

INTERVIEWS

CANDICE LIN

November 01, 2021 • Candice Lin on collective grief and the consolation of cats



Candice Lin, *Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping*, 2021, hand-printed (katazome) and hand-drawn (tsutsugaki) indigo panels, steel bar, dyed rugs, glazed ceramics, epoxy resin, feathers, block-printed and digitally printed fabric, bells, tassels, and miscellaneous small objects, dimensions variable. Installation view, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, 2021–22. Photo: Ian Byers-Gamber.

Candice Lin made Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping, 2021, in the isolation and inertia of the coronavirus pandemic. The installation, which also marks her first solo museum show, strains against that sadness. Centered in and around a collapsible, movable, wearable tent, Lin's latest work draws on the ways she found connection over the last eighteen months, and creates a setting where others might find the same. But connection is double-edged: The installation references the sometimes gradual, often violent ways cultures meet and intermingle, creating new hybrids and then moving on. The exhibition is mobile, too; on view at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis from August 5 to January 1, 2022, it will move in February to the Harvard University's Carpenter Center for Visual Arts.

WHEN I CONCEIVED THIS INSTALLATION, I imagined Covid-19 would be over and we would be so excited to be in a world of full sensations and touch. I didn't foresee the pandemic still being ongoing and that the idea of handling objects and resting on surfaces other people have touched might be anything but inviting. But in Minneapolis, people have not been hesitant to interact with and touch the work.

Seeping, Rotting, Resting, Weeping consists of an indigo-dyed tent flanked by ceramic figures that hold up the panels. There is a little bit of signage inviting people to enter, but the work's material quality and sensuousness also compels them to go inside. There are soft, plush rugs that have been stippled with dye, and ceramic cats that can be rested on like Tang Dynasty ceramic pillows. There is an indigo-bound journal of drawings and personal notes recording the time from March 2020 until June 2021: roughly the start of the pandemic in the US to the time this show came together. There are also two pieces I call tactile theaters that have a seat on either side, and visitors are invited to sit across from one another and touch them like a surrogate body. One is made of concrete and the other is made of scagliola. They're very smooth, sanded to 3000 grit, and are very sensuous to the skin.

The words in the show's title—sleeping, rotting, resting, weeping—seemed to encapsulate much of my, and perhaps many other people's, experience during the pandemic. The

weeping refers to all the death and collective grieving of this year and a half. But I'm also thinking about the processes that are involved with some of the materials, about how death and decay are linked to fermentation and new life. For example, when indigo is fermented (or control rotted) it is sometimes referred to as an alive being, even a child, that needs to be put to bed or to rest under the "bedcovers." The making of the indigo dye pot relies on feeding the bacteria which eat the oxygen and reduce the vat. They can only live by breaking down decaying organic matter like urine, broth, or old fruit. I did a lot of experimentation with different types of vats. (The urine one was stinky. The vat has to be hot, so I kept it outside in my yard in 90-degree weather.) When I was ready to dye all the panels, I made enough to fill a kiddie pool.



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The tent structure was made in a modular way, where each panel can be unhooked and worn as a tunic, and the metal bars spanning the ceramic pillars can be shortened to different lengths. I used a rice-based resist paste and hand-cut stencils to print the indigo panels with historical patterns from moments when one culture's images started to meld and shift because of global trade or colonial influence. For example, there is a Japanese *katazome* design that incorporates Portuguese and Dutch trade logos, and there are several Nigerian *adire* patterns that show the influence of British colonization with the introduction of the crown and Union Jack motifs. So the work is about contact—between people, between species, and between cultures. I was thinking of this nomadic, End Times life where people, after becoming a hybrid species with other animals, would wear their shelter. The *qigong* video is set in a postapocalyptic desert where an earthquake splits open the earth and an indigo tent emerges. Underneath, a cat human hybrid I call a cat demon is stretching and doing *qigong* naked. He's not wearing the panel, but he could if he got cold.

The show is about the ways, not always positively, we are enmeshed—culturally, historically, environmentally, species-ly. It connects way back to early research I was doing in 2013 about Lynn Margulis's writing, and an installation I did at Galeria Quadrado Azul called "The long-lasting intimacy of strangers," which also had a companion exhibition I curated at the Luckman Gallery called "Companions: the long-lasting intimacy of strangers." That title came from a phrase of hers about how new life forms get made from positive modes of collaboration as well as violent ones, like an organism trying to consume another and managing only to partially digest it. Michael Taussig defines this in terms of anthropology and culture as "the space of death" that binds "the culture of the conqueror" to "that of the conquered." There's a space of death inside the organic process of indigo as well as the history of indigo plantations in British-ruled India.

I've always loved cats and had deep connection and communication with them. During this pandemic I had many months when I mainly interacted with my cat Roger. I think this time period stripped away everything that wasn't a source of necessity and soul-sustaining pleasure. Allowing myself to think about cats, and to make work centered around them, fed that need for comfort and connection that was scarce during this time. Behind the central tent or temple in my show, there is a video with a cat demon leading people in

qigong exercises while having a side conversation with a guileless but perverted character who's also my partner, Asher Hartman (the texts started as actual joke texts between us), voiced in the strange and wonderful language of junk emails and advertisements seen in subtitles flickering at the bottom corners of the video. Another animation that plays on a small TV inside the tent is about White-n-Gray, a feral cat who lived on my porch for eleven years. One day he showed up with completely blue legs after curiously dipping them in one of my indigo test vats. He disappeared shortly afterward (I think he died of natural causes) in the summer of 2020. So the animation imagines his last days and how he disappeared into the blueness.

— *As told to Travis Diehl*

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