

Common Aliens



Exhibition: October 1–29, 2015
Thursday to Saturday 1–6 PM or by appointment (info@atelierceladon.com)
Vernissage: October 1, 7:30–9:30 PM
Conference Closing Reception: October 4, 7–9 PM
Z Art Space (819 Avenue Atwater)
atelierceladon.com

ARTISTS

viola chen 陈宜晴 (closing reception only)

Yuki Kasai Paré

Shani Kossally

Kristin Li (closing reception only)

Kosisochukwu Nnebe

Eli Oda Sheiner

Aletha Persaud

Cheryl Sim

Shanna Strauss

When asked about people's failure to consider the impact of "race" and "ethnicity" in their experiences, values and behaviors, Scott, a White male, shares: "it is a defense against the "traumatic" consequences of having to deal with the "difference gap" - difference related to race, ethnicity and culture - between whites and non-whites." ¹ For all the Scotts living in Canada that find themselves to be one of the dominant group members, such a "defense mechanism" is perpetuated continuously throughout their daily lived experiences.

In an attempt to reconcile these attitudes of exclusion, Common Aliens has provided a much needed platform to address repressed narratives of identity. Similarly, the artists included in the exhibition have insightfully shared their distinct experiences as visible minorities striving to better understand their own diasporic identity. By alluding to imagined homelands; encouraging a close reading of their mixed histories through ambivalent attitudes of conflict and desire; and even conforming to imposed expectations of "otherness" using subversive means, these artists have well demonstrated the accrued nature of ethnic representation as a socio-political construct. As Carl E. James argues: "ethnicity is not simply a matter of individual choice: members of society play a role in defining ethnicity."

On this occasion, Z Art Space is pleased to collaborate with Atelier Céladon on the nurturing of this ongoing dialogue.

DIRECTOR, Z ART SPACE Tianmo Zhang

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¹ James, Carl E. "The Construction of Cultural Identities." *In Seeing Ourselves: Exploring Race, Ethnicity and Culture*, Second Edition (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, Inc., 1999): 29.

LIST OF WORKS

***Come back home often* 常回家看看, VIOLA CHEN 陈宜晴 (2015)**

Performance, installation, video

Untitled, YUKI KASAI PARÉ (2015)

Mixed media on two wood panels

***Passive Legacy*, SHANI KOSSALLY (2015)**

Mixed media and acrylic paint on stretched canvas

***Two Snakes*, KRISTIN LI (2015)**

Video

***Of Canaries and Revolutions*, KOSISOCHUKWU NNEBE (2015)**

Mixed media on Plexiglas

***KITAN CLUB Ceramics*, ELI ODA SHEINER (2014 - 2015)**

Ceramics, thrown on wheel

***Misc. Girl TV*, ALETHA PERSAUD (2015)**

Video, monitor, headphones

***I Knew You Were Some Kind of 'nese'*, ALETHA PERSAUD (2014 - 2015)**

Personal garments, embroidery, clothing rack, plastic storage container, clothes hangers

***Hybrid Dresses*, CHERYL SIM (2014)**

Banana Dress

Cotton fabric, custom printed lining, hand embroidery, gold thread
Fabrication of the dress: Gary Mak

DNA Dress

Crepe fabric, machine embroidery, custom printed lining
Fabrication of the dress: Gary Mak

Sim Dynasty Dress

Store bought cheongsam, hand embroidery, gold thread, silver thread

***The Floating Homeland*, SHANNA STRAUSS (2015)**

That Place

Acrylic, photo transfer on reclaimed wood

The World in Her Hands

Acrylic, oil pastel, photo transfer on reclaimed wood

Phoenix

Acrylic, beads, photo transfer on reclaimed wood

Uringo Bayoyo

Acrylic, photo transfer on reclaimed wood

Flashing through online sensations, and yet another instance of cultural appropriation in part by the latest pop stars, we shout about appropriation, calling out the continuous exploitation of people of colour's bodies and cultures. We are begging the question: who owns culture? Thinking through and beyond motions of more traditional cultural reclamation, we bring nine Montreal-based artists in dialogue with the inaugural *Common Aliens: Diaspora Conference*, taking place on unceded Mohawk land and a gentrifying neighbourhood with a long but erased history of Black power. We seek to take space without drawing borders and re-present racialized cultural markers in an assemblage of ambiguity. Finding commonalities among differently marked members of what we call "a people of colour diaspora," the artists featured in the *Common Aliens* exhibition present cultural objects that essentially move, but do not mark a fixed identity. How is it to be or feel alien?

The works featured in this exhibition point to a double alien-ness, one that is experienced within society - informed by white supremacy, colonialism, racism, sexism, among others - and another, internal one. This is fueled by an unstable identity that can be at once a source of oppression and of limitless creativity. It is the tension between the two which we put into motion through *Common Aliens*. In the window, we see a familiar garment. Yet many people will not know its name - cheongsam, nor its history. Cheryl Sim's *Hybrid Dresses* are a vehicle for the artist's research, from the object's ambivalent social connotation to the construction of its personal meaning. Likewise, Yuki Kasai Paré's untitled mixed media on two wood panels and Eli Oda Sheiner's *KITAN CLUB Ceramics* come together in their gesture toward sorting through multiple layers of racialized reality, ways of materially (re)connecting with one's heritage and (re)learning to be oneself. We are putting the hybridity invested into the pieces themselves into dialogue with each other, and asking you to eavesdrop, add your two cents.

Drawing on fragments of reclaimed historical imagery and constructed present ones, the works *Of Canaries and Revolutions* by Kosisochnikwu Nnebe, the exploratory *Passive Legacy* by Shani Kossally, or Shanna Strauss' selection from the powerful *The Floating Homeland* series brings into question what it means to ground your roots. The particular duality of alien-ness is evident in Viola Chen's performance *常回家看看* (*come back home often*) as well as Kristin Li's video *Two Snakes*, both of which will be presented at the conference closing reception. The construction of home and navigating through one's heritage, in order to own it, is a complex endeavour. Perhaps there is no state of belonging after all? The pervasiveness of misidentification and exotization is manifest in both Aletha Persaud's installation *I Knew You Were Some Kind of 'nese'* and video montage *Misc. Girl TV*. While we deal with the effects of an uneven political, social, and economic dynamic of capitalist society and the persistence of colonial histories on Turtle Island, the *Common Aliens* artists together facilitate encounters in space for a collective search for self-love, healing, and the construction of alternate and unalienable realities through art.

CURATORS Hera Chan, Sophie Le-Phat Ho, Kosisochnikwu Nnebe

We would like to extend our thanks to Tianmo Zhang and Z Art Space for providing valuable support and helping to facilitate a space of sharing on this year's inaugural Common Aliens: Diaspora Conference 2015. Through conversations on the criticality of maintaining context in the circulation of art around the world, we have planted the seeds for a platform that we hope will only continue to inspire movement.