

Ahn Lee

Growing up as a queer, nonbinary person in the U.S. as a result of Cantonese diaspora – a lineage of escaping the Cultural Revolution and British colonial hold of Hong Kong - my childhood was littered with altars as a means of connection back to our hometown Sunwui (Xinhui, major 19th century port of Chinese laborers). This portfolio is a timeline of my MFA program, beginning with a piece from my 2019 application portfolio. It is informed by my experience navigating violent anti-Chinese sentiment during COVID; archival research connecting the Cantonese diaspora and silkworms in the Bay Area; and deepening relations to my ancestry through raising and exploring the physicality of silkworms. My research oriented to the relationship between the Cantonese diaspora and silkworms. I investigated the role of Yellow Peril in the Piedmont Silk Experiment, drawing from the Sacramento Daily 1882, in which Mrs. Hittell urged, “awake to action” by investing time in silkworm farming or else American domesticity would be “hopeless” against Chinese people. Drawing on the Chinese folktale, “Butterfly Lovers” I realized the silkworm as a conduit of the diaspora; and the cocoon as a portal of death, resurrection, transformation and a futurity I am searching for.

This body of work aims to create a present Chinese folklore that tells of a future where we can emerge from this moment of racial violence amidst a global pandemic with power and grace. It is a wishful project in which I process the hysterics of Cantonese American history through porcelain – an ancestral material and techniques that precedes our lifetimes and will exist long after.

Currently, I am a first year MFA student at UC Berkeley. Prior to this, I studied at UCLA as a Eugene V. Cota Robles Graduate Fellow. My work has been shown at the Root Division, SOMArts, The SF International Asian American Film Festival (CAAMFEST), TranScreen Amsterdam Transgender Film Festival, and as an Emerging Artist with Disabilities Grant recipient and a Creative Capital Artist Training Grant recipient at The Kennedy Center.

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