into the more recent histories of Chinese presence in North America, notably in the form of the Chinatown curios shop (or shop of curiosities) in the early twentieth century, directly referenced in the title of Tam’s installation work. While a shrewd observer would note the inauthenticity inherent to many of the “original” artefacts exhibited (which are oftentimes of non-Chinese origin or design), Tam adds an additional layer of falseness by recreating these objects in wax, soap, papier-mâché, aluminium foil, or sequins. Tam’s sparkly kitschy remakes thus extend the already absurd exoticizations of Chineseness into a visibly contrived materiality and low product quality.

---

<sup>32</sup> Two major works on the topic of chinoiserie include Hugh Honour, *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay* (London: John Murray, 1861), and Oliver Impey, *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration* (London: Oxford University Press, 1977).

Taking her “artefacts” from a wide variety of sources from museum collections to contemporary department stores to eBay, Tam additionally displays both historical and contemporary forms of chinoiserie. Indeed, although the ethnic urban enclaves of Chinatowns across North America have seen a sharp decline since the 1980s,<sup>33</sup> commercial enterprises of varying ethnic or national origins continue to mobilize notions of Chinese cultural authenticity to sell products. Across North America, blue-and-white porcelain is readily found in Walmart and Homesense stores; Chinese restaurants boast authentic cuisine of Shanghaiese, Sichuanese, or Taiwanese regions; and entire Asian-themed malls peddle all variety of imported consumer goods, from Korean makeup to Chinese clothing to Japanese toilets. As Lily Cho writes of Tam’s installations, “Chineseness in diaspora is not smugly certain of its authenticity...Is that Chinese or is it not?...Karen Tam’s installations capture this experience and recreate it.”<sup>34</sup> In this manner, although Tam’s installation takes the visual culture of early twentieth century Chinatowns as a starting point, its objects in fact originate from a trans-temporal, transnational economy of kitsch Chinese consumer goods and engage in a greater epistemology of authenticity. The visual and material culture of Chinese cultures and communities in Canada is similarly entangled in the global flows of goods, capital, culture, and people. Positionality as it is evoked by Tam’s *Terra dos Chinês*, therefore engages in postcolonial legacies, global capitalism, and the concept of cultural authenticity.

As an introduction to some of the major themes of Gu Xiong and Karen Tam’s works, the examples of Gu’s *Pins* and Tam’s *Terra dos Chinês* presented in this chapter have touched on a

---

<sup>33</sup> Wei Li, “Introduction: Asian Immigration and Community in the Pacific Rim,” in *From Urban Enclave to Ethnic Suburb: New Asian Communities in Pacific Rim Countries*, ed. Wei Li, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2006), 1-22.

<sup>34</sup> Lily Cho, “Diasporic Counterpublics: The Chinese Restaurant as Insitution and Installation,” in *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014): 114, accessed December 6, 2017. Proquest Ebook Central.

range of ideas that will be discussed in greater detail throughout the remainder of this thesis. This chapter has focussed on introducing my methodology of positionality and how these two works in particular demonstrate the specific history of Chinese Canadian migrations and visual culture. In subsequent chapters, I will continue to explore global experiences of migration and postcolonial legacies through the vector of Chinese Canadian histories.

### Chapter 3 Transnationalism in contemporary artistic practices

While the prior chapter focussed primarily on the analysis of the works and how they evoked the positionalities of Chinese Canadian migrations and visual cultures, this chapter will focus more so on defining the transnational and global elements of Gu and Tam's works. I will analyze in more detail Gu's *Yellow Cargo* (fig. 2) and Tam's *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series (fig. 4), which respectively engage with the Pacific rim economy and the history of Chinese food culture in North America. With continued reference to *Pins* and *Terra dos Chinês*, I will address transnational elements within the production, curation, and exhibition of all the above installation works. My aims in this chapter are twofold: first, I seek to pinpoint concrete ways in which diasporic or other groupings of artists utilize their positionalities in their artistic practices without essentializing their intrinsic "Chinese-Canadianness" (in the case of Gu and Tam) due to their perceived ethnic, cultural, or national identity.<sup>35</sup> Second, I hope to demonstrate how elements of transnationalism, cross-cultural exchange, and globalization are not only topics in art by diasporic Chinese (as well as non-diasporic) contemporary artists but also mechanisms for the workings of the global contemporary art world itself. In this way, I seek to demonstrate the embeddedness of both the artist and the art world in global or transnational cultural dynamics.

#### *Representing transnationalism in global contemporary art*

Contemporary art historian, Pamela M. Lee outlined in a 2003 article several ways in which the art world attempted to reckon with the emergent "global question" through what she termed a

---

<sup>35</sup> This methodology is inspired by Edward Said's understanding of identity as a "twentieth-century phenomenon...of unimaginably large and diffuse mass societies." In Chapter 5, I will revisit the tension between notions of mass or globalized society as "large and diffuse" in Said words as opposed to the idea that globalization is narrowing physical or imagined distances. Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2000): 179.

“logic of representation.”<sup>36</sup> This logic of representation pertained firstly to the *representation* of diverse artists, perspectives, and topics within the art world and secondly, the *representation* – as in depiction – of imagery of globalization in works of art. The former type of representation will be the subject of Chapter 5 of this thesis; presently, I will demonstrate the latter type of representation through Gu Xiong’s *Yellow Cargo* (2016-2017) and Karen Tam’s *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series (2002-2017).

### *Gu Xiong’s Yellow Cargo (2016-2017)*

*Yellow Cargo*<sup>37</sup> (fig. 2) exhibited as part of Gu Xiong’s 2017 solo retrospective *Gu Xiong: Migrations* at the Galaxy Museum of Contemporary Art in Chongqing.<sup>38</sup> The work consists of a large number of cardboard cargo boxes arranged in the shape of a cargo ship (fig. 2.2), with a video of the Yangtze River projected onto the rear of the “ship” (fig. 2.1). In this way, *Yellow Cargo* evokes the transnational economy of the Pacific rim through synecdochic objects in a similar fashion as *Pins* and *Terra dos Chinês*. Much like a Chinese-English dictionary serves to represent Chinese-Canadian immigration in *Pins* and a blue-and-white porcelain vase serves to represent the history of Chinese export products in *Terra dos Chinês*, the cargo boxes in *Yellow Cargo*, each bearing labels from local businesses in Chongqing, serves as a synecdoche of the greater trans-Pacific economy. This economy is additionally represented through the video projection of the bustling Yangtze River, which opens to the Pacific Ocean. Notably, in the specific

---

<sup>36</sup> Pamela M. Lee, “Boundary Issue: The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism” *Artforum* Nov. 2003, 165-7.

<sup>37</sup> Gu Xiong previously exhibited another site-specific version of *Yellow Cargo* in 2016 in Machala, Ecuador. In this initial version of the work, the materials used were 1500 banana boxes from the local banana industry and an accompanying video projection.

<sup>38</sup> Originally intended to exhibit for two months between June and August, 2017, according to the artist’s website, the exhibit was shut down days before the scheduled opening. The gallery remained open while the exhibition was de-installed, and Gu generated an additional body of photography and video work documenting this process of erasure. Due to lack of publicized information about the shut down, I have focused primarily on the exhibition as planned.



context of this solo retrospective and Gu's bi-coastal personal and professional life, this element of the work additionally alludes to another river in another port city: the Fraser River in Vancouver. The projection thus serves to doubly show the actual activity of real cargo ships entering and leaving the ports of Chongqing and hint at the various global ports which these ships and their cargo are destined to arrive at. The commercial activity evoked in this work can be considered in light of Pamela M. Lee's notion of global contemporary art that directly represents imagery of globalization. The work also evinces the specific transnational exchanges between the national economies of China and Canada, of which Gu Xiong himself has taken part as an individual who has worked and travelled between the two countries.

*Karen Tam's Golden Mountain Restaurant series (2002-2017)*

Karen Tam's *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series, which has seen distinct iterations in thirteen locations across Canada and the United Kingdom since 2002, represents globalism not through imagery of transportation or other such mechanisms of globalization but rather through recreating a range of institutions that result from those mechanisms. Just as with *Terra dos Chinês*, which takes Chinatown curios shops as its subject, the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series recreates "typical Chinese-Canadian cafés and restaurants between the 1930s and 1980s."<sup>39</sup> Each iteration in the series has a unique name, furnishings, signs, menus, and other paraphernalia and takes inspiration from a specific era. Items in each restaurant installation are a combination of "fabricated, found, and borrowed items from local community and businesses."<sup>40</sup> In describing the recognisability of and resemblance between installations, Lily Cho writes that Tam's restaurants

---

<sup>39</sup> As quoted from Karen Tam's online portfolio. <http://www.karentam.ca/goldmountain.html>.

<sup>40</sup> As quoted from Karen Tam's online portfolio. <http://www.karentam.ca/goldmountain.html>.

are characterized by their “lack of cosmopolitanism.”<sup>41</sup> Notably, by choosing to exhibit the majority of the series in small cities and towns, Tam shifts the focus away from cosmopolitan urban centres or “gateway cities” like Vancouver. Instead, as a counterpoint to the point-blank representation of mass globalized economies in *Yellow Cargo*, Tam’s restaurant series presents an alternative vision of globalization as carried out through the perpetuation, diffusion, repetition of small local institutions like a Chinese restaurant.

None of the installations in the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series have been functioning restaurants, however a variety of public programming including Chinese karaoke nights, calligraphy workshops, movie screenings, and other social events where food is served have taken place. *Jardin Chow Chow Garden: A Division of Gold Mountain Restaurant* (fig. 4.1) installed in Saint-Hyacinthe, Quebec, for example, hosted game days with a mah-jong table and gumball machine as well as a social event titled “West eats East,” where shrimp chips, soya drinks, coffee, and 7-up were served. In addition to replicating the communal sharing of food and cuisines of varying degrees of Chineseness that takes place in real Chinese restaurants, the organization of such events emphasizes the Chinese restaurant as a site of diasporic Chinese community building and transnational exchange throughout history. As such, Tam’s *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series also differs from Gu’s *Yellow Cargo* in the facet of globalization depicted; rather than evoking multinational corporations, trading in massive quantities of goods across the global economy, Tam’s traditional mom-and-pop style restaurants focus on intimate processes of local or even individual cross-cultural exchanges and diasporic experiences.

### *Defining a transnational or global artistic practice*

---

<sup>41</sup> Cho, *Eating Chinese*, 109.

Having explored how *Pins* and *Terra dos Chinês* invoke the variegated positionalities of different sites, objects, and people in Chinese Canadian history as well as how *Yellow Cargo* and the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series each represent elements of globalization of transnationalism, I will now address how the production and exhibition of these installation works are also entangled in processes of transnationalism or globalization. In other words, through analyzing the transnational Chinese Canadian elements of Gu Xiong and Karen Tam's artistic practices, I hope to begin establishing a logic for grouping artists under such categories as "Chinese Canadian" in the first place.

#### *Gu Xiong and A Tale of Two Rivers*

Gu Xiong and Karen Tam both have what can be termed "transnational" art practices and exhibit across Canada and the world. Gu Xiong frequently travels between his permanent residence in Vancouver and his hometown of Chongqing in both personal and professional capacities. His solo retrospective *Gu Xiong: Migrations* at the Galaxy Museum of Contemporary Art in Chongqing and was funded in part through Canadian government grants associated with Canada 150. As previously discussed, exhibited works within this retrospective, including *Pins* and *Yellow Cargo* were organized around the common theme of transnational migration which Gu often uses as inspiration for his works. Gu's career takes him across the Pacific rim and between the internally diverse metropolitan centers of Chongqing and Vancouver. As Cho et al. notes, to conceptualize Asia or China as global is not to deny national or geographic entities, but rather to recognize regions as sites of constant movement and social relations.<sup>42</sup> Edward Said's notion of geography as "a socially constructed and maintained sense of place" is thus most fully

---

<sup>42</sup> Cho et al., *Human Rights and the Arts*, 15.

revealed when examining the many overlapping imaginings of space and identity present in Gu and Tam's works.<sup>43</sup>

For instance, the river shown in *Yellow Cargo* will be easily recognizable as the Yangtze to the audience of Chongqing, but may easily be mistook on first glance for the Fraser river by someone local to Vancouver. This work's framing as part of an exhibition on migration reveals additional layers: while to those whose lives straddle the Pacific Ocean may see their paths in the cargo destined for the same journey to the West, others may see a different journey from rural to urban China in pursuit of work in the rapidly developing port city of Chongqing. Gu writes that his own journey of migration started not in Canada but within China during the Cultural Revolution when, as an urban youth in 1972, he was sent to the countryside in northeastern Sichuan for re-education.<sup>44</sup> Migration in this way resonates not only with transnational mobility, but the increased porosity of many different boundaries of cultural space and identity.

Gu Xiong's personal experiences living and travelling between China and Canada extend beyond the chosen topics of his works, however. Gu's continued connections to networks and institutions on both coasts as well as his fluency in both cultures allow him to display great flexibility and mobility in his art and career. Having completed his BFA and MFA in the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Gu has continued to maintain professional ties to the Chongqing art world, exhibiting there frequently in both solo and group shows well after moving to Vancouver in the late 1980s. Similarly, since moving to Vancouver, Gu has exhibited alongside many of the same Chinese or Asian Canadian artists and in many of the same institutions. Furthermore, his frequent use of bilingual (English and Chinese) texts, from the captions of video works and Gu's own poetry to exhibition catalogues and wall texts,

---

<sup>43</sup> Said, "Invention, Memory and Place," 180.

<sup>44</sup> Gu, "My Migrations," 15.

demonstrate a prevailing concern for mediating Chinese and Canadian modes of expression through his work. The above cited poem from *Pins* is one such example. The catalogue of the *Gu Xiong: Migrations* retrospective is also fully bilingual, with essays by Gu himself as well as scholars and curators from both China and Canada, translated in either language.

### *Karen Tam and the history of the Chinese diaspora*

Karen Tam, who was born and raised in Montreal but educated in Chicago and London, has examined diasporic Chinese culture across North America and Europe. The inspirations for *Terra dos Chinês* can notably be traced to previous explorations of European chinoiserie in a travelling group exhibition of a different title<sup>45</sup> between 2012 and 2014 in the United Kingdom, during which time Tam was studying for her doctorate in Cultural Studies at the University of London. Unlike Gu, who emphasises the specific transnational flows of people, objects, and ideas between the coasts of China and western Canada in his works, Tam takes a more global history and experience of diasporic Chinese as her subject. To describe the differences in approach between Gu and Tam, I return once again to the notion of positionality. Tam, by virtue of growing up in Montreal as opposed to immigrating to Canada later in life; pursuing an education in cultural studies; and other such social, intellectual, and spatial factors is differently positioned in her perspective and approach to the subject matter of Chinese Canadian histories and experiences than Gu Xiong. Notably, Tam has focussed on bringing her exhibitions to variety of spaces across Canada, as opposed to developing a cross-continental career as Gu has done. She has accordingly held residencies in cities across Canada, including Montreal, Vancouver, and Toronto, as well as additional residencies across Europe, the United States, and notably a one month stint at 501

---

<sup>45</sup> Group exhibition, *Sinopticon: Contemporary Chinoiserie*, Victoria & Albert Museum (London, UK), 2012-14.

Artspace Chongqing in 2009. Tam's emphasis on and frequent references to the history of diasporic Chinese visual and material culture in her works also correlates to her background as a scholar of this subject.<sup>46</sup> Thus, whereas Gu's approach to his works have oftentimes developed out of personal experiences, paraphernalia, and textual accounts related to immigration, Tam's approach is based more so on scholarly investigations of history.

In this sense of a transnational or global art practice, Gu Xiong and Karen Tam each invoke different personal experiences, geographical locations, and networks in order to create their works and organize exhibitions. While globalized transportation and communications technology allow many contemporary artists to exhibit internationally, I argue that where Gu and Tam choose to exhibit their installation works, in particular, is not random, but a vital part of the play of Chinese Canadian and diasporic Chinese positionalities that forms the base of the majority of their oeuvres. Both their interest or inspiration in addressing certain subject matters of transnationalism and diaspora in their art and the subsequent professional experience, skills, and networks necessary to bring them to fruition originate from their lived experiences as Chinese Canadians.

---

<sup>46</sup> On her LinkedIn, Tam describes herself as both "artist" and "independent scholar;" she has contributed to Alison Hulme's (ed.) book, 'The Changing Landscape of China's Consumerism' (2014), and to John Jung's book, 'Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurant' (2010).

## **Chapter 4 Mechanisms of a Chinese Canadian art world**

Following from my analysis of the transnational dimensions of Gu Xiong and Karen Tam's artistic practices, I will presently seek to outline the various structures and organizations around these artists' individual practice. By focussing specifically on those that engage in notions of Chinese or Asian Canadian art, I hope to demonstrate how a variety of mechanisms are in place for the organization of artists under these categories and the production of art around topics of Chinese diaspora and transnationalism.

### *Chinese Canadian organizations, institutions, networks, and knowledge*

While not all artists of a particular identity or group may choose to affiliate with or address subject matter within that identity or group, the existence of specific organizations, institutions, and networks dedicated to such categories as Asian American or diasporic Chinese art speaks to its prevailing hold on the contemporary art world. Within Canada, such organizations include: galleries and artist-run centres such as Centre A and R Space, both located in Vancouver; artist associations and collectives such as the Diasporic Asian Art Network (DAAN) and Atelier Céladon in Montreal; dedicated departments or institutes within existing institutions such as the Asian Collection and Garden at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria and the Institute of Asian Art (IAA) at the Vancouver Art Gallery; and academic research journals, associations, and institutes devoted to the study of this topic including the Asian Diasporic Visual Cultures and the Americas (ADVA), Canadian Asian Studies Association/Association Canadienne des Études Asiatiques (CASA/L'ACÉA), and the Canadian Society for Asian Arts (CSAA).

In terms of creating a logic for grouping Chinese Canadian artists or defining Chinese Canadian art, the existence of such organizations and the collective body of exhibitions, publications, events, and other ephemera they generate speaks to very concrete mechanisms for

the production, dissemination, and study of art around the notion of Chinese or Asian Canadian. In other words, the existence of this community or system of diasporic/Chinese/Asian/Canadian artists and art within the larger scope of Canadian or global contemporary art self-validates the continued production of art and knowledge around this grouping. For art historians, in particular, it is quite practical to acknowledge and describe these common communities of artists, curators, and scholars. In my own study of an artist like Gu Xiong, for instance, I would highlight the specifically transnational vector of his artistic practice and career that is born out of the network of mainland Chinese, Canadian, and Chinese or Asian Canadian peoples and institutions he has cultivated throughout his career. Therefore, while most contemporary artists today exhibit internationally, a significant portion of Gu's oeuvre can be considered in light of his consistent affiliation with variably mainland Chinese, Canadian, and Chinese and Asian Canadian organizations.

*"Redress Express" (2007)*

To highlight the specific ways in which these organizations support the work of artists such as Gu Xiong and Karen Tam as well as promote the accompanying body of knowledge, I will examine two exhibitions and their corresponding programming in particular. First is the exhibition *REDRESS EXPRESS: Chinese Restaurants and the Head Tax Issue in Canadian Art* held at Centre A in Vancouver in 2007, which was accompanied by a two-day symposium titled "REDRESS EXPRESS: Current Directions in Asian Canadian Art and Culture." The exhibition included works by five Asian Canadian artists, including Gu Xiong, who exhibited a series of banner portraits of important Chinese Canadian figures, and Karen Tam, who installed a version of her *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series titled *China Doll* (fig. 4.2) in Centre A's gallery space in Vancouver's



Chinatown. The symposium included lectures by scholars from across Canada working in a variety of disciplines (many of whom have been cited throughout this thesis), and ended with an artist talk moderated by curator and scholar Alice Ming Wai Jim.

As previously discussed, in the art historical study of either the works of specific artists or this exhibition as a whole, it is first of all quite practical to describe the fact of their being organized under an umbrella of “Asian Canadian art.” However, as we began to unpack the organizers’ of this exhibition and symposium’s own reasoning for coming together under this category, it becomes quite clear that their motivations were not merely practical. The host institution, Centre A, for instance, describes their mandate in quite explicitly political terms of “activat[ing] contemporary art’s vital role in building and understanding the long and dynamic Asia-Canada relationship, while tackling questions of broader concern from Asian and Asian-diasporic perspectives.”<sup>47</sup> The description for *REDRESS EXPRESS* similarly evokes both the history and current politics of Asian Canadian existence, namely pertaining to the redress campaign for surviving Chinese head tax payers, and a desire to address these themes through art and continued scholarship.<sup>48</sup> As curator and then director of Centre A, Alice Ming Wai Jim, writes, the exhibition title itself was derived from the same term that the media coined in 2006 to describe “the cross-country train ride to Ottawa by Chinese head tax payers and their families to hear Prime Minister Stephen Harper deliver a long overdue apology on June 22, 2006.”<sup>49</sup>

The occasion of the exhibition coincided with Karen Tam’s residency at Centre A and her restaurant installation, which transformed the entire gallery space, served as the focal point of the

---

<sup>47</sup> As quoted from the Centre A website: <http://centrea.org/about/>.

<sup>48</sup> As described in the exhibition text on Centre A’s website: <http://centrea.org/2007/08/redress-express/>.

<sup>49</sup> Alice Ming Wai Jim, “Redress Express: Chinese Restaurants and the Head Tax Issue in Canadian Art (Deliberations on a Preliminary Course),” *Amerasia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 97-114, Accessed November 30, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.33.2.a367746162795516>.

entire exhibition; the Chinese restaurant serves as a sort of icon through which to “bring forward critical discourses in relation to the head tax redress and identity politics.”<sup>50</sup> The reception for the opening of the exhibition and the first day of the symposium was held in Tam’s “restaurant;” photographs of the event (fig. 4.2), which featured karaoke and dancing show, how the installation not only reproduces the likeness of a historical site of communal and cross-cultural gatherings but also serves as an active site of renewed community building and knowledge sharing. As such, *REDRESS EXPRESS* as a whole constituted both a visual, material, and spatial working through of identity politics and head tax redress – as realized through the group exhibition – and a gathering of scholarly knowledge on these subjects – as realized through the symposium.

#### *EAHR @ ARTEXTE (2015)*

A similar project was organized in 2015 by the student-led Ethnocultural Art Histories Research group (EAHR) of Concordia University and the Montreal non-profit arts organization Artexte. This project, titled “EAHR @ ARTEXTE: Uncovering Asian Canadian and Black Canadian Artistic Production,” produced two alternating vitrine exhibitions of Asian Canadian and Black Canadian artists’ works displayed at Artexte and the Department of Art History at Concordia University; an essay by students within EAHR titled “Tracing Asian Canadian Art Histories and Aesthetic Alliances;” and two comprehensive bibliographies available on the Artexte website. Photographs of Karen Tam’s 2006 installation from the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series at MAI Gallery, Montreal as well as photographs of her installation of an opium den at Robert Langen Art Gallery in Waterloo Ontario in 2011 were included in the exhibition as well as the subjects of the accompanying essay. This project was an occasion for the collective re-exhibition of

---

<sup>50</sup> As described in the exhibition text on Centre A’s website: <http://centrea.org/2007/08/redress-express/>.

photographs of a large number of different works by Asian Canadian artists across Canada since the 1980s. Additionally, the essay and bibliography produced served to accompany these visual documents with textual knowledge.

This project, conducted by students under the EAHR group, founded in 2011, exemplifies the increased interest in what the research group has termed ethnocultural studies, as well as the occasion to assemble a very wide range of artists, works, and texts on the subject of Asian Canadian art. As with *REDRESS EXPRESS* at Centre A, this project and exhibition was founded on explicitly political purposes of addressing issues pertaining to Asian Canadian existence. Specifically, the project aimed to address and redress “the underrepresentation of Asian Canadian and Black Canadian artists and art histories within art museums, galleries, and other cultural institutions” as well as how this underrepresentation is subsequently reflected in scholarly writings.<sup>51</sup> In this way, this project took a reflexive approach to examining and displaying works of Asian Canadian artists that interrogated how larger societal issues pertaining to ethnic minorities and institutional racism also pervades the art world and academia. The broad range of artists selected for this project and the comparative approach with Black Canadian art also exemplifies the logic for different categorizations of artists under variably “Chinese,” “Asian,” or “ethnic minority/person of colour.” As a scholarly project aimed at documenting a wide range of artists and collecting a comprehensive bibliography, “EAHR @ ARTEXTE” has quite apparent reasons for their expansive approach. (Unlike *REDRESS EXPRESS*, which developed its programming out of a very specific historical event of the Chinese head tax and its corresponding group).

I would argue a similar logic underlies other evocations of a wider “Asian” Canadian, American, or diasporic art; in the interest of remedying the ongoing marginalization of ethnic

---

<sup>51</sup> Alice Ming Wai Jim ed., *EAHR @ ARTEXTE: Uncovering Asian Canadian and Black Canadian Artistic Production* (Montreal: Ethnocultural Art Histories and Research Group (EAHR), 2015): 4.

Asian artists in Canadian and North American art – or even the specific marginalization of Asian and Chinese Canadian themes in art against the immense popularity of contemporary art by already prominent artists from mainland China – there are clear benefits for artists to organize themselves in solidarity with fellow members of the same or similarly marginalized group. This is also true for artists regardless of whether the content of their works directly address issues pertaining to Asian Canadians or not. In this way, the positionality of Chinese or Asian Canadian artists as marginalized members of society at large serves not only as potential inspiration for the similar content of their works, but also as the impetus for their organization under the institutions, associations, and exhibitions serving precisely to support their careers in very real and practical ways.

## Chapter 5 The Politics of Representation in Global Contemporary Art

Thus far, I have also been preoccupied with Canada as the primary site in which both artists work and exhibit as well as both Canada and China as entities against which much of their work is positioned against. As I noted in the beginning of my thesis, these identities, sites, and experiences which I have thus far mainly treated in transnational terms are not exclusive of notions of the “global.” However, in this final chapter, I will directly address the implications that distinctly (albeit not exclusively) global elements of contemporary art and the art world have on the politics and positionality of Chinese Canadian or other diasporic art.

### *“Global contemporary”*

According to curator Francisco Bonami, “the concept of globalization is often used to define the world as a unified territory, which it is not. We experience fragmentation in this world.”<sup>52</sup> In many ways, the works of Gu Xiong and Karen Tam seek to describe and engage with this fragmentation in a globalized world; Tam’s works demonstrate how postcolonial legacies and cross-cultural divides have plagued Chinese Canadian existence in the past, and Gu’s works manifest in visual media the hardships of global migration. In both artists’ works, the sweep of globalized economies and geo-politics do not smooth over the national borders, cultural divides, or racial conflicts. Rather, an undercurrent of disillusionment with the romantic promises of globalized interconnectivity pervades much of their oeuvre.

In particular, either artist’s engagement of the viscosity of international commerce, namely through the export of mass produced goods from mainland China demonstrates a concern for how global capitalism perpetuates rather than connects a fragmented world. In *Terra dos Chinês*, Karen

---

<sup>52</sup> Francisco Bonami as quoted in Ruth Iskin, “Introduction,” in *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives in a Global World*, ed. Ruth Iskin (New York: Routledge, 2017), 10.

Tam juxtaposes genuine historical artefacts of Chinese export porcelain and European *chinoiserie* next to their modern-day equivalents from home good chains like Homesense (fig. 3.4) which are frequently mass-produced in mainland China. With the notable exception of the pictured vase in fig. 3.4 bearing a Homesense and “Made in China” sticker,<sup>53</sup> Tam’s paraphernalia are not labelled, and it is frequently impossible to distinguish between the historical and contemporary artefacts. Indeed, both utilize a similar aesthetics of Orientalism to attract their consumers. As postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha wrote, colonial mimicry or appropriation of the colonized object in fact serves to exaggerate a “representation of difference” through manifesting a “reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite.”<sup>53</sup> By conflating historical and contemporary “Oriental” objects, Tam therefore draws attention to how colonial processes of mimicry and appropriation, dating to the eighteenth century in the case of European *chinoiserie*, are presently being reproduced by globalized manufacturing industries. Gu Xiong, as previously discussed, depicts the imagery of this globalized manufacturing industry in *Yellow Cargo* (fig. 2), including the cargo boxes, ships, and ports involved in the global shipping of such manufactured goods as Tam’s Homesense vase.

However, rather than merely drawing attention to or representing these processes of global fragmentation, Tam and Gu each purposefully invoke imagery of globalization in order to subvert them. The importance of the spectator and different forms of “seeing” has previously been expounded by scholars of feminist theory and art history; Rey Chow notably expands Laura

---

<sup>53</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” in *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 122.

Mulvey's writing on the masculine gaze and feminine image in film towards conceptualizing of a Chinese or ethnic spectator in a cross-cultural context.<sup>54</sup> Chow writes:

Unlike what Oriental things still are to many Europeans and Americans, "Western things" to a Chinese person are never merely dispensable embellishments; their presence has for the past century represented the necessity of fundamental adaptation and acceptance. It is the permanence of imprints left by the contact with the West that should be remembered even in an ethnic culture's obsession with "itself."<sup>55</sup>

In works like *Terra dos Chinês* and the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series, Tam plays on the expectations and positionalities of her viewers who will likely recognize the "Orientalist" coding in the aesthetics of her decorative objects and storefronts. She subsequently subverts their expectations by revealing the contrivance of her work. In *Terra dos Chinês*, Tam achieves this by mimicking the "Oriental" artefacts within her installation; in recreating "Oriental" objects in paper, tinfoil, and wax, she makes a mockery of the very process of mimicry employed by colonizers. Moreover, by intentionally mixing historical, contemporary, and fabricated artefacts amidst one another in her installations, she goads viewers into first recognizing objects as apparently "ethnic" before revealing, through the evidently different materiality of the fabricated objects, the falsehood of the entire enterprise of colonial mimicry. In the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series, she achieves a similar effect by transforming entire gallery spaces, including the facades, into the appearance of a functioning Chinese restaurant.

Gu Xiong similarly plays with different viewer expectations and positionalities in *Yellow Cargo*. The video footage of a port in Chongqing displayed on the cargo-box ship is taken from some distance (fig. 2.1) at which it is not immediately clear which specific port is depicted. The

---

<sup>54</sup> Rey Chow, "Seeing Modern China: Toward a Theory of Ethnic Spectatorship," in *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 20-22.

<sup>55</sup> Rey Chow, "Seeing Modern China," 27.

port therefore simultaneously depicts the specific port at Chongqing and the generalized idea of a port as a site for the import and export of goods around the world. I previously drew attention to how the Yangtze River opening to the Pacific at Chongqing evokes the Fraser River of Gu Xiong's second home in Vancouver; in this sense, Gu compares himself to the mass-produced commercial goods being shipped out from mainland China to developed countries like Canada. As himself part of a specific diaspora of large populations of Chinese individuals to Canada and the United States at the turn of the millennium, Gu thus compares his marginalization as a Chinese immigrant to Canada to the trivialization of cheaply made manufactured goods made in China, or, as Chow describes, the "Oriental things" that have been and still are considered "dispensable embellishments" to "many Europeans and Americans"<sup>56</sup> – or, more generally speaking, to those who adopt an "Orientalizing" or racializing gaze. In *Pins* (fig. 1), which exhibited alongside *Yellow Cargo* in the *Gu Xiong: Migrations* retrospective, Gu explicitly addresses these continually reproduced forms of marginalization, oppression and pain born out of global migrations. As elaborated earlier in my thesis, in *Pins*, these global migrations encompass a variety of sites and positionalities, from rural to urban, developing to developed, and so on.

### *"Curating difficult knowledge"*

In Chapter 4, I described the extant underrepresentation of Chinese and Asian Canadian and other marginalized artists in the contemporary art world and the need for increased diversity of artists and perspectives as a matter of equity. In the remainder of my thesis, I will elaborate on the need for this representation in the contemporary art world in terms of the importance of art as

---

<sup>56</sup> Rey Chow, "Seeing Modern China," 27.



a reflection of and influence on society, as well as for interrogating globalization within the art world.

First of all, diversity in the art world is important not only for diversity's sake. As Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton write, the display and curation of difficult knowledge constitutes a critical form of shaping collective memories in society.<sup>57</sup> Lehrer and Milton identify a common thread of "memory work" throughout academia, museums, memorial sites, and other cultural practices. As a reflection on both historical and contemporary society and Chinese Canadian experiences, the works of Gu Xiong and Karen Tam engage directly in Lehrer et al.'s conception of "memory work." The "REDRESS EXPRESS" exhibition and symposium, for instance, was specifically aimed at reexamining the difficult history of institutionalized racism against Chinese people in Canada, for which Tam and Gu each contributed works of contemporary art. While not all contemporary art engages so explicitly in history or politics, I would argue that parts of the contemporary art world such as those representing Chinese Canadian and diasporic Chinese art do perform vital forms of memory work. Lehrer et al. specifically describe curating as a highly intimate form of "caring for" difficult memory and attempting to frame it for public display.<sup>58</sup> They furthermore describe curators as a type of broker, negotiator, facilitator, and sharer of authority.<sup>59</sup> The curatorial approaches of "REDRESS EXPRESS" closely align to Lehrer et al.'s theorization on curating difficult knowledge while also engaging in methods of curating contemporary art exhibitions, as the organizers of the exhibition, principle among them Alice Ming Wai Jim, sought to address the difficult history of Chinese in Canada through works of contemporary art.

---

<sup>57</sup> Erica Lehrer and Cynthia E. Milton, "Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing," in *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 3.

<sup>58</sup> Lehrer et al., 3-4.

<sup>59</sup> Lehrer et al., 6.

Many Indigenous art historians, including Inuk scholar and curator, Heather Igloliorte, specifically addresses the ability of art and curatorial strategies to effect societal change. Igloliorte describes her curatorial practice as expressly “decolonial” in that she aims to undermine Canadian settler-colonial ideologies and histories through the exhibition of various forms of contemporary Inuit art in settler-colonial art museums and institutions.<sup>60</sup> This methodology of decolonization, while not applicable in a literal sense to the history and circumstances of Chinese Canadians, is transferable to the effective curation Chinese Canadian contemporary art.

### *Institutional critique*

Igloliorte’s process of decolonizing the art museum space through art functions simultaneously as an enactment of societal activism and a specific institutional critique of the art world itself as embedded within a larger political sphere. Writing about the art world’s treatment of globalization, Pamela M. Lee further emphasizes the complicity of many aspects of art institutions and practices in reproducing a “colonial logic.”<sup>61</sup> Lee describes a phenomenon in the global contemporary art world whereby

...official institutions (namely, museums, those loci of art-historical knowledge) are imagined to defend their proprietary interests from global “outsiders” and their curatorial incursions. By the same token something of a colonial logic underwrites the expansion of the art world’s traditional borders, as if the art world itself were gleefully following globalization’s imperial mandate.<sup>62</sup>

Lee additionally describes the self-congratulatory nature of “abject neoliberal[ism]” of the global contemporary art world in how it characterizes itself as existing outside of the problematics of

---

<sup>60</sup> Heather Igloliorte, "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum," *Art Journal* 76.2 (2017): 100-13.

<sup>61</sup> Lee, "Boundary Issue," 165.

<sup>62</sup> Lee, "Boundary Issue," 165.

globalization.<sup>63</sup> The mere representation of Chinese Canadian and other diasporic Asian artists within this contemporary art world therefore is not enough; a reflexive approach to the exhibition and study of Chinese Canadian art is necessary to address issues within the art world. “REDRESS EXPRESS” and “EAHR @ ARTEXTE” are two examples of projects motivated by reactionary impulses against institutionalized racism both within and beyond the art world.

To this end, I will also argue that works like Karen Tam’s immersive installations engage in similar efforts of decolonization as Igloliorte’s. By transforming the gallery spaces into her facsimiles of Chinese restaurants and Chinatown curio shops, she changes the ontology of the gallery in much the same way she does the objects within her work.<sup>64</sup> Just as with the artefacts and fabrications in Tam’s installations, viewers and passers-by alike will not immediately be able to identify whether the space is a gallery or a Chinese restaurant. The “experience of a perpetual double take”<sup>65</sup> engendered by these works occurs on the streets as well as within the self-selected visitors of the gallery, serving as precisely the genre of societal intervention that Igloliorte and Lee propone. Lily Cho further describes these works as “not simply mimetic creations with a pedagogical function,” in the way that they form a “diasporic counterpublics” by reproducing a public space within a public space.<sup>66</sup>

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, I have examined the works, exhibitions, artistic practices, and professional networks of artists Gu Xiong and Karen Tam in order to explore the validity of the

---

<sup>63</sup> Lee, “Boundary Issue,” 166.

<sup>64</sup> Other examples of installations that have transformed gallery space to similar ends include: Beninese artist Meschac Gaba’s *Museum of Contemporary African Art* (1997-2002), English artist Tracey Emin’s *My Bed* (1998), and Chinese artist Song Dong’s *Waste Not* (2005-).

<sup>65</sup> Cho, “Diasporic Counterpublics,” 114.

<sup>66</sup> Cho, “Diasporic Counterpublics,” 115.

notion of Chinese Canadian or diasporic Chinese art. I began first by interrogating the complex terminology surrounding Chinese and Asian communities around the world as well as the inconsistent application of such terminology in describing contemporary art and artists affiliated with these groups. Engaging the notion of positionality of people, sites, objects, and ideas, I subsequently examined *Pins* (2017) by Gu Xiong and *Terra dos Chinês* (2012-2016) by Karen Tam in relation to Chinese Canadian history. Next, I expanded my analysis to include two more works, Gu's *Yellow Cargo* (2016-2017) and Tam's *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series (2002-2017) and began to establish the idea of a transnational artistic practice as seen in Gu and Tam's careers. This was then supported by an outline of the various organizations, institutions, and networks involving Chinese or Asian Canadian that I argued collectively produced specific mechanisms for the production and exhibition of Chinese or Asian Canadian art within the contemporary art world. I additionally argued that these mechanisms effectively provided a practical logic for the organization of artists under categories of racial, ethnic, cultural, or national identity such as "Chinese Canadian." Finally, I demonstrated how it is not only be practical to evoke these categories in global contemporary art, but also a crucial in the interest of representing diverse and critical perspectives in globalizing society and a globalizing art world.

Gu Xiong and Karen Tam address notions of Chinese diaspora in their work and present their works in exhibitions that are transnational in more ways than one. Engaging with both the specificities of the Chinese Canadian experience and the macrocosmic phenomena of global contemporary art, Gu and Tam exemplify the logic by which many artists organize themselves to challenge the marginalization of diasporic Chinese and Asian voices in the art world and beyond.

## Works Cited

- Anderson, K. J. "The Idea of Chinatown: The Power of Place and Institutional Practice in the Making of a Racial Category," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 77, no. 4 (1987): 580-598.
- Ang, Ien. "Undoing Diaspora: Questioning global Chineseness in the era of globalization." In *On Not Speaking Chinese: Living between Asia and the West*, 75-92. London: Routledge, 2001.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse." In *Location of Culture*, 121-31. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Cho, Lily. "Diasporic Counterpublics: The Chinese Restaurant as Institution and Installation." In *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*, 109-130. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014. Accessed December 6, 2017. Proquest Ebook Central.
- Cho, Lily and Susan J. Henders. *Human Rights and the Arts: Perspectives in Global Asia*. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2014.
- Clifford, James. "Diaspora." *Cultural Anthropology* 9, no. 3 (1994): 302-338. Accessed July 9, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656365>.
- Fisher, Jean ed. *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*. London: Kala Press, 1994.
- Honour, Hugh. *Chinoiserie: The Vision of Cathay*. London: John Murray, 1861
- Igloliorte, Heather. "Curating Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit: Inuit Knowledge in the Qallunaat Art Museum," *Art Journal* 76.2 (2017): 100-13.
- Impey, Oliver. *Chinoiserie: The Impact of Oriental Styles on Western Art and Decoration*. London: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Iskin, Ruth. "Introduction," in *Re-envisioning the Contemporary Art Canon: Perspectives in a Global World*, ed. Ruth Iskin. New York: Routledge, 2017.
- Jim, Alice Ming Wai ed. *EAHR @ ARTEXTE: Uncovering Asian Canadian and Black Canadian Artistic Production*. Montreal: Ethnocultural Art Histories and Research Group (EAHR), 2015.
- . "Redress Express: Chinese Restaurants and the Head Tax Issue in Canadian Art (Deliberations on a Preliminary Course)." *Amerasia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 97-114. Accessed November 30, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.33.2.a367746162795516>.
- Gao, Minglu and Norman Bryson. *Inside Out: New Chinese Art*. Museum of Modern Art, 1999. Print.

- Gell, Alfred. *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford University Press, 1998; 2013.
- Goldstein, Andrew and Alexandra Munroe. "The Guggenheim's Alexandra Munroe on Why 'The Theater of the World' was Intended to Be Brutal." *Artnet News*. September 26, 2017, accessed September 30, 2017. <https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/alexandra-munroe-theater-of-the-world-interview-pt-1-1095470>.
- Gu, Xiong. "My Migrations: From Yangtze River to Fraser River." Migrations catalogue, 13-16. Accessed December 10, 2017, <http://guxiong.ca/en/catalogue/gu-xiong-migrations-catalogue/>.
- . "Pins." accessed December 9, 2017, <http://guxiong.ca/en/writings/pins-2/>.
- Lee, Christopher. "The Lateness of Asian Canadian Studies." *Amerasia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 1-18. Accessed November 30, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.33.2.c8053m5q76215018>.
- Lee, Pamela M. "Boundary Issues; The Art World Under the Sign of Globalism" *Artforum* Nov. 2003, 165-7.
- Lehrer, Erica and Cynthia E. Milton. "Introduction: Witnesses to Witnessing." In *Curating Difficult Knowledge: Violent Pasts in Public Places*, 1-10. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Li, Peter S. "A World Apart: The Multicultural World of Visible Minorities and the Art World of Canada." *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 31, no. 3 (1994): 365-391.
- . "The Rise and Fall of Chinese Immigration to Canada: Newcomers from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of China and Mainland China, 1980–2000." *International Migration* 43 (2005): 9-34. Accessed October 31, 2017. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2005.00324.x.
- Machida, Margo. "New Critical Directions: Transnationalism and Diaspora in Asian American Art." *Notes in the History of Art* 31, no. 3 (2012): 23-28. Accessed October 30, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2320859>.
- . *Unsettled Visions: Contemporary Asian American Artists and the Social Imaginary*. Duke UP, 2008. Print.
- Peterson, Glen. "House Divided: Transnational Families in the Early Years of the People's Republic of China." *Asian Studies Review* 21, no. 1 (2007): 25-40.
- Priegert, Portia. "Karen Tam's Chinatown." *Galleries West*. June 18, 2017. <http://www.gallerieswest.ca/artists/previews/karen-tam-s-chinatown-studio/>.
- Said, Edward. "Invention, Memory and Place." *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2000): 175-192.

Shih, Shu-mei. "Against Diaspora: The Sinophone as Places of Cultural Production." In *Global Chinese Literature: Critical Essays*, edited by David Dewei Wang and Jing Tsu, 29-48. Leiden: Brill, 2010.

Siu, Paul. "The Sojourner." In *American Journal of Sociology* 58, no. 1 (1952): 34-44, accessed July 9, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2771791>.

Wang, Gungwu. "A Single Chinese Diaspora? Some Historical Reflections." In *Imagining the Chinese Diaspora: Two Australian Perspectives*, edited by Annette Shun Wah and Wang Gungwu, 1-17. Canberra: Centre for the Study of the Chinese Diaspora, Australian National University, 1999.

———. "The Question of 'Overseas Chinese.'" *Southeast Asian Affairs* 3 (1976): 101.

Wei, Li. "Introduction: Asian Immigration and Community in the Pacific Rim." In *From Urban Enclave to Ethnic Suburb: New Asian Communities in Pacific Rim Countries*, edited by Wei Li, 1-22. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2006.

### **Additional Bibliography**

Chiu, Melissa, Karin M. Higa, and Susette S. Min. *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now*. Asia Society with Yale UP, 2006. Print.

Cornell, Daniell, Mark Dean Johnson, and Gordon H. Chang. *Asian/American/Modern Art: Shifting Currents, 1900-1970*. U of California, 2008. Print.

Day, Iyko. "Lost in Transnation: Uncovering Asian Canada." *Amerasia Journal* 33, no. 2 (2007): 67-86. Accessed November 30, 2017. <https://doi.org/10.17953/amer.33.2.954t72724n566632>.

D'Souza, Aruna. "Introduction." In *Art History in the Wake of the Global Turn (Clark Studies in the Visual Arts series)*, ed. Jill H. Casid and Aruna D'Souza (2014), vii-xxiii.

Elkins, James. "Art History as a Global Discipline." In *Is Art History Global?*, ed James Elkins (2007), 3-23.

Jay, Jennifer W. "Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon: (Re)packaging Chinas and Selling the Hybridized Culture in an Age of Transnationalism." In *Reading Chinese Transnationalisms: Society, Literature, Film*, ed. Maria N. Ng and Philip Holden (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 131-142. Accessed December 6, 2017. <http://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/132625>.

Kina, Laura, Jan Christian Bernabe, and Susette S. Min. *Queering Contemporary Asian American Art*. University of Washington Press, 2017. Accessed September 30, 2017. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1505401>.

- Munroe, Alexandra, Philip Tinari, and Hanru Hou. *Art and China after 1989: Theater of the World*. Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2017. Print.
- Silbergeld, Jerome, and Dora C. Y. Ching. *ARTiculations: Undefined Chinese Contemporary Art*. P. Y. and Kinmay W. Tang Center for East Asian Art, 2010. Print.
- Steyerl, Hito. "Politics of Art: Contemporary Art and the Transition to Postdemocracy." *E-flux journal* 21 (Dec. 2010).
- Wu, Hung, "A Case of Being Contemporary: Conditions, Spheres, and Narratives of Contemporary Chinese Art," *Making History* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008), 11-28.
- Walker, Alice. "Globalism," *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012), 183-96.



## Appendix



Fig. 1.1 Gu Xiong, *Pins*, multi-media installation, 2017, The R Space, Vancouver BC.



Fig. 1.2 *Pins* installation detail. Chinese-English dictionary and other objects on a bed of pins.



Fig. 1.3 Still from *Pins* (2017), video work.



Fig. 1.4 Still from *Holding* (2017), video work.



Fig. 2.1 Gu Xiong, *Yellow Cargo*, installation, cargo boxes and projection, 2016-2017, various sites, photographs from Migrations exhibition (2017) at the Galaxy Museum of Contemporary Art, Chongqing, China.



Fig. 2.2 *Yellow Cargo* alternate view.





Fig. 3.1 Karen Tam, *Terra dos Chinês*, installation, 2011-present, various sites, photograph from article, Montreal QC, 2016.



Fig. 3.2 *Terra dos Chinês* detail. Jade pendants, wax fascimiles. Photograph by the author from the article, Montreal QC, 2016.



Fig. 3.3 *Terra dos Chinês* detail. Mixed-media, cloisonné vases, sequins, papier-mâché.



Fig. 3.4 *Terra dos Chinês* detail. Homesense porcelain canister. Photograph by the author from the article, Montreal QC, 2016.

Fig. 4.1 Karen Tam, *Jardin Chow Chow Garden: A Division of Gold Mountain Restaurant* (2006) from the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series (2002-2017), as installed as part of the ORANGE: L'événement d'art actuel de Saint-Hyacinthe event (Saint-Hyacinthe, QC). 15 x 8.5 x 4.3 m / 49.2 x 27.9 x 14 ft. Swords, embroidered images of cranes & eagles, signage, window décor, vases, menus, phone, bronze lanterns, display case, plants, booths, tables, chairs, coffee machine, photos, paintings, cutlery, dishware, clay figurines, clay bridges, clay boats, fish tank, Tiki men, mah-jong table, cash register, gumball machine, wooden divider, video, various décor, materials, fabricated, collected, and rented from prop warehouses, local community & businesses to recreate a chop suey house of the 1960s. Shrimp chips, soya drinks, coffee & 7-Up were served on during "West eats East," a day of games, movies & coffee.

Storefront view:



Interior view:





Mahjong table:



Figure 4.2 Karen Tam, *China Doll* (2007) from the *Golden Mountain Restaurant* series (2002-2017), as installed at Centre A (Vancouver, BC). 16.45 x 14.63 x 7.62 m / 54 x 48 x 25 ft. Window décor, plants, hardwood flooring, menus, placemats, counter, cash register, fishtank, tables, chairs, curtains, counters, TVs, cigarette shelf, Sprite sign, lanterns, photos, videos & various items sourced from local businesses & individuals to recreate the interior dining areas of a 1950s-60s Chinese restaurant. Karaoke singing and dancing occurred during the opening. During the exhibition, it was used as a film set.

Exterior views:



Interior view:



Karaoke and dancing at the opening on August 1, 2007:

