



Wanxin Zhang

Making In Between: Contemporary Chinese American Ceramics



Image Jennifer Datchuk

Exhibition Dates: March 14 – August 23, 2020

Opening Reception: March 14, 6-9pm

Making In Between examines the works of first- and second-generation Chinese American ceramic artists from across the United States and provides a basis for dialog and inter-cultural exchange during an era fraught with international tensions. Southern California has a significant Chinese-American heritage and is home to the third-largest community in the United States of Americans with Chinese ancestry.

Through cultural, geographic, and historic lenses, the exhibition invites visitors to learn about and engage with the contemporary Chinese American artistic experience.

Jennifer Ling Datchuk (b. 1980) is child of a Chinese immigrant and grandchild of Russian and Irish immigrants. Her work transports the familiar to the strange, imbuing common domestic items with symbolic questions of identity, place, and belonging. “My work has always dealt with identity, with the sense of being in-between, an imposter, neither fully Chinese nor Caucasian. I have learned to live with the constant question about my appearance: “What are you?”

Sin-ying Ho (b. 1963) was born and raised in Hong Kong before immigrating to Canada in 1992 and New York thereafter. Ho overlays figurative decals created digitally in New York on traditional ceramic forms she travels to China to produce. Her works are amalgams of ceramic pieces fired and glazed separately, brought together as a melting pot of artistic and personal identity.

“Migration, transplanting, and growing up in a colony like Hong Kong generates a sense of displacement and involves a constant negotiation of my identity.... As the world moves towards greater globalization, many nationalities and cultures will merge together and evolve into an unknown global culture. I reference my own experience being Chinese and living in North America with the cultural collisions I have endured. This cross-cultural experience speaks to a universal phenomenon.”

Beth Lo (b. 1949) was born in Lafayette, Indiana shortly after her parents emigrated from China. Water, a central element in many of her works is represented with a blue/green celadon glaze, conjuring the frustration, alienation, and disaster Lo experienced during her childhood. The birth of her son in 1987 marked a turning point in her work, which now uses calligraphy and traditional Chinese form and iconography to examine the intersection of heritage, identity, motherhood, and parenting.

Cathy Lu (b. 1984) grew up as part of the only Chinese American family in a Miami, Florida neighborhood that was home to Cuban exiles and immigrants. “I’m uncomfortable with the phrase Asian American because I’ve always felt that having

been born here, I'm just 'American', but I understand that I will never be seen that way. I've always been surprised about how people react by the way I look – assuming that I can or can't speak Chinese or English. If I'm in Noe Valley washing my clothes at the laundromat, people will sometimes assume I work there.”

Lu's work explores the idea that food can be a language of home, and deconstructs the way food (fruits, sauces, spices, and more) create a sense of identity and belonging. By manipulating traditional imagery of Chinese art and presentation, she unpacks what it means to be trans-cultural, and how ideas of cultural 'authenticity' and 'tradition' interface with contemporary trans-cultural experiences.

Stephanie H. Shih (b. 1986) was raised with one younger brother by Chinese-Taiwanese parents whose love of home cooking laid the foundation of her fascination with food. “Food carries meaning for everyone but especially people who have only known life in the diaspora, whose identities are tied to a figurative homeland that exists only in the memories and experiences that this set of people have had.”

Her work went viral in July of 2018 when she posted photos of a new body of work – rows and rows of identical ceramic dumplings folded and arranged by hand.

Responses came from all corners of the country and from diverse communities, all united by deep nostalgia. “I think it feels important to me to create space because we don't have a shared physical place. We have to create dialogue and that becomes the space that we have...this is ours and it's just for us.”

Wanxin Zhang (b. 1961) was born and educated in China and graduated from the prestigious LuXun Academy of Fine Art in Sculpture in 1985. A successful state artist, Zhang discovered the work of Robert Rauschenberg at the Beijing Art Museum in 1985, “before [which], [he] had no idea what was possible to express in modern art, or what it could look like.”

In 1992, he relocated to San Francisco with his wife and young child knowing little English and driven by his desire to pursue an artistic career. He immersed himself in the regional art scene, influenced by Manuel Neri, Robert Arneson, and Viola Frey. “As a Chinese person, clay is in my blood. Clay and ceramics have been an integral

part of Chinese culture for millennia...At the same time, having distance from China is what freed me to utilize these materials to fit my personal narrative.”

<http://www.amoca.org/makinginbetween20/>