

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE ON CHINA
IN THE WORLD GALLERY

12 FEBRUARY–24 MAY 2024

A A A A S S S E M B L L Y Y Y Y
A A A A A S S E M B L Y Y Y Y Y
A A A A A S S E M B L Y Y Y Y Y
A A A A A S S E M B L Y Y Y Y Y
A A A A S S S E M B L L Y Y Y Y

Assembly brings together eight Hong Kong-born artists from different generations of the diaspora. Amid the current wave of migration, this exhibition explores the act of ‘making sense’ of layers and fragments, of memories and stories, and of the complexities of life faced by communities in flux. *Assembly* embraces the resonance and dissonance between the diverse creative practices of different generations of artists, while challenging ready-made notions of diasporic identity.

Born in Hong Kong, the artists represented in *Assembly* are now based in Warrang/Sydney, Naarm/Melbourne, London, and Vancouver, each having migrated at significant moments in the history of Hong Kong: the 1967 anti-colonial riots, the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration, the eve of the 1997 Handover, and the wake of the 2019 protests and subsequent passing of the national security law in 2020.

As a space that is both ephemeral and intentional, an exhibition is by definition a form of assemblage; it momentarily brings individual practices, experiences, and histories together around a shared idea. With a concern for the relationship between intergenerational memory and shifting identity, faced by all diasporic communities, this exhibition embraces the resonance and dissonance between eight distinct artistic practices exploring the tension between individual and collective experience, in which Hong Kong remains a distant yet central presence, a source of gravity.

Assembly is curated by Dr Olivier Krischer.

More information and public program: ciw.anu.edu.au/event/assembly

Please do not touch the artworks.

EXHIBITING ARTISTS

Chun Yin Rainbow CHAN 陳雋然 (b. 1990, Hong Kong) is a musician, producer, and visual artist based in Naarm/Melbourne. Chan migrated to Australia in 1996 with her family. *Fruit Song* 生果文 (2022) is a multimedia installation based on Chan’s research into her mother’s Hong Kong *Waitau* 圍頭 community, believed to be the area’s first settlers during the Song Dynasty (960–1279). The work reimagines a *Waitau* ritual known as the bridal lament, a public performance of grief in which the bride would weep and sing for three days with family and friends, expressing their sorrow and defiance in the face of arranged marriages through veiled references to fruit. The three-part audio track includes Chan’s contemporary rendition of the *Fruit Song*, sung in *Waitau* language and produced in the artist’s signature style of finely layered, bittersweet electro pop.

Nikki LAM (b.1988, Hong Kong) is a visual artist and curator based in Naarm/Melbourne, who moved to Australia in 2005. Lam’s work deals with the complexity of diasporic experience and individual and collective histories, through poetry, translation, fragmentation, destruction, and re-generation. *the unshakeable destiny_2101* (2021) is the first part of a film trilogy reflecting on creative agency during times of cultural, social, and political transition, critically interpreted through screen cultures. Shot on 16mm film, the work weaves together dense references to the films of émigré Hong Kong director Wong Kar Wai, with allusions to the city’s colonial past and recent protests. The title is taken from the final words of Chris Patten’s farewell speech at the 1997 Handover ceremony.

Firenze LAI Ching-Yin 黎清妍 (b. 1984, Hong Kong) is a painter, illustrator, and book designer who moved to London in 2022. Lai depicts anonymous people in urban spaces, focusing on how gestures and postures can convey an individual presence rather than likeness. In *Noise* (2011) and *Wind* (2011), she captures the effects of two invisible forces, which are common but by nature difficult to describe. *Betting Station* (2012) and *Security Guard* (2013) similarly bear witness to the tension between our capacity to empathise, and our inability to truly understand what it is to be in the skin of another. The guard's clasped gloved hands. The punter's nervously wrapped legs. What are they thinking? How are they feeling?

Pamela LEUNG 鄭詠兒 is a Hong Kong-born multi-media artist who moved to Warrang/Sydney in 1976. Completing her Master of Fine Arts at the National Art School in 2016, Leung's work encourages us to share ideas of identity and displacement. *Agglomerate* (2022–) is a woven mat that both symbolises and facilitates community, with the twine being produced by members of the global Hong Kong diaspora from local Chinese-language newspapers printed in traditional Chinese characters. Leung first learned to crochet from her now 94-year-old mother, and adds to the mat with each exhibit and event. *Ngor yiu fan uk kei* (2022) is a neon sculpture of words meaning 'I want to go home' in Cantonese. Rather than a nostalgic refrain, Leung is quoting one of the Hong Kong student protesters besieged by police during the protests of 2019. Leung here reclaims the neon medium as a symbol of Hong Kong's cultural history.

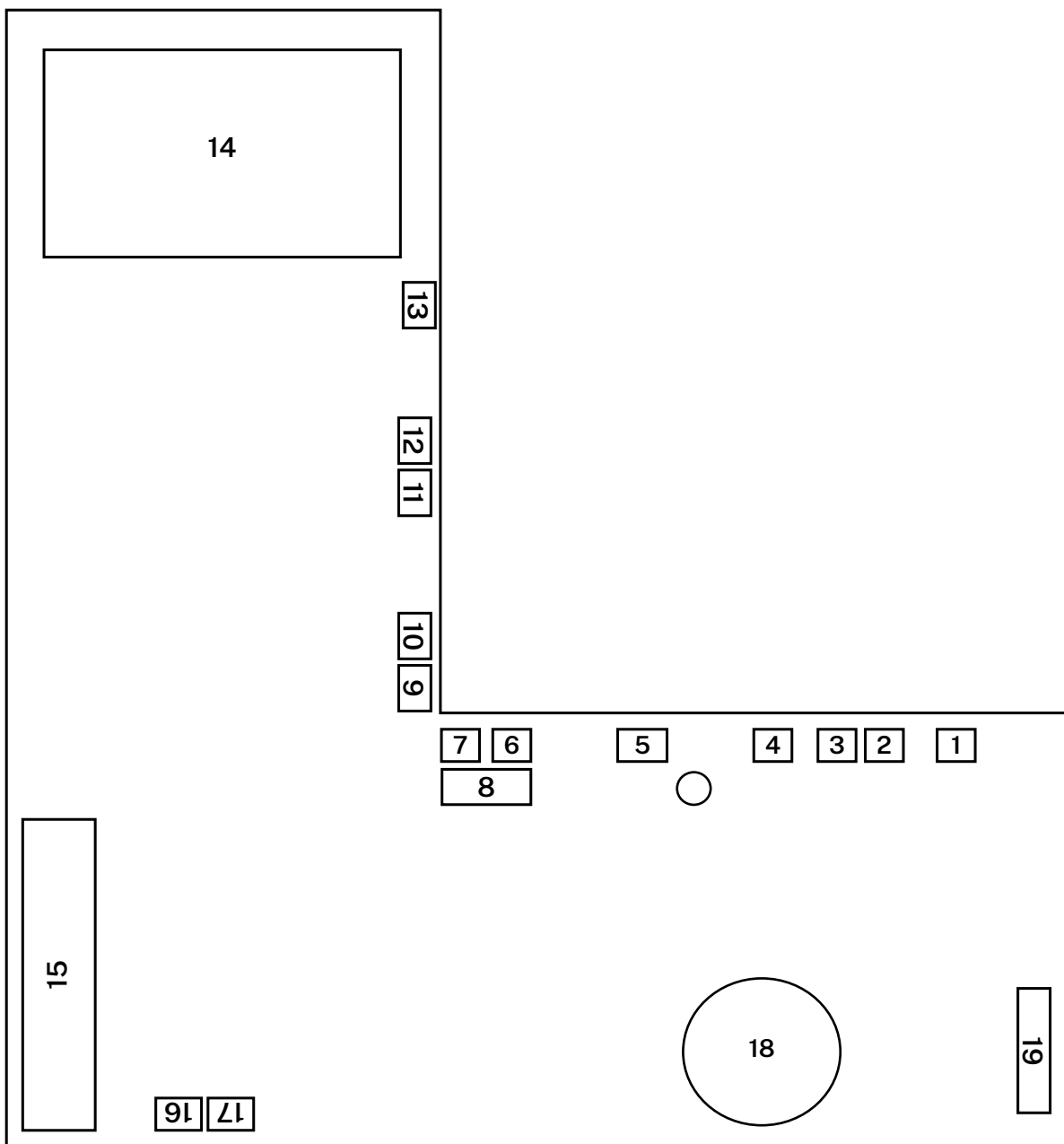
Cyrus TANG completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2004 and a Master of Fine Arts (Research) at Monash University in 2010. While Tang trained in clay, she 'forced herself' to work with other materials after art school. *In memory's eye, we travel* (2016) is a three-channel video depicting a house as it slowly begins to warp and disintegrate. The delicate monochrome tone and soft focus establish a sense of timelessness, which contributes also a sense of unease. Preferring to work with analogue processes in her studio, Tang made a detailed wax model that she filmed in real time, upside down, as it was exposed to heat. The work responds to the end of a relationship, but also to a sense of sadness at the fading of a childhood dream.

Hiram TO 杜子卿 (1964–2017), born in Hong Kong, spent formative years in Scotland (1978–83), before moving to Meeanjin/Brisbane in 1986. From 1995, he returned to Hong Kong, working in media while establishing an international profile, including representing Hong Kong at the 2007 Venice Biennale. To's work is both dense and minimalist, projecting a sense of the quotidian as layered through references to the aesthetics of fashion, music, and advertising. At times To's work borders on self-referential parody – but always with a twist of irony. In *Untitled from The printing room* (1989), photocopies are tinted and given a waxy patina, lending them an 'authentic' look. *I spy through the rose coloured glass* (1988–89), made during the Bicentennial year, challenges the official record of Australia's British 'discovery' through candid word play (e.g. disco-very, very-disco). In *Casual Victim* (1991) and *Higher [Dior-orDi]* (2002), however, To acts out photography's power to project and to anticipate our desires, undermining the myth of the artist as an oracle or source of truth.

Howie TSUI Ho Yan 徐浩恩 (b. 1978, Hong Kong) grew up in Lagos, Nigeria, before moving to Thunder Bay, Canada; he is now based in Vancouver. With a Bachelor in Fine Arts from the University of Waterloo (2002), Tsui has developed a hybrid style of exaggerated, grotesque imagery, combining traditional and contemporary themes and materials to satirise political and cultural hegemonies. *Retainers of Anarchy* (2018) is a printed handscroll featuring illustrations Tsui produced for a large non-linear, multi-channel animation. Here he combines episodes and characters from the hugely popular martial arts fiction of Hong Kong writer Jin Yong (a.k.a Louis Cha, 1924–2018), paintings by Italian-born Qing court painter Giuseppe Castiglione, and familiar scenes of Hong Kong history and urban spaces. *Calcify* (2018) and *Offering* (2018) in the *Avatars of Entombment* series draw from a recent set of illustrations based on 'scholar rocks'. Traditionally used as a focal point for contemplation by high culture civilised elite, the scholar rocks here have been encrusted with boards resembling the cangue, a tool used for public humiliation and torture in Imperial China.

John YOUNG Zerunge AM 楊子榮 (b.1956, Hong Kong) was sent to study in Australia following the 1967 anti-colonial riots in Hong Kong. He later read philosophy of science and aesthetics at the University of Sydney, then studied painting and sculpture at Sydney College of the Arts. Young has had more than 60 solo exhibitions and participated in over 160 group exhibitions, being recognised in 2020 as a Member of the Order of Australia for services to the visual arts. *Hong Kong Burns* (2000) and *That Bright Red Star* (2000) are an uncharacteristically personal pair of paintings, in which Young comes to terms with the 1997 Handover and its aftermath. While the two works relate to Young's *Double Ground* painting series, in their juxtaposition of 'stacked' classical genres (nude, still life, landscape), against an apparently unrelated background – a butterfly pattern, symbolising a sense of apprehension or unknowing – they foreshadow questions of history and ethics that Young would later develop in the *History Projects* series.

LIST OF WORKS



Please do not touch the artworks.

- 1 Hiram To, *Casual Victim*, 1991, printed card, 38H x 46W x 1.8D cm [framed]. Courtesy Griffith University Art Collection, purchased with assistance from the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, 1991.
- 2 Hiram To, *Untitled from The printing room*, 1989, photocopy with wax and red and sepia toner, 49.2H x 39.7W x 2D cm [framed]. Courtesy Griffith University Art Collection, purchased 1989.
- 3 Hiram To, *Untitled from The printing room*, 1989, photocopy with wax and red and sepia toner, 49.2H x 39.7W x 2D cm [framed]. Courtesy Griffith University Art Collection, purchased 1989.
- 4 Hiram To, *Higher [Dior-orDi]*, 2002 printed 2015, photographic print face mounted on acrylic, 150 x 63 cm approx. Courtesy Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection — gift of Scott Redford 2021.
- 5 Nikki Lam, *the unshakable destiny_2101*, 16mm film transferred to 2K digital video with sound, 2021. Courtesy the artist.
- 6 Howie Tsui, *Avatars of Entombment #1 (Calcify)*, 2022, three-colour silkscreen on Crane Lettra cotton paper, 61.0 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy the artist.
- 7 Howie Tsui, *Avatars of Entombment #2 (Offering)*, 2022, three-colour silkscreen on Crane Lettra cotton paper, 61.0 x 45.7 cm. Courtesy the artist.
- 8 Howie Tsui, *Retainers of Anarchy*, 2018, Epson Ultrachrome pigmented ink on rice paper, mounted on paper and silk, 30 x 239 cm. Courtesy Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection — gift of the artist and ART LABOR Gallery 2019.
- 9 John Young, *Hong Kong Burns*, 2000, digital print and oil on canvas, 288 x 138cm. Courtesy the artist.
- 10 John Young, *That Bright Red Star*, 2000, digital print and oil on canvas, 288 x 138cm. Courtesy the artist.
- 11 Firenze Lai, *Betting Station*, 2011, ink on paperboard, 29.7 x 42.0 cm. Courtesy White Rabbit Collection, Sydney.
- 12 Firenze Lai, *The Wind*, 2011, ink on paperboard, 27 x 22 cm. Courtesy White Rabbit Collection, Sydney.
- 13 Pamela Leung. *Ngor yiu fan uk kei (I want to go home)*, 2022, neon sculpture. Courtesy the artist.
- 14 Chun Yin Rainbow Chan, *Fruit Song* 生果文, 2022. Habotai silk, silk dye, freshwater pearls, 花帶 patterned braids, linocut print, polyamide thread, cotton, vinyl lettering, wall paint, multichannel audio (5:20 minutes), dimensions variable. Courtesy Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection — purchased with funds provided by the Asian Art Collection Benefactors 2023.
- 15 Cyrus Tang, *In memory's eye, we travel*, three-channel video, 2016. Courtesy the artist.
- 16 Firenze Lai, *Noise*, 2011, ink on paperboard, 29.7 x 42.0 cm. Courtesy White Rabbit Collection, Sydney.
- 17 Firenze Lai, *Security Guard*, 2013, oil on canvas, 50.0 x 40.7 cm. Courtesy White Rabbit Collection, Sydney.
- 18 Pamela Leung, *Agglomerate*, crocheted newspaper, approx. 200 cm in diameter, 2022. Courtesy the artist.
- 19 Hiram To, *I spy through the rose coloured glass*, 1988–89, laser copy and modelling compound, 121.3H x 160.9W x 0.13D cm. Courtesy Griffith University Art Museum, purchased 1996.