



FORGING AMERICAN

ART IN THE WORKINGS OF AN ASIAN AMERICAN RUST BELT



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Art in the Workings of an Asian American Rust Belt

Curated by Van Tran Nguyen & Natalie Fleming

September 8 - November 17, 2017

Big Orbit

A CEPA Gallery Project Space
30D Essex Street, Buffalo, New York

Lines in the Sand: Conversations on Borders and Belonging

*With Dr. Ana Grujic, UB Sanctuary Campus,
Liz Park, Associate Curator at the Carnegie Art Museum,
& Dr. Cynthia Wu, UB Transnational Studies Department*
October 6, 7 PM
Department of Art Gallery, B45 Center for the Arts
University at Buffalo

Who Killed Vincent Chin?

Film Screening & Discussion

With Director Christine Choy
November 10, 7 PM
Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center
617 Main Street, Buffalo, New York

Artists: *Chris Lee, Dan S. Wang, Harumo Sato, Howard Hao Tran, Jing Xu, Kalpana Subramanian, Law Eh Soe, Lingfei Zhao, Mein Thein, Mizin Shin, Natalie Fleming, Pamela Ybañez, Robert Fleming, Sepideh Pourhang, Serena Hocharoen, Sophia Yung, Van Tran Nguyen*

Writers: *Amber Dennis, Andi Coulter, Asri Saraswati, Conor Moynihan, Ekrem Serdar, Gabriella Nassif, Jasmine Magaña, Joy Resor, Justin McCann, Laura Kerrigan, Ricki Sablove, Shengkai Xu, Victoria Claffin, Wendy Gelernter, Xiuzhu Li, Zhewei Cao*

Additional sponsorship has generously been provided by the University at Buffalo Department of Art & Department of Transnational Studies. Special thanks to Margaret Anre, Daniel Calleri, Robert Fleming, Ashin Vilar Ga, Saw Maung Htwar, Becky Koenig, David Mitchell, Bethany Moody, Matthew Myers, April Phaw, Law Eh Soe, Wha Stina, Cynthia Wu, and Jean Zhu.



Squeaky Wheel
FILM & MEDIA ART CENTER



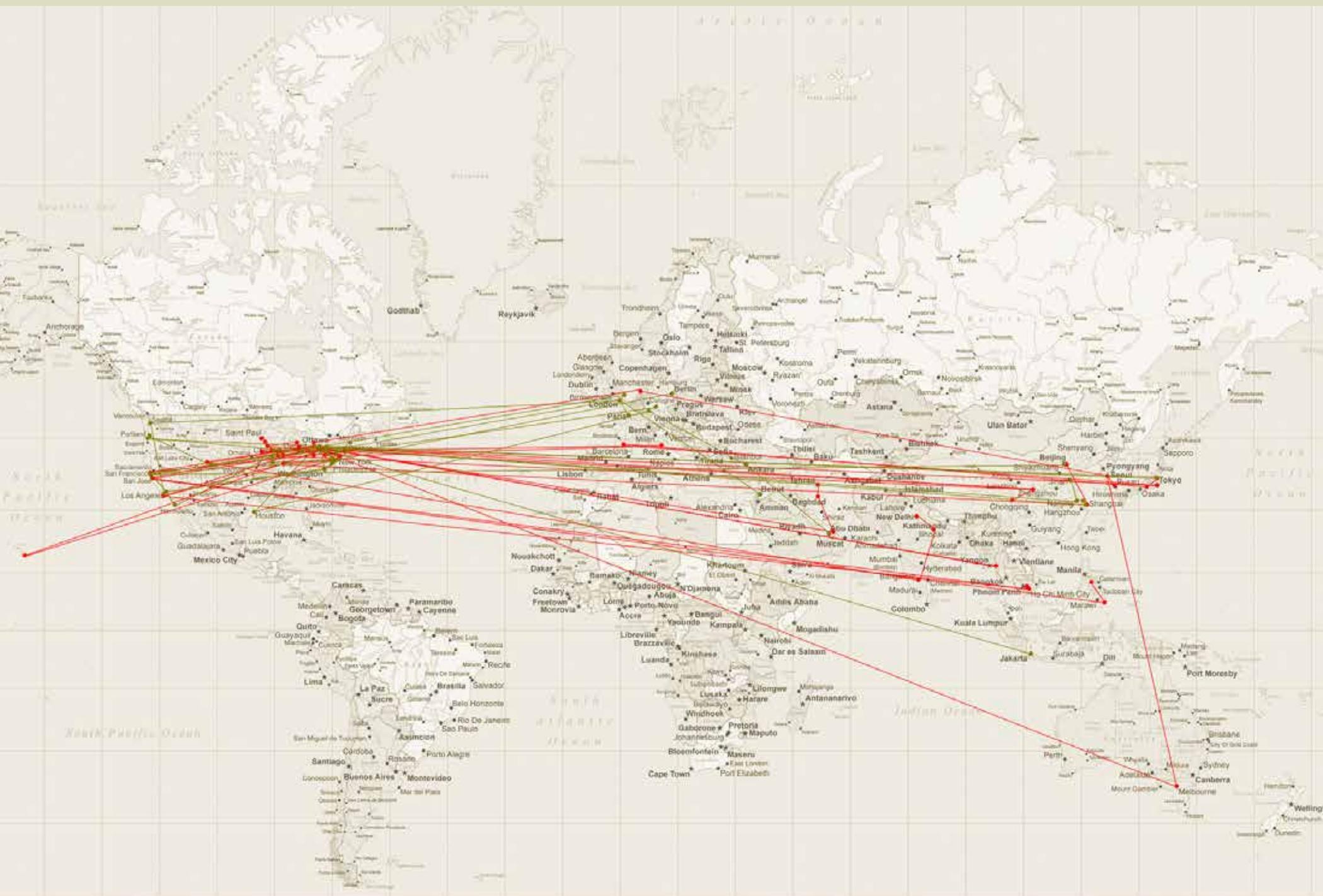
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KINSHIP OF THE IN BETWEEN

Van Tran Nguyen, Co-Curator

My Aunt Coco was what Westerners might call a “boat person,” but I never use this title. As far as I could remember, her journey to North America is called *vượt biên*.

Our language controls us through its structure, its hierarchy, and its omissions. *Vượt biên*, which directly translates as “escaping sea,” dictates that it is the sea that is being left, not the land. The Vietnamese language privileges the ocean and water in ways that force us to situate ourselves second to the powerful element that surrounds our homeland. She tells me that her life is one of momentary escapes from the sea, while traveling from one refugee camp to another. People like Coco had to travel on the ocean to find any refuge offered by the land. The travel created a kinship between her and those around her risking the journey, a floating brotherhood of humankind. These stories are told to us so that the way we understand water, like blood, continues to pass through generations to come. The vessels that aided our migration are now a part of our identities, like water, like our language. But it has become a struggle to understand or feel any control over our own mutating multiplicity.

Viet Thanh Nguyen, a Vietnamese-American writer and refugee, speaks of being two things at once in his novel *The Sympathizer*. He states: “I am simply able to see any issue from both sides. Sometimes I flatter myself that this is a talent, and although it is admittedly one of a minor nature, it is perhaps also the sole talent I possess. At other times, when I reflect on how I cannot help but observe the world in such a fashion, I wonder if what I have should even be called a talent. After all, a talent is something you use, not something that uses you.” I am Vietnamese-American: both and none. My mother and aunt traveled to a/my country that misrecognizes them, that hurts them, to make a new life, while making sure to connect me through their memories to a/my home across oceans. In *Forging American: Art in the Workings of an Asian American Rust Belt*, my narrative, along with the narratives of sixteen artists, form a kinship of the *in between*, like those on my Aunt Coco’s boat, momentarily rivaling any connections of heritage, language, or citizenship that push and pull us all.



ABOUT THE CURATORS

Van Tran Nguyen was born in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam and holds a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art, a Bachelor of Sciences in Biology, and an MFA degree in Studio Art from the University at Buffalo. She is currently a PhD student in the Philosophy of Electronic Art at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. In 2016, She co-curated the exhibition *The Measure of All Things: Rethinking Humanism through Art* (University at Buffalo) and has exhibited in numerous group and solo exhibitions throughout Buffalo, New York including: *Strange Agency* (Buffalo Arts Studio, 2017), *Split Ends* (515 Main Street Gallery, 2016), *Ill at Ease: Dis-ease in Art* (University at Buffalo, 2017), and *FRESH: Intersection* (BT&C Gallery, 2017).

Natalie Fleming is an independent curator and PhD student in the American Studies Program at the University at Buffalo, specializing in American photography. In 2012, she received her Master’s degree in art history and a certificate in curatorial studies at Rutgers University. She has worked in a variety of museums and galleries throughout the New York area, including the University at Buffalo Department of Art Galleries, Putnam History Museum, New York Historical Society, Cooper Hewitt Smithsonian Design Museum, Macculloch Hall Historical Museum, and the Katonah Museum of Art.

RUSTED IMAGINATIONS

Natalie Fleming, Co-Curator

“‘You can’t be American. You look too Chinese,’ he told me. ‘But,’ he concluded with a shrug, ‘whatever you say.’”

Natalie Quan, “The No Man’s Land of Asian American Identity”

On June 19, 1982, Chinese-American Vincent Chin was struck over the head with a baseball bat while celebrating his bachelor party in a suburb of his hometown, Detroit. The two white men who beat Chin to death assumed that he was Japanese and therefore responsible for the loss of their jobs in the automobile industry. The white judge who oversaw the resulting court case sentenced the men to three years probation, reasoning: “These weren’t the kind of men you send to jail... You don’t make the punishment fit the crime; you make the punishment fit the criminal.”

These events reveal the limitations of the American imagination concerning both lives like Chin’s and cities like Detroit. As the term “Asian American” suggests, his distinct ethnic background is erased, while his physical features disallow for the recognition of his American origins. To his white attackers, Chin could not possibly belong, because he did not conform to their narrow notion of what it means to be American. Instead, he becomes Japanese, a danger to their self-proclaimed right to economic success. Over time, Americans modify the particulars of this imagined Asian threat, but their fear remains. The 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the Japanese internment camps of World War II, and the recent executive order blocking refugees from primarily Muslim nations, including four Asian countries, are segregationist policies designed to protect the national body from perceived foreign contamination. Politicians claim their guardianship over traditional ways of life by flouting the very foundations of American society, such as *jus soli* citizenship, regardless of background.

Likewise, the complexities of Detroit and other cities known for declining populations, failing factories, and aging infrastructure, are reductively labeled “Rust Belt,” due to our lack of imagination concerning American production. The rust that now defines these cities indicates that they will never truly recover, but instead, will continue to corrode with time. They are stuck disintegrating in the wake of the American industrial system, a model that has lost its viability in the twenty-first century. Americans mourn and wait, refusing to accept that

the economic landscape has changed and unable to imagine a future without grain elevators and the smoke of factory stacks dotting their horizon.

Looking for hope, Rust Belt officials have increasingly promoted Asian migration as a source of potential renewal. Such welcome, however, is often framed through economic incentive, with expectations that the new residents will live up to a stereotype of the model minority. Today, Asia is the leading source of immigration to the United States, but the resulting negotiations of space and identity remain all but invisible on a national level. The exhibition *Forging American: Art in the Workings of an Asian American Rust Belt* revels in the complexities of American borders and belonging through the work of seventeen artists.

Law Eh Soe, Mein Thein, and Serena Hocharoen capture the overlap of culture and identity experienced by Asian immigrants in Rust Belt cities. In *Little Burma*, Soe photographs his new Burmese community of transplants in a Buffalo park. Linked by the threat of violence in their country of origin, they come together to enjoy food, play volleyball, and laugh, regardless of their different ethnic groups: Chin, Karen, and Karenni. Thein is also a Burmese refugee living in Buffalo, and uses his brightly-colored paintings to document the difficulties and possibilities of adapting to a new country. Although he never received any training in the arts, he has always felt compelled to capture certain necessities that he believes makes a happy life regardless of his financial situation or physical location. Hocharoen was born in the United States to Thai parents. Her work, *Foreign Structures*, highlights a generational and experiential divide that makes the Illinois suburban architecture of her childhood exotic in the eyes of her mother and father. Hocharoen expresses the subjectivity of vision while navigating her family’s diverse definitions of the familiar.

An eclectic array of archival practices stand in for moments of cross-cultural and temporal contact in the work of Howard Hao Tran, Dan. S. Wang, Chris Lee, Van Tran Nguyen and Robert Fleming. Tran’s Chinese parents raised him in Vietnam before settling in the United States. Components of all three cultures make up Tran’s sense of identity and can be found in his work. In *Hanh Trinh #1*, the enormous head of a woman, marked Vietnamese through his title, invites her audience to peer within her ears to experience memories in the form of videos of another time and place. Her size renders her unavoidable within this American exhibition space, but memories take us and her elsewhere. Wang’s *Detroit Industry Series* is the result of the artist’s ten-day exploration of the city and contains numerous historic references, taking us to Detroit’s twentieth century race riots,

worker's rights movements, and the waning of its automobile industry in the face of Japanese and German production. Lee, Tran Nguyen, and Fleming focus on the murder of Vincent Chin in the wake of these changing conditions. Lee connects Chin's death to the rise of Japanese City Pop, a genre of music linked to the growing economy of Japan and influenced by American jazz, funk, and disco, among other sources. The audience experiences Chin's death as another product of 1982 along with movies like *Blade Runner* and the inoffensive sounds of the year's City Pop hits on a period Sony Walkman. Fleming uses his law degree to hunt down the documents of Chin's case, placing printed copies on a desk in the gallery. Sitting there, visitors hear the testimony of Chin's mother in court as she looks for justice for her child. Through the voice of Tran Nguyen's Vietnamese mother performing these transcripts, the audience hears how Chin's own mother is corrected and controlled by those in the legal system.

Mizin Shin, Harumo Sato, and Sophia Yung focus on the legacy of the Rust Belt's industrial complex on their own identities. Mizin Shin's seemingly never-ending woodblock prints document a system of production with no end. Although the title, *How Things Are Made*, indicates that viewers will learn the basics of manufacturing, this highly-detailed plan tells them nothing about either the makers or the product. This is production for production's sake: a loop in which viewers are stuck, unable to interpret either its justification for existence or its alternative. Harumo Sato's prints rely on Japanese creation myth to comment on our industrial food system. Changes to the quality and quantity of flour, meat, and vegetables are captured through the body of the Japanese food goddess *Ogetsuhime*, who, through her placement, causes viewers to wonder at the distance between processes of creation and their own consumption. Sophia Yung's video *Back and Back* examines today's Rust Belt cities against ancient Chinese prophesy. Yung's work highlights the difficulties of translation. From the original text to the trusted blue screen of a computer, and from a Mandarin-speaking monotone Google voice, to Morse code and typed English, and back through Yung's own broken Mandarin, the prophesy declares that here, "Smog encompasses the Earth, reaching beyond the sky and over the sea."

Jing Xu's work, as well as my own, accepts that production and capitalism are not contained within stable borders. Chinese-born Xu defines herself based on the products she purchases, imagining through her work a way to easily carry the remains of her acquisitions with her. She places straps around the Philippine-brand jelly drink CiCi, her favorite treat as a child, the McDonald's large French fry container, a product she associates with her time living in Indiana, and an empty carton of her chosen brand of Marlboro

cigarettes. However, Xu does not need to worry about keeping her preferred consumables close. Such products have now spread all over the globe, allowing her to continually purchase the feeling of connection with her Chinese childhood and American adulthood. In *Diamonds for English*, I document the process of teaching Chinese children to speak English online from my home in Buffalo, New York. Although traditional jobs may no longer be available in Rust Belt cities, a new global market allows for the possibility of Chinese families to fund residences throughout the United States. Working odd hours, I am able to maintain my job and home as long as I meet the standards of anonymous parents and bosses, and, most importantly, keep children eager to communicate with an endless stream of animated diamonds, crowns, and trophies as rewards.

Lingfei Zhao and Sepideh Pourhang attempt to resist the boundaries and labels placed on their bodies. While walking through a park in Rochester, New York, Zhao struggles to avoid interacting with man-made objects. However, viewers soon realize the futility of his task. Although such parks are often created as a way for Americans to escape the urban environment, they are highly-curated compositions. Zhao struggles to avoid obvious human additions to the landscape, but he mistakes the well-worn dirt and planted foliage as natural. In the end, his effort to evade the path leads him to the same final destination as everyone else. Iranian artist Pourhang captures a female body through photography in its effort to become visible, whether behind a facial wrap highlighted by the Persian decorative *tazhib* or a Western generic turtleneck. Although we see neither Zhao or Pourhang succeed, their acts of defiance are caught in perpetuity, continuously questioning the confines of our imagined limits.

Pamela Ybañez and Kalpana Subramanian teach us to imagine permeable borders for land and self. Ybañez posits an awkward question to her Buffalo community: "What do you think I am?". She forces those whom she interviews to communicate their assumptions about race and belonging rather than pretend that such ideas don't exist in a so-called post-racial United States. While her viewers do not question the value of classification in their answers, through this exploration, Ybañez moves away from the notion of a singular identity to conceptualize her plurality as a Filipina-American. Subramanian's work reimagines the familiar landscape. While walking through a local neighborhood, participants hear the sounds of faraway real and fantasy locations, including Indonesia, India, Zenobia, and Isadora. The combination of sight and sound allows them to experience their surroundings in new ways, asking them to reconsider their assumptions. *What else could the Rust Belt be? What else could we be? What possibilities do our bodies and land already contain?*

CHRIS LEE

1882–1982 (*Yellow Peril, Motor City Pop*),
Mixed Media, 2017

Andi Coulter

“City Pop” as a musical genre is not well-known outside the confines of Japan. A style popularized in the early 1980s, it is an adult precursor to later 1990s Shibuya-Kei Japanese “youth” pop. City Pop took cues from New York City’s image of the affluence of Wall Street, as well as sanitized elements of disco, funk, jazz, and rock. With its lush production, technologically-forward early synthesizers and almost overt inoffensiveness, City Pop reflects a Western culture sheen on Tokyo. Lee’s choice of *Love Trip* (1982) by Japanese artist Takako Mamiya is an emblem of the growth of Japan’s post-WWII economy. The album’s title track sounds eerily similar American performer Al Jarreau’s *Moonlighting* (1985) from the TV show of the same name, even down to the power suit worn by Mamiya on the cover. Using a Sony Walkman, Lee shows how Japanese technology changed the consumption and portability of music, as the slick synth of City Pop became the soundtrack for the monied urban epicenters of the future.

Lee juxtaposes Japan’s City Pop against the news story of Vincent Chin, a Chinese American who was brutally beaten by two Detroit men. As Detroit’s auto industry outsourced much of its auto manufacturing jobs to Japan, Asian-American tensions grew in the Motor City. This work connects the anonymity of soft rock or jazz’s “fusion” with the misidentification of the “Asian American” through Chin’s beating, placing arbitrary markers around sonic or visual cues in an attempt at defining the “other.” The surface level sounds of a utopian city music are wiped clean of all of the discord being played out underneath.

Andi Coulter spent fifteen years in the music industry as the Marketing Director for the 9:30 Club in Washington D.C. and Live Nation in San Francisco. She is currently completing her dissertation at the University at Buffalo on noise and community building in New York City’s music scene in the 1970s.



Chris Lee is a graphic designer and educator based in Buffalo, New York. He is a graduate of OCADU (Toronto) and the Sandberg Instituut (Amsterdam), and has worked for *The Walrus Magazine*, *Cmagazine*, *Metahaven* and *Bruce Mau Design*. His design-research practice is developed along a variety of trajectories, but generally explores graphic design’s entanglement with power as it is framed through questions of visual knowledge production, visual rhetorics, and processes of standardization and legitimization. He has contributed projects and writing to *Counter Signals*, *Decolonising Design*, *Journal of Aesthetics & Protest*, *Graphic and Volume*, and has facilitated workshops in art and design institutions and universities in the United States, Canada, Scotland, the Netherlands and Croatia. Currently, Lee is an Assistant Professor at the University at Buffalo, a member of the programming committee of *Gendai Gallery*, a design research fellow at *Het Nieuwe Instituut* in Rotterdam (2017/18) and formerly with the journal *Scapegoat: Architecture/Landscape/Political Economy*, as both designer and co-editor.

the introduction of these models for 1978 Chrysler
American-built production car employing a transverse
front-wheel drive, a design feature which has been common
in and Japanese cars for some time.

MAINSHAFT



DAN S. WANG

Detroit Industry Series, Screen prints, 2012

Laura Kerrigan

Dan S. Wang's *Detroit Industry Series* confronts the viewer with issues of class, ethnicity, and belonging. The print *We Called a Strike and No One Came*, for example, raises questions in the mind of the viewer about what would cause a group of workers to turn against those presumably fighting for their own interests. How do perceived differences of race, gender, or ethnicity impact worker solidarity? We are systematically taught to point our fingers at those around us when we suffer instead of pointing them up towards those with power. While much of Wang's imagery comes from the twentieth century, the political, economic, and social issues referenced here are still relevant today. Viewers draw parallels between the struggles of the past and those in our current pseudo-democratic society.

Laura Kerrigan is a PhD student in American Studies at the University at Buffalo. Her research is on the connection between human exploitation and environmental degradation, with a focus on capitalism.

Dan S. Wang/王念華 was born in Michigan, currently lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and works in the global Midwest. He has lectured widely, including at Documenta 11, the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing, and the Third Creative Time Summit. He works alone and in collaboration with others. He splits time between organizing, studio production, and writing. His printmedia work circulates through both contemporary art networks and functional activist situations, and his writings have been published internationally in journals, exhibition catalogues, and book collections. Along with Anthony Romero, he co-authored the conversation-essay *The Social Practice That Is Race*.

The suite of prints on display grew out of time spent in Detroit on the "commando" residency, a short lived joint program of MOCAD and dflux. They were originally produced for *Desaturate*, a series of screen print exhibitions curated by Damon Locks.

When he is not causing art troubles or making political gestures, he can be found running the register in his dad's restaurant in Chicago.

HARUMO SATO

Selections from *Mogu Mogu Munch Munch*,
Screen prints, 2016

Wendy Gelernter

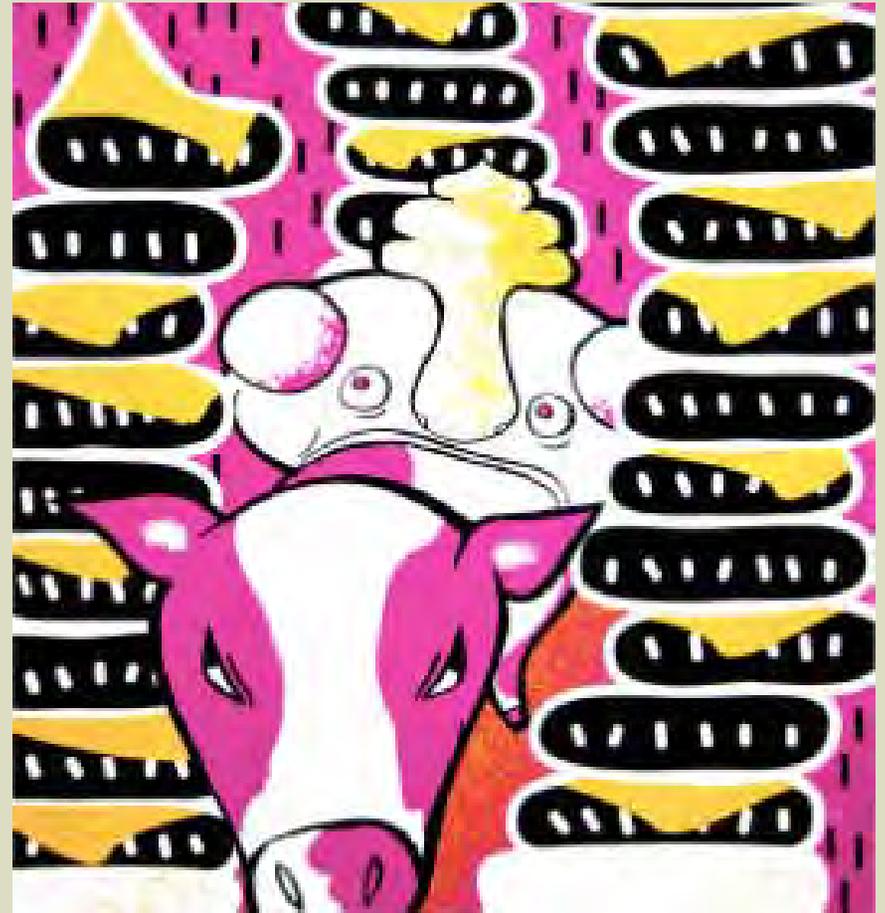
This selection of visually stunning screen prints from Harumo Sato asks us to explore the complex relationship between humans and the food we eat with a series of diptychs that present contrasting views on food production. The whimsical and humorous style of the prints initially lulls the viewer into seeing non-threatening, and rather romantic views of agriculture. But further examination generates disturbing questions about the quality and safety of the food we eat, as well as the sacrifices we are willing to make in order to produce it.

In each couplet of prints, we are first introduced to creation myth images, where the ancient Japanese goddess, *Ogetsuhime*, produces foods through all of her orifices – grains through her nose, vegetables through her eyes, and meats through her mouth. While the goddess is in seeming harmony with the plants and animals around her in these initial prints, in each corresponding print she is smaller, overwhelmed, or even imprisoned by today's versions of her offerings. Acorns that were ground by hand are now replaced by cookies and cakes, meats from wild animals are transformed into hamburgers and hotdogs, and a cornucopia of fresh vegetables is now being genetically engineered in the lab.

Are the sacrifices of human and environmental health that Sato illustrates necessary in order to produce enough food to feed the world? Were the ancient ways of producing food somehow purer and safer than current methods, or were they also intertwined with environmental damage and danger to humans? How do different cultures view food, and the way it is produced, and do we all share the same concerns about these issues?

These are just some of the many questions that Sato's work asks us to ponder as we drive by farmworkers in the field, roll our carts down the supermarket aisle, as we cook, and as we sit down with friends and family to eat.

Wendy Gelernter is an entomologist who lives in San Diego, CA. Her research has focused on lowering pesticide and fertilizer inputs in horticulture and agriculture.



Harumo Sato is a California-based Japanese visual artist who graduated from the University at Buffalo in 2015.

In questioning our busy and highly industrialized daily lives, she translates old mythological analogy and allegory imagery into modern, colorful, and unique visual images. She has a strong interest in pattern design that has traveled through many cultures and contexts over the centuries. With various colorful materials like screen print, Japanese watercolor, sumi ink, and acrylic, she seeks visual pleasure and vivacious energy to open the viewer's mind.

Sato has exhibited her work in two recent solo shows: *Mogu Mogu Munch Munch* (Western New York Book Art Center, 2016) and *Inner Peace and Outer Peace* (Burlingame Public Library, 2017).



HOWARD HAO TRAN

Hanh Trinh #1, Burlap and Video, 2011

Ekrem Serdar

Howard Hao Tran's *Hanh Trinh #1* is composed of a large sculpture of a head with two discreet videos installed within the sculpture's ears. Audiences can peek inside to watch videos of a young boy biking in an open field and a Vietnamese cupping therapy session. The artist, currently based in Pennsylvania, was born in Vietnam to Chinese parents. He was twelve years old when they immigrated to the United States. These travels have shaped the artist's identity. Considered Chinese while in Vietnam and Vietnamese while in the United States, he comments that he is now "assimilated to this culture to the extent that when I visit Vietnam, I no longer feel that it is my home." Tran's words echo those of Hollis Frampton who, while writing about the Greek roots of the word 'nostalgia', states that it is "not an emotion that is entertained; it is sustained. When Ulysses comes home, nostalgia is the lumps he takes, not the tremulous pleasures he derives from being home again." These lumps become apparent with Tran's configuration of sight and sound. Peeking into the sculpture's ears to see visions of other selves and places creates a poetic dissonance, this head holding a resonance that isn't apparent until one looks in.

Ekrem Serdar is the curator at Squeaky Wheel Film & Media Art Center (2015–present), where he is responsible for the organization's exhibitions, public programming, and artist residencies. He is the recipient of a Curatorial Fellowship from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts (2017). He is on the board of directors of Dreamland (Buffalo, NY) and is an advisory member of Experimental Response Cinema (Austin, TX), and the FOL Cinema Society (Istanbul).

Howard Tran's artwork ranges from figurative sculpture to abstract, two-dimensional pieces. Utilizing traditional and non-traditional materials, he creates pieces that emphasize texture and symbols and reflect his Vietnamese and Chinese background.

Howard Tran received his MFA in sculpture from Boston University in 2000. He received his BFA in sculpture from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco in 1998. His work has been exhibited nationally in solo and group exhibitions. Tran is currently a Professor of Art at Lycoming College in Pennsylvania.

JING XU

FUNction, Mixed Media, 2016

Xiuzhu Li

A fun, yet also thought-provoking, mixed media piece, *FUNction* is made by New York based artist Jing Xu. Known as an artist that is good at pushing the boundaries of power systems, Xu unceasingly challenges authority in people's everyday lives and expresses the message of freedom and autonomy through new media and sculpture installations. In *FUNction*, Xu explores the power dynamics of consumer culture. Putting three different packages and containers onto straps, she transforms them into more than just a pack of CiCi Juice, a McDonald's French fry container, or a package of Marlboro cigarettes. These products bring temporary fun into people's lives, but hanging on straps, they become something for people to carry even after they have been used. The blurry line between "fun" and "functional" which is encapsulated not only in the work's title, but also through these newly-wearable packages and containers, brings us to a fundamental question which we seldom ask ourselves as we consume, especially when we consume impulsively: "Do we really need them...?" We buy such products for fun, but gradually, they become an essential part of our lives. Can we still say that it is us who is consuming, or are we ourselves being consumed by this culture of capitalism? *FUNction* serves as a radical reminder about how easy it can be for people to be confined within a system even when that system promises freedom of choice through purchase.

Xiuzhu Li is a New York based queer freelance photographer. They just received their master's degree from University at Buffalo majoring in American Studies. Having a strong interest in Asian American history, media studies, and queer theory, Li aims to explore these areas through photography and use this medium to promote the visibility of Asian American queer communities.

Jing Xu is a mixed media artist currently based in New York City. She received her Bachelors degree at DePauw University, Indiana, in 2017, where she majored in Studio Art and minored in Economics and Art History. During her time at DePauw, she received the President Award for Excellence and her artwork was featured on the cover of *A Midwestern Review*. Xu has worked as a gallery assistant for David Katz and Jason Yi. In October, Xu will have a group exhibition show at CICA Museum, Korea. She is currently pursuing a Master's Degree in Education at Parson's School of Design.





Kalpna Subramanian is an artist, filmmaker and PhD candidate at the Department of Media Study at the University at Buffalo. She was awarded a Fulbright Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellowship in 2015 to pursue art-based research at the Film Studies program in University of Colorado Boulder. Her present research explores transcultural frameworks of enquiry into the aesthetics of the moving image. She has worked closely for several years with visionary multimedia artist Ranjit Makkuni at Sacred World Research Laboratory on several award-winning interactive exhibits that have been showcased at the National Gallery of Modern Art & Prince of Wales Museum (Mumbai), National Museum (New Delhi), Eternal Gandhi Multimedia Museum (New Delhi) and Asia Society (New York). She created moving image works for the Eternal Gandhi Multimedia Museum and Planet Health 2010 in India. Subramanian's films have been screened at several international festivals including the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, Dobra-Festival Internacional de Cinema Experimental (Brazil), Experimental Superstars, International Signes de Nuit, Interfilm Berlin, Green Film Festival (Korea) and Big Ears Festival (USA). She received the UK Environmental Film Fellowship in 2006 for her film *Turtles in a Soup*, which won awards at the CMS Vatavaran Film Festival, International Wildlife Film Festival of Montana and was nominated for a Panda award. Her video installation *Portrait of Yvonne Lo in Assisi* (2014) won an audience award at the Documentary Festival of History and Archeology in Perugia, Italy. *The Maze of Lanes* (2003) has won awards for Creative Approach and Cinematography at the Montana Cine International Film Festival. Subramanian has taught film, media and communication design for several years. She is also a children's book author and a western classical vocalist.

KALPANA SUBRAMANIAN

Dislocations, Locative sound work, 2017

Ricki Sablove

"I think you recognize cities better on the atlas than when you visit them in person."

- Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

What is a neighborhood? It is what we see: A pattern of streets. A hodgepodge of buildings. A landscape green with manicured lawns and overgrown weeds. It is what we smell: Cooking aromas emanating from open windows and the stench of garbage awaiting collection. It is what we hear: A soundtrack of conversations, traffic, sirens, the barking of dogs, the wail of police sirens, piano practice from the second floor of a duplex, and hip-hop blaring from a stopped car. It is what we understand: Intersections with signs that guide us to our destinations. A neighborhood is a sensory and intellectual experience, fashioned from the experiences and memories of those who inhabit or pass through it. It is a multilayered collage of memories: what we have experienced there, what others have told us about it, and what we assume about one place based on our observations elsewhere. But all too often, it is something so familiar that we hardly notice it.

Kalpna Subramanian's *Dislocations*, however, compels us to explore the Allentown neighborhood of Buffalo with awakened senses. Using an app to be downloaded from the gallery onto the viewer's own mobile phone, it provides an interactive soundscape combining music, excerpts from Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, and voices from the streets of Indonesia, Japan, and India. By alluding to places that we may or may not have seen, Subramanian creates a narrative of shared humanity. And by guiding us around the familiar streets of Allentown, *Dislocations* not only reintroduces us to the place, but places us in the role of what the architect Robert Venturi calls the moving observer, who ultimately determines the design and destiny of the urban setting.

Ricki Sablove is an adjunct professor of art history at Rowan University and a historian of art and architecture. Her research focuses on travel sketches by nineteenth and twentieth century American architects and the role of the observer's movement in the perception of the built environment.

LAW EH SOE

Little Burma, Photography, 2017

Asri Saraswati

In his photographs, Law Eh Soe captures the gathering of the Burmese refugee community in a park in Buffalo. Most Burmese refugees fled Burma when the military junta government tore apart their home country, forcing them to relocate to camps in Thailand and Malaysia until they could be resettled in the United States. In *Minima Moralia*, Theodor Adorno writes that for war exiles, "Dwelling, in the proper sense is now impossible. The traditional residences we have grown up in have grown intolerable." Adorno asserts that the exile is distraught with this newly formed notion of space and his/her life will be filled with the effort to recreate the home that can never be. In Soe's photos, we see the refugees' effort to reinvent home through gatherings, and more importantly, food. With their mortar and pestle, the women grind spices and bring back the smell of food that resembles home.

In one picture, we see the gathering at its end. Empty plates and used skewers sit next to the women on a traditionally woven mat. Their hair is bundled in a similar way. Toddlers play on a separate mat, while older children and men gather further away in the park. We see glimpses of not just a gathering, but a social structure and a well-functioning community. As the sun shines brightly, there is almost a glimpse of a happy ending. We wonder however, how will the rest of the day go for the refugees? How often can they enjoy such a gathering? And most importantly, can the home ever be fully recreated? Soe's work ignites more questions and compels the Buffalo community to think about the Burmese refugees that we hear and see many times, yet rarely try to communicate with and understand.

Asri Saraswati is a PhD candidate in American Studies at the University at Buffalo. She specializes in Asian American studies, race and migration in United States' history, and mobility and migration in Indonesian literature.

Law Eh Soe was born in Hpa-An, the capital city of the Karen State in Burma. From 1991 to 1996, he studied law at Rangoon University. He worked as a staff photographer for AFP (Agence of France Press) from 2003 until 2005. In 2005, he was hired by the European Pressphoto Agency as a staff photographer. Due to governmental instability in Burma, he came and settled in Buffalo in 2007 as a refugee. From 2008-2014, he worked as a culture liaison for the International Institute refugee resettlement office in Buffalo.





LINGFEI ZHAO

Resistance, Video, 2016

Amber Dennis

Resistance may in fact be futile or, man in a sea of man.

Lingfei Zhao's *Resistance*, an art walk through a Rochester park, is a pointed exercise in futility. Zhao attempts to avoid man-made objects while crossing the large expanse of the park using chunks of wood to scoot across a bridge, for example, or leaping over gravel paths from one patch of manicured grass to another.

The viewer almost immediately sees the hopelessness of this journey and the inescapability of man-made objects. Zhao moves through a man-made park, the path he walks along is man-made, and, although he doesn't wear shoes, his knit cap, winter coat and jeans are man-made. So focused on his quest, Zhao fails to see these contradictions and continues his lateral move through the landscape.

The piece simultaneously serves as a metaphor for White male patriarchy and supremacy, speaking to the complicated nature of what it actually means to resist these large, foundational systems. Those who do not benefit from said systems of Whiteness are forced to participate in a losing game, much like Zhao's doomed art walk, where trying to resist or trying to partake is always thwarted by the Whiteness that surrounds them. There is some hope, however, in Zhao's embodiment of the limits of resistance. The earnestness of his undertaking mirrors our own struggle, imploring us to resist even when the chips are stacked against us.

Amber Dennis curates art exhibitions under the name *The Schoolyard* (schoolyardarts.com), a feminist social space whose mission is to "make everyone cool with contemporary art." Along with Albright-Knox Art Gallery Curatorial Assistant, Jasmine Magaña, she is the co-creator of *Feminista Social Club* (feministasocialclub.com), a group that supports feminist production and collaboration, and community building and strengthening.

Lingfei Zhao was born in Hanzhong, China and is currently working and living in Rochester, New York. He graduated from Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts in 2014 with majors in Art Education and Fine Arts. He is currently working on his MFA degree at the Rochester Institute of Technology in Fine Arts Studio.

MEIN THEIN

Changes, Acrylic Paint on Canvas, 2017

Victoria Clafin

Changes is a celebration of the city of Buffalo, a place where Mein Thein has found comfort ten years after moving to Buffalo as a Burmese refugee.

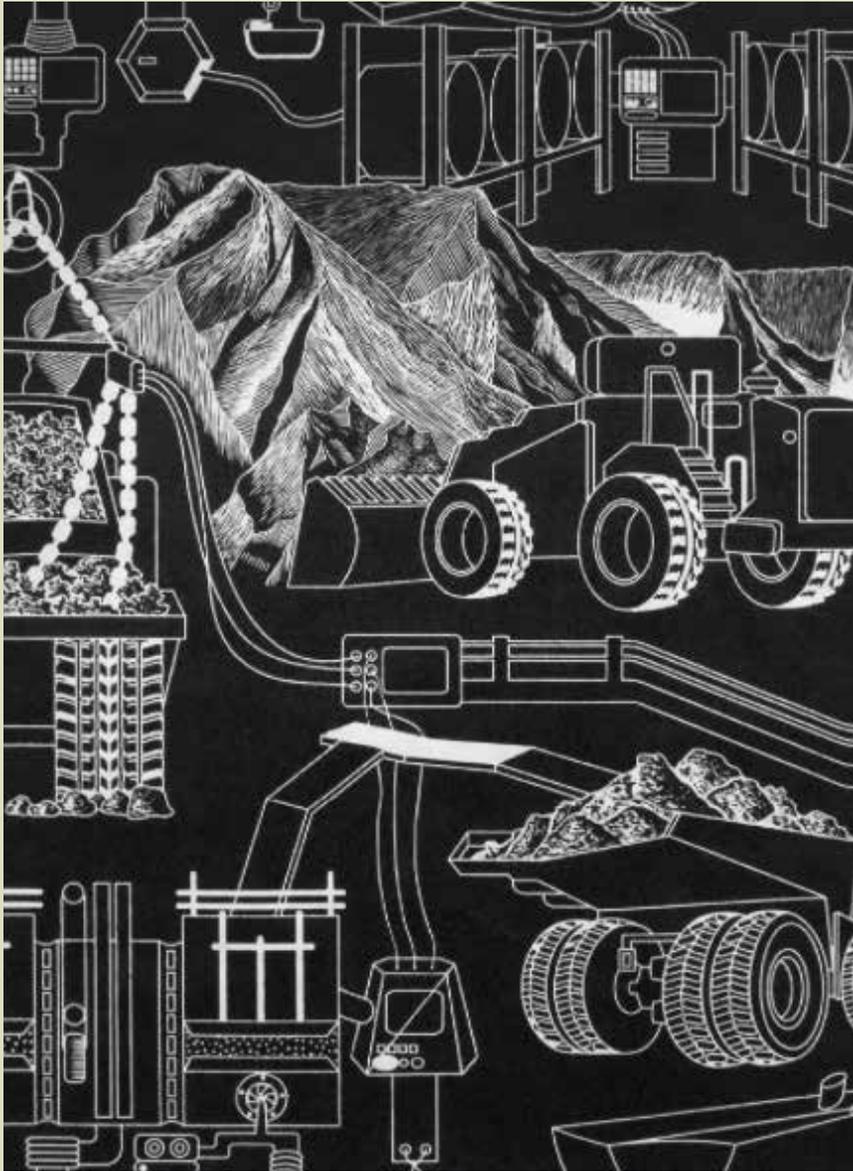
As Thein's safety has been challenged throughout the course of his life, so has his opportunity to pursue a formal education. Thein therefore had to teach himself the emotional visual language on display in his paintings. His works illuminate the landscapes where he has traveled and lived—his birth place in Burma, his escape to Thailand, and the long process that it took for him to feel comfortable and secure in this new American city. *Changes* expresses a deeply personal happiness, an individual narrative that points to a nonetheless universal desire for community, home, and self-worth.

Thein reminds us that the security of our own country should never be taken for granted and reinforces the necessity of making American cities like Buffalo sanctuaries for all seeking asylum, regardless of their religion, race, or economic standing. His work expresses the possibilities available for our lives if a city is accepting and tolerant of newcomers. Thein portrays the city of Buffalo as a colorful and vibrant place, a vision that we hope matches up to the billboard slogans of the I-90 of "an All America City." Though we may uphold the value of individuality as a nation, we are reminded that we make up a collective whole.

Victoria Clafin lives in Buffalo, New York, and works as an Assistant Events Coordinator at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery. Though the years roll on, she can't escape her roots of where the apples are sweet and the corn grows free in Ontario, NY.

Mein Thein was born in the Karen State of Burma in 1974. He was raised by his mother until the age of six when he was sent to a Buddhist monastery to be raised by monks. As Burma's political unrest increased, he migrated to Thailand and lived there as a migrant worker and a refugee for ten years. In 2007, he immigrated to the United States with his family and eventually settled into the Buffalo Burmese community. Thein is a self-taught painter; his work is inspired by his life as a refugee, his memory of home, and the hopes he has for his new life in America.





Mizin Shin is originally from South Korea. She graduated from Hong-ik University with a BFA in Printmaking and, recently, from the University at Buffalo with an MFA degree. Using a combination of printmaking and digital media, Shin's work highlights the interdependency between societal systems by visualizing these networks in relationships approaching coexistence from multiple perspectives.

MIZIN SHIN

How Things Are Made, Woodcut prints, 2017

Justin McCann

Everything is connected: containers, gears, tubes, wires, conveyor belts, and computers. These are the maddeningly intertwined elements of an automated manufacturing system in Mizin Shin's *How Things Are Made*. Her visionary set of prints pictures the contemporary industrial landscape that we don't think about when we hear the term "Rust Belt America." In many respects, her work is a twenty-first century, post-industrial version of the *America Today* mural (1930-31) by Thomas Hart Benton at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In a series of 10 panels, Benton chronicles American life in the various regions of the United States. Labor and industry feature prominently in the murals. American men construct skyscrapers, build ships, and forge steel. In Shin's hands, by contrast, things are made without people. She answers the question, "how are things made?" by using the aesthetic of schematic drawing to present the manufacturing process as one large networked operation. The machinery and associated apparatuses appear as a series of repetitive and interwoven generic symbols, removed from any social or environmental context. She represents a system of production that is over planned and overdesigned, one part added to another, yielding nothing but the sustaining of the system's own existence. Marvelously, Shin utilizes the enduring and perhaps most basic of technologies—woodblock printmaking—to challenge the logic of our networks of production as rational and useful in a post-industrial age.

How things are made has consequences that reach beyond the manufacturing sector of the economy. Whether in "Rust Belt" America or in river towns dotted with abandoned mills in Maine (where I live), the production of goods shaped community identities and influenced how they were organized. Shin's prints bring to light perhaps the harshest legacy that two hundred years of industrial innovation has left us: an outdated manner of technological thinking that seeks to expand modes of production and consumption in ways that may no longer be beneficial to human existence. Shin's vision of post-industrial America is a truthful assessment of where we are, and we must take time with it before deciding where and how to go from here.

Justin McCann is a PhD candidate in art history at Rutgers University and the Lunder Curator for Whistler Studies at the Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine.

NATALIE FLEMING

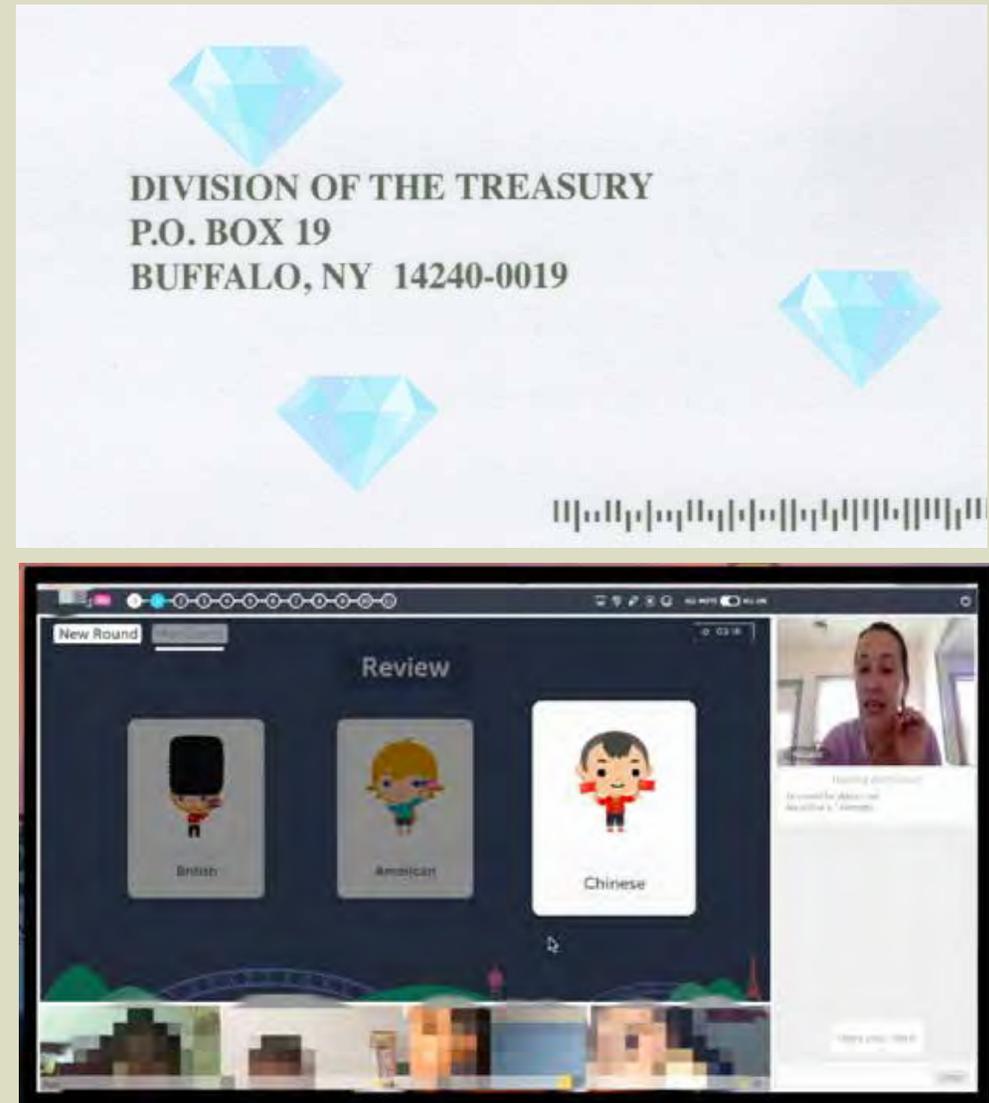
Diamonds for English, Video, 2017

Shengkai Xu

Natalie Fleming's thought-provoking piece critically explores the issues of border, transnationalism, neoliberal economy, and national identity. By documenting her online class performance, job requirements, contact with her employer, and copies of payment, Fleming vividly illustrates how money flows in a globalized economy—where the livelihoods of individuals across different nation-states become interdependent on each other. Specifically, the growing amount of transnational jobs makes the contemporary labor market less confined by a traditional sense of space. Driven by this shift, part-time and adjunct positions begin to replace tenured, salary-based conventional jobs. Flexibility in schedule and the job information network become increasingly important, whereas “preparation for lesson plan” is less necessary. To the employer, the instructors are anonymous, dispensable, and easily replaced.

To be sure, state-of-the-art technology dissolves geographical boundaries and diminishes physical borders—rendering Asia and the Americas inseparable; yet the ease of communication also obscures this interaction at the same time. For instance, Fleming's position is unbeknownst to those outside of her immediate circle. The reality that families in China financially contribute to residents in Rust Belt cities is yet to become visible among many Americans. “Asians” continues to be fathomed as a population that steals “American” jobs in prevailing political discourse.

While one envisions globalization to eventually improve the understanding among different groups and break down bias as well as stereotypes, Fleming's work probes this presumption and calls for renewed attention. As exposed in the video, her position problematically requires the instructor to “teach authentic English.” In a similar vein, the image of an “American” appears to be a white, blonde male in the teaching material. Perhaps one of the purposes of taking these English lessons is to allow Chinese children to get to know America at a young age, and, one day, become Americans. Yet during the process, they are constructed as passive receivers, unable to enrich our understanding of what America is. The assumption of Asians as “perpetual foreigners” is left unchallenged.



Shengkai Xu is a PhD student in American Studies at the University at Buffalo. Born in Shanghai, he has lived in Beijing, Berkeley, and Buffalo. His research focuses on the intersections of race and class in immigration law, and the relationship between immigration restriction and imperialism.



PAMELA YBAÑEZ

Mga: Plural, Video, 2005

Jasmine Magaña

In her video work *Mga: Plural*, Pamela Ybañez departs from a question that many non-white or ethnically ambiguous people often receive: “What are you?”, or its curiosity-inflected relative, “Where are you from?” Usually delivered in a seemingly innocuous tone rounded out by incredulity at whatever the answer may be, the query remains a constant and consistent annoyance in the lives of many people of color. It is this particular detail that makes Ybañez’s investigation all the more poignant and pertinent. Here the Filipina-American artist flips the script and solicits responses to the question: “What do you perceive me to be?”

The work focuses on the quick interactions Ybañez initiates with strangers at a popular Buffalo-area café where she poses the aforementioned question. While some comfortably answer, others carefully consider their response as they struggle not to offend. She presses for specificity when someone’s reply is “Asian Pacific,” “Asian,” or the more alarming, “Oriental.” Intermixed in the compilation of people trying to decipher her ethnicity, Ybañez inserts additional, more accurate, layers of her identity in the form of exchanges with her mother and sister. The artist shares an especially endearing moment with her sister sounding out words in Tagalog, trying to re-gain the language that had at one time belonged to her and had since been lost.

Ybañez appears at the end of the video to proclaim her plurality; a notion hinted at by the work’s title—in Tagalog, *mga* is placed in front of a noun to express multiplicity. Created during her time as a graduate student at the University at Buffalo, a period in her life when she felt keenly aware of being perceived as “other,” Ybañez transforms an alienating situation into a gesture of self-actualization and openness. At its core, the work is a very personal exploration of the boundaries of identity, a process that involves continuously unpacking one’s own identity not only for others but also for oneself. Specifically, it is about a journey towards self-definition and coming to terms with one’s eternally plural, hyphenated identity.

Jasmine Magaña is a curator/cultural worker currently based in Buffalo, NY. Along with Amber Dennis, she is the co-creator of Feminista Social Club.

Pamela Ybañez is an Oakland based artist who works in photography, curation and social engagement projects. Her art deals with personal and social investigations as a way to discuss existing societal conditions around inequality and identity. Her most recent curation projects include SOMArts Cultural Center in San Francisco, Wailoa Art Center in Hilo and Joyce Gordon Gallery. She has exhibited her work nationwide including Hallwalls, Site:Brooklyn, East Hawaii Cultural Center, ProArts, and Kearny Street Workshop.

SEPIDEH POURHANG

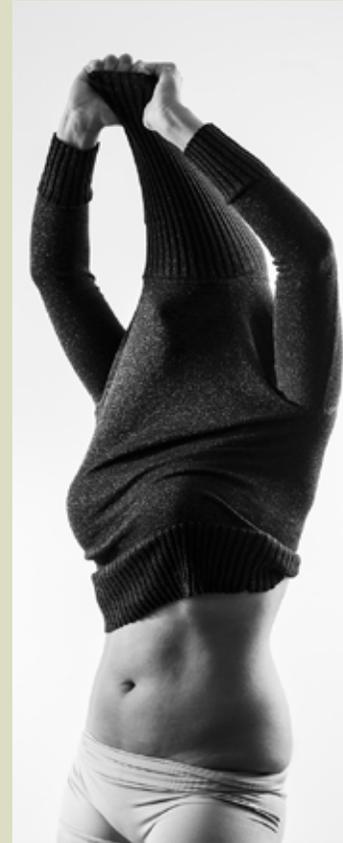
Selections from the *Cocoon Collection*, Photography, 2017; *Hide and Seek*, Mixed Media, 2016

Conor Moynihan

Traditions of dress and mannerisms are key tools in determining “Americanness,” marking the center and margin(s) of American society. Artist Sepideh Pourhang’s two works from the *Cocoon Collection* feature women in three-quarters pose shot in the act of pulling a turtleneck sweater up over their heads. At first glance, these works seem to evoke a banal fashion shoot (a Gap ad, perhaps). Yet, upon closer inspection, the turtleneck becomes more ominous. It seems to be strangling the sitters, which reframes its removal into a fraught struggle. Can she breathe? Will she get it off in time? Our pulses quicken with adrenaline. But who is the sitter? What is she like? We don’t know. Her identity is masked by her struggle with the generic turtleneck. This (erasure, suffocation) redresses what is latent in the phrase “model minority” and emphasizes a fight for autonomous self-identification.

Pourhang completed her BA in Persian Miniature and Calligraphy in Iran before immigrating to the United States to pursue her MFA at the University at Buffalo. *Hide and Seek* combines these traditions and the work seems to have two centers, uniquely eclipsed. There is the woman, face wrapped almost entirely in white fabric, looking outward, and the frame (*tazhib*), intricately painted, drawing attention inward. According to Pourhang, in Persian miniatures, the *tazhib* is used to underscore the essential concepts of the work, such as highlighting a passage from the Quran, denoting its sacredness or significance. In Pourhang’s *tazhib*, however, is a woman, a figure often absented in Iranian civil and religious society. Thus, Pourhang demonstrates how formal traditions can be appropriated to new ends, recasting the margins into new centers of critical attention.

In these three works, Pourhang’s sitters are not only there to wear the turtleneck, they do not remain properly outside the *tazhib*, they will not only lend meaning; these women become active, defining, and self-assertive presences. Pourhang draws attention to the oppression of women at the margins by positioning this inequality centrally—inescapably so. In a sense, this breaks the fantastical Orientalist mold. Within *Forging American*, her work suggests that being an Asian American woman in the Rust Belt plays much more than a marginal role in lending definitional meaning to the center of that region.



Conor Moynihan is a PhD student in the University at Buffalo’s Visual Studies program whose research specifically addresses contemporary transnational artists from the Middle East, North Africa, Iran, and Turkey, working in North America or Europe, who deal with gender and sexuality. In his research, Moynihan relies on feminist, queer, post-colonial, and disability theory.

Sepideh Pourhang is originally from Iran, and came to the United States after finishing her BFA in 2013. She utilizes Persian miniatures and photography to integrate a broad understanding of Persian arts in the lens of equality. Her works reveal imbalanced political, social and environmental conditions in the Middle East. Her goal is to make people think about gender inequality, specifically, to promote human rights and protect women from all forms of violence, discrimination and injustice.

SERENA HOCHAROEN

Foreign Structures, Pen on handmade paper, 2017

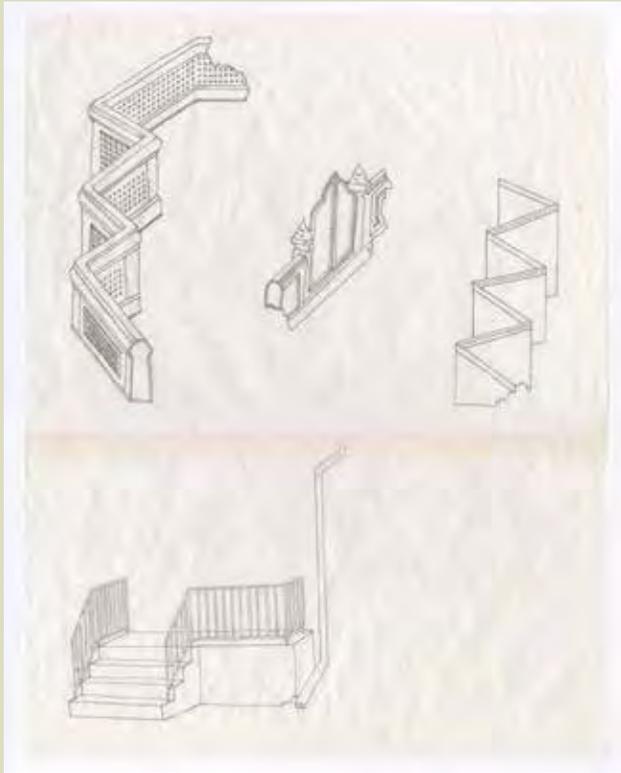
Joy Resor

Serena Hocharoen projects images of place and belonging through her counter-balanced drawings.

Hocharoen contrasts sketches from Thai temples to those of her childhood home. The combination speaks volumes about the idea of “home” via architecture. The images also question our understanding of otherness, as suburban home entrances are juxtaposed with ornate temple walls. Architecture has long been used as a tool of power and status. For many American viewers, Hocharoen’s images of her home in Illinois give a sense of security, comfort, and safety nestled in a suburban United States. Home ownership is considered an important step towards the American Dream. This architecture indicates economic and social belonging, a symbol of a middle-class upbringing. The American Dream is so deeply ingrained into our culture that even the image of a simple railing and drainage pipe conjures up memories of the past and hopes for the future.

For these Americans, Hocharoen’s depiction of Thai architectural structures seems far removed from their lives. The gilded gates and high walls found in Thai temple frescoes differ greatly from the majority of architecture built in the United States. However, the artist’s parents grew up in Thailand, where temples are a more familiar sight. To a Thai audience, it is Hocharoen’s Illinois suburban home that appears exotic. While the separation of foreign/familiar, hospitable/inhospitable, stranger/neighbor, East/West is illustrated on two separate panels, Hocharoen’s life and our own are much less neatly divided.

Joy Resor is a graduate student of urban planning at the University at Buffalo. Her focus is on community development with an interest in affordable housing.



Serena Hocharoen is a printmaker, papermaker, and book artist from the suburbs of Chicago. She recently graduated from Grinnell College in 2017 with a BA in Studio Art and Chemistry. Her work explores personal experiences and emotions, depicting the search for a sense of belonging in her own body as a woman of color in America. Through referencing her experiences and emotions documented organically in diaries, sketchbooks, and zines, she is able to develop a variety of images that allow her to capture, understand, and make visible this search. Aside from her personal work, Serena is also the editor of an online zine, *spaghetti teens*, and enjoys collaborating with other artists. Currently, she is working at Women’s Studio Workshop in Rosendale, New York, as a studio intern.

SOPHIA YUNG

Back and Back /背再背, Video, 2017

Zhewei Cao

On Self-Fulfilling Prophecies

When I told my parents that I was moving my studies from China to the United States, they were not the most supportive: "Asians don't fit there," "They don't like us," and "You'll never fit in."

My parents are not alone in expressing this belief. When we come to the United States, most of us accept the idea as natural that we won't be liked by Americans and try to surround ourselves with other Chinese immigrants. And in so doing, we isolate ourselves and settle into our own manufactured Chinese utopias. There's no failure to blend in if you don't try. We fulfill our family's prophecy of isolation and the loop goes on.

For those of us who have decent language skills and want to blend in, we are left with two options, a) Cling to your identity as a Chinese person who just happens to be living in the United States; b) Divorce yourself from your Chinese roots to act the part of the vaguely-defined Asian American.

I refuse to accept the fate that I will always be an outsider. But fitting in hasn't been easy. My Chinese friends constantly hint that I'm trying too hard at something that will never work. Eventually, they stop asking me to join their dinners or study groups. There are times when I look at them laughing and talking and wonder if I am doing the right thing.

I prohibit myself from doing anything remotely Chinese in my life: avoiding going to the American Chinese restaurant that serves horrible lo mein or speaking English to my Mandarin-speaking friends even when we are the only ones in the room. While showing my parents around New York City, I grew embarrassed when they spoke to me in public, as if speaking a word in Mandarin would take me one step closer towards the prophecy of exclusion from American society.

But very recently, I came to the realization that all of my efforts might really be pointless. Not because the prophecy is inarguably true, but because my Chinese side and American side can and should coexist. What would it be like to embrace aspects of my cultural heritage and adapt to aspects of an American lifestyle?

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*WAR WITHOUT SOLDIERS *MAKING GAMES

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*SMOG ENCOMPASSES THE EARTH

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*REACHING BEYOND THE SKY AND OVER THE SEA

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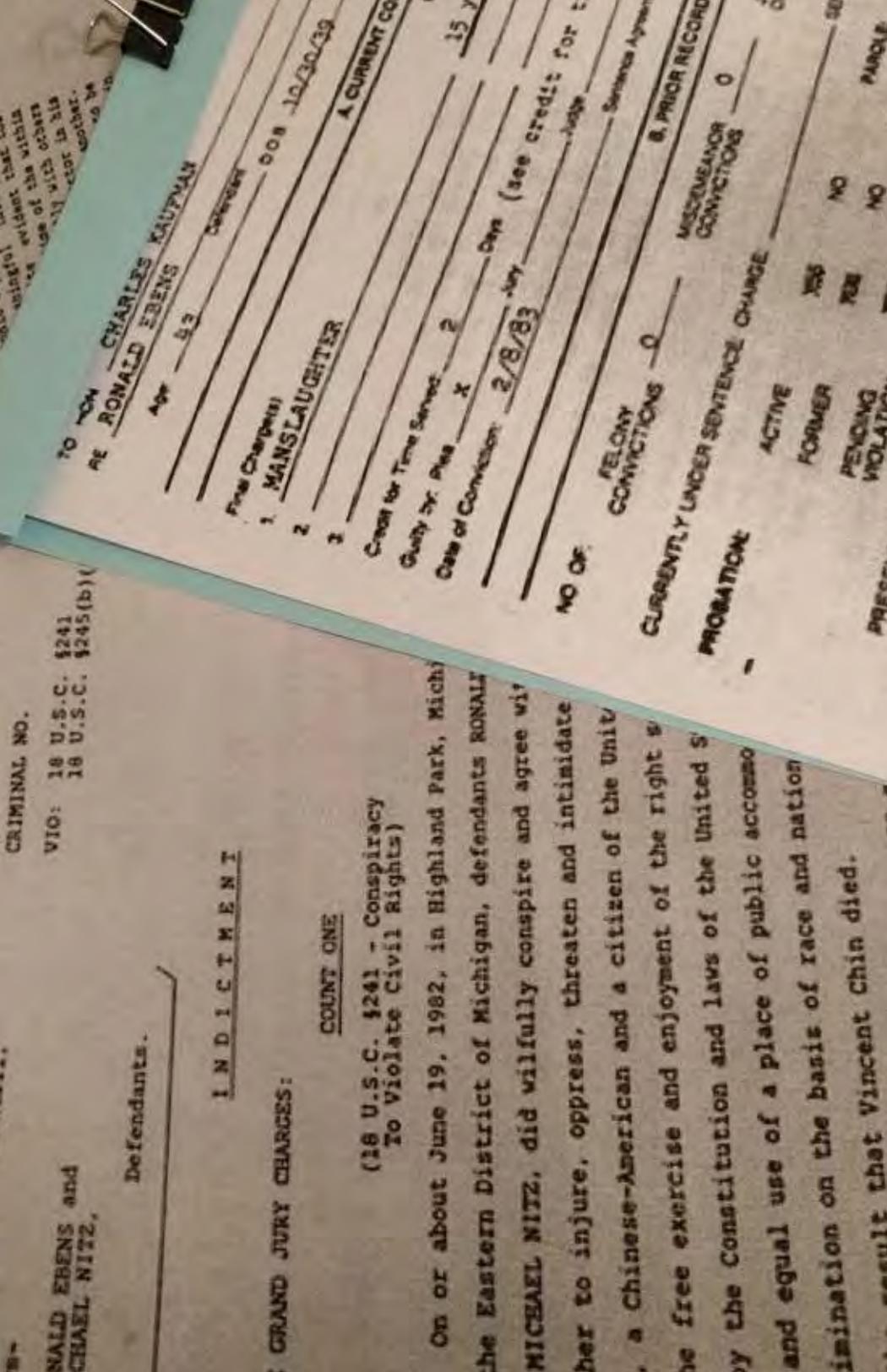
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*GODS PLAY TRICKS

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Zhewei Cao is a Chinese photographer currently based in Rochester, NY, whose work focuses on the phenomenon of light in everyday life and the visual representation of Chinese philosophy.

Sophia Yung is a Chinese- American graphic designer and artist originating from Brooklyn, NY and currently based in Buffalo, NY. Her most recent work analyses the application of linguistic technologies in both current and historical contexts. A recurring theme involves the haunting role of financial capital in immigrant labor, as well as Asian American culture shock in the precarious twenty-first century. During her undergraduate studies, she received the Evelyn Lord Rumsey Travel Scholarship in 2016 and the Morrison Scholarship in 2017; both scholarships have provided her with the opportunity to travel in pursuit of artistic cultural research.



VAN TRAN NGUYEN & ROBERT FLEMING

For Vincent, Mixed Media, 2017

Gabriella Nassif

Before Vincent Chin lost consciousness and died, he whispered “It isn’t fair.” Beaten violently by two white Americans, Chin’s death is remembered as the hate crime that galvanized a pan-Asian-American activist movement. But the side-by-side images of Vincent’s bloody and bruised face next to that of a younger, smiling Vincent were used in the press to serve as a reminder of the racist, violent underbelly of the American justice system. Robert Fleming and Van Tran Nguyen’s *For Vincent* puts viewers in an office-like setting: legal documents from Chin’s trial are sprawled across the desk. An audio recording emanates from the desk of Chin’s mother’s testimony, including the interruptions made by officials asking her to “correct” her English. The scene powerfully evokes sorrow and outrage, as we are intimately pulled into Lily Chin’s experience of the supposedly neutral American legal system she navigated through on behalf of her son. Nguyen and Fleming’s piece forces us to relive Vincent Chin’s murder and trial through multiple senses, instead of couching the event in images of Vincent’s smiling face and the subsequent activism that evolved afterwards. Vincent Chin remains a cold reminder of the current state of legal affairs in the United States, and the inherent violence immigrant Americans face in their everyday experiences.

Gabriella Nassif is a PhD student in the Global Gender Studies program at the University at Buffalo, and provides research support to the Institute for Women’s Studies in the Arab World located in Beirut, Lebanon. Her work focuses on migrant domestic workers in Beirut.

Robert Fleming is a visual artist whose practice includes painting, printmaking and drawing. He received a law degree at the University at Buffalo and has worked as a lawyer for a number of years while maintaining his artistic practice. He is on the board of directors for CEPA Gallery. He has an upcoming solo exhibition at the Western New York Book Arts Center in 2018 and is currently working on a “printstallation” – a large scale combination of etchings and relief prints that primarily uses images of running figures intended to suggest chaos, strife, joy and other scenarios that viewers can read in a number of ways. Some of the themes he has explored include migrant workers, the difficulty of meaningful human interconnections, and human disruptions caused by military conflict and economic crisis.



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