

MIXING RICE

by

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A thesis exhibition presented to OCAD University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Criticism and Curatorial Practice

Jing Jin Cuisine, Little Szechuan, Odd Couple, 20th Street, Saskatoon

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Abstract

MIXING RICE is an Artist in Community project was undertaken in the Riversdale Business Improvement District Saskatoon from October 2021 to March 2022 with the curatorial objective to link local Asian and artist communities in Saskatoon through a visual art exhibition. By partnering local artists with Chinese-Canadian restaurant owners based in the Riversdale neighborhood in Saskatoon, this project aimed to introduce Chinese-Canadian restaurant culture to a broader public by immersing both restaurant patrons and interested arts viewers in a physical and visual feast of Chinese culinary excellency. Furthermore, this project aimed to increase visibility for the Asian communities in Saskatoon. The project took the form of a physical exhibition presented in the selected Chinese restaurants in Saskatoon, in addition to an online website that documented the exhibition to disseminate the work more broadly.

This support paper examines my research process that led to my exhibition centered on Asian cuisine. I reflect upon the community engagement generated through the exhibition with local artists, restaurant owners, and the audiences. Additionally, the paper is my vehicle to scrutinize how community-based curatorial practice can open dialogue through exhibitions and establish frameworks for future decolonial practices in the curatorial field.

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I am incredibly grateful to the participating artists, Biofeedback Collective (Kelsey Ford, Lauren Warrington, and Emily Zdunich), Qiming Sun, Jinglu Zhao, Negar Tajgardan, Barbara Reimer, who spend their time and creativity collaborating with me on this phenomenal project. Thank you for being my guest artists in MINING RICE throughout the entire journey.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected artists and scholars in multiple ways. The lockdown has restricted my ability to travel freely or draw inspiration from cultural exchanges. To adapt to this new normality, I began to pay closer attention to the local communities, sparking a shift in my artistic practice from photography to one based on community relations, a practice informed by social engagements and relational art frameworks that focuses on engagement through human interaction and social discourse that has led to MIXED RACE. The creation of my thesis exhibition, MIXING RICE, is in response to and addresses my experience of numerous underlying societal issues brought to light due to COVID-19.

Born and raised in Wuhan, China, and now living in Saskatoon, I was devastated by the news Atlanta Spa Shootings in March.¹ After my initial feeling of anger and confusion from seeing the news of the settled, a thought arose: “what is the rudimentary cause of such a series of violence?” Racialized stigmatization is painstakingly obvious in numerous Western media narratives. At the beginning of 2020, the people accused Wuhan’s citizens of procreating COVID through their “nasty eating habits” and “drinking industrially polluted water.” Chinese food, which is perceived as “cheap & unsanitary” in North America, has become further vilified as the origin of the pandemic. Beyond some overtly discriminatory campaigns pushed by radical media, many of the misconceptions about cultures and races focus on one element: food. With the recent rising racial tension and the increasing violence against people of visible Asian descent fanned by COVID-19’s induced hysteria, as an artist and curator who cares about this land and the livelihood of its communities I felt I needed to break the silence and confront these

¹ Holly Honderich, “Atlanta spa shooting: How we talk about violence,” BBC News, Washington, 19 March 2021 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-56446820>

misconceptions. Someone needed to stand up for our people through visual language. MIXING RICE was my way of standing up, created to explore how visual art in a community context can address racism and open a healing dialogue for Asian and non-Asian communities during the pandemic.

MIXING RICE is an Artist in Community project aiming to engage the local Asian and artist communities in Saskatoon through a visual art exhibition. By partnering with Chinese-restaurant owners and artists based in the Riversdale neighborhood in Saskatoon, this project introduced Chinese-Canadian restaurant culture to a broader demographic by immersing the audience – both restaurant patrons and interested arts viewers – in a physical and visual feast of Chinese culinary excellency. Additionally, this project aimed to increase visibility for the Asian communities in Saskatoon through digital documentation more broadly. The project takes the form of a physical exhibition presented in the selected Chinese restaurants in Saskatoon and an online website that documents the process of this exhibition. The exhibition was held from October 2021 to March 2022.

This accompanying support paper examines the results of the exhibition centered around Chinese cuisine. In the paper, I outline the process of research for the exhibition and the process of its realization. I reflect on the community engagement experience with local artists, restaurant owners, and the audiences. Additionally, I examine how the community-based curatorial practice can open dialogue through exhibitions and establishes frameworks for future decolonial practices in research.

My initial passion for using visual art to navigate food and its cultural association was ignited by a project I made in 2017: *Yee Clun's Lost Story*,² my first public photographic installation at Regina's Art Park. The project was undertaken in collaboration with the Lost Story Project³, a cross-Canada-history commemoration project directed by Ronald Rudin. Lost Story Project gathered visual artists and filmmakers to explore the little-known stories which represent a crucial part of Canadian history. My specific project, *Yee Clun's Lost Story*, speaks of the racial discrimination suffered by Chinese restaurant owners under Saskatchewan's "White Woman Labour Law"⁴ passed in 1912. "White Woman Labour Law" was created between 1912 to 1969, which forbade Chinese business owners from hiring white women without permission. Yee Clun challenged the Regina City Council's enforcement of this law with help from communities, lawyers, neighbors, and white women in 1924.⁵

The second project I undertook related to Chinese restaurants in Canada occurred at the end of 2018 when I assisted Amy Lam and Jon McCurley (Life of a Craphead collective) in their collaboration with a local Chinese restaurant in Saskatoon, Jing Jin Cuisine, in the Riverside neighbourhood of Saskatoon. For their project, entitled, *Entertain Every Second*,⁶ they connected the art space and the neighbor community by setting a contract between AKA Artist-Run Center and Jing Jin Cuisine. In this contract, AKA Artist Center agreed to support Jing Jin Cuisine's business by ordering catering from Jing Jin Cuisine when there is an art reception. During the project *Entertain Every Second*, I worked closely with the curator, artists, and the owner of Jing Jin Cuisine. The restaurant owner speaks little English; therefore, I took on the task of her

² "Yee Clun And Regina's 'White Women's Labour Law,'" *Lost Stories*, 2017, <http://loststories.ca/regina/>

³ *Lost Stories*, official website, <http://loststories.ca/index.html>

⁴ Constance Backhouse, "The White Women's Labour Laws: Anti-Chinese Racism in Early Twentieth-Century Canada," Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2011

⁵ "Yee Clun," *The Encyclopaedia of Saskatchewan*, https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/yee_clun.jsp

⁶ Su-Ying Lee, *Life of a Craphead: Entertaining Every Second*, 2019, <https://www.su-yinglee.com/entertaining-every-second-2>

language interpreter. Since working for *Entertain Every Second*, I have devoted myself to researching community-based art, Saskatchewan's Chinese restaurants' history, and the unique culinary culture of Asian restaurants in North America. My research and former community-based projects led to MIXING RICE and Jing Jin became one of the sites for the exhibition.

During my research for the Yee Clun's Lost Story project, I found the book *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*,⁷ written by Lili Cho, a Toronto-based writer. Cho published the book in 2010 to illustrate and narrate the small towns' Chinese restaurants across Canada through the menu. By defining the dishes and restaurant spaces for those both inside and outside of the Chinese immigrant community, Cho discusses the meaning of being Chinese and Chinese Canadian. Lily Cho's book is the initial inspiration for my thesis exhibition, MIXING RICE. Building archiving for small-town restaurants' stories and reconstructing the diasporic community, Cho offers the narrative framework for the MIXING RICE project: use restaurants spaces as the platform and use the food from the menu as a subject. Together, the space and subject create dialogue.

For my research on Chinese family-owned restaurants in North America, I also drew on the book *Chop Suey Nation: The Legion I and Other Stories from Canada's Chinese restaurants*,⁸ written by Ann Hui, a writer based in Toronto. This book narrates Hui's exploration of small-town Chinese food across Canada. Hui's *Chop Suey Nation* explores the notion of typical North American Chinese cuisine becoming part of Canadian history: the Chop Suey. Lily Cho's *Eating Chinese* and Ann Hui's *Chop Suey Nation* emphasizes the importance of cuisine in the

⁷ Lili Cho, *Eating Chinese: Culture on the Menu in Small Town Canada*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010

⁸ Ann Hui, *Chop Suey Nation: The Legion Cafe and Other Stories from Canada's Chinese restaurants*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2019

construction of Chinese-Canadian identity, which is central to my own exploration of identity and food in MIXING RICE.

The projects and books, *Entertain Every Second*, *Eating Chinese*, and *Chop Suey Nation*, suggest how interest in the cultural iconography of Chinese Canadians is gaining popularity amongst contemporary artists and writers in North America. Through my research, I also sought out art projects and exhibitions discussing decolonial practice inspired by Asian-Canadian artists, curators, and writers that focus on the culinary history and cultural aspects of Asian cuisine. Of these projects, artist Karen Tam's series of exhibitions, *Gold Mountain Restaurant*,⁹ which turns the gallery space into a Chinese restaurant in artist-run centers across Canada, was particularly inspirational. Tam explores the cultural impact Asian restaurants and culinary culture have had in North America through her immersive installations. Karen Tam's "Gold Mountain Restaurant," which took place between 2002 to 2017, repurposed the gallery space from a white cube made for high-end fine art into a Chinese restaurant, a mundane public space. Tam's installations inspired me to consider how connecting and transforming the spaces of the gallery and the Chinese restaurant can decolonize art practices. Tam's an act of disruption was the initial impetus for my idea of transforming the restaurant into a gallery for MIXING RICE.

The exhibition, *Chop Suey on the Prairies: A History of Chinese Restaurant in Alberta*,¹⁰ curated by K. Linda Tzang and held the Royal Alberta Museum, from April 2013 to 2014 was also important reference for MIXED RICE. This exhibition showcased Chinese food culture and explored its broader cultural impact by archiving the history of Alberta's Chinese restaurants. Through collecting Chinese restaurant nick-nacks to include in the exhibition, Tzang raised

⁹ Karen Tam, *Gold Mountain Restaurant*, 2002-2017, <http://www.karentam.ca/fgoldmountain.html>

¹⁰ *Chop Suey on the Prairies: A History of Chinese Restaurant in Alberta*, The Royal Alberta Museum, 2013-2014
<https://edmontonjournal.com/life/food/chop-suey-on-the-prairies-at-the-royal-alberta-museum>

several questions, such as whether a Chinese restaurant owned by a Vietnamese family belongs in the exhibition, which prompts a consideration of the issue of the ethnic homogenization Asian-Canadians, something that I consider in the framing of MIXING RICE.

Another key reference for MIXING RICE is the work of Toronto-based artist and photographer Morris Lum, who spent nine years researching and cultivating artworks at the core of Toronto's downtown Spadina Avenue Chinatown. Morris uses photography practice to make portraits of those clusters of Chinatown buildings. *Remembering the Forestview*¹¹ is a series of images that reflects Chinatown's business surviving during the pandemic since 2020, in which the highly saturated red and blue colors of the buildings, billboards, and lights, resonate with the sense of a peaceful Chinatown landscape. The intimate space between each billboard, advertisement, and light presents the solidity of small-family businesses run by Asian immigrants. Morris Lum's photograph demonstrates his affinity for the residents of Chinatown.

The engagement and development of community relationships were central to these projects and are also the key focus of the development of my own curatorial practice. MIXING RICE is predicated on a curatorial framework that builds connections and sustainable relationships in society. Through my research process, I recognized how Chinatowns can serve as the locale and impetus for creating artworks that reflect the unique cultural aspects of North American Chinese restaurants. MIXING RICE as a curatorial project adopts a community-based art methodology that focuses on bringing together artists and restaurant owners and patrons to create connections and interactions through the artworks installed inside the restaurants. Through

¹¹ Morris Lum, *Remembering the Forestview*, memory for the Forestview Chinese Restaurant Toronto, 2021
<http://www.morrislum.ca/remembering-the>

the framework of community-based curatorial practice, I was also able to explore my heritage, identity, and what it means to be a Chinese Canadian artist and curator.

2. CURATORIAL FRAMEWORKS FOR EXHIBITION

Theorists of community-based and socially engaged art have been central to developing my curatorial framework. These include *Conversation Pieces, Community, and Communication in Modern Art*,¹² written by Grant Kester, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*¹³ by Pablo Helguera, and *Outdoor School-Contemporary Environmental Art*¹⁴ by Amish Morrell and Diane Borsato. Drawing on the tenets of community and socially engaged practices for the curatorial framework for MIXING RICE, I identified dialogue creation, spontaneous collaboration, and gallery decolonization as core curatorial principles and objectives for MIXING RICE.

Kester's *Conversation Pieces* explores how artists are creating dialogue, relationships, and solutions for social issues. In Kester's examples, artists are operating new collaboration methods within the neighborhood, such as a parking garage in Oakland, California; a boat on the Lake of Zurich in Switzerland; public market in Chiang Mai, Thailand. Kester says in the introduction, "They are context providers rather than content providers,"¹⁵ making conversation about community and art. The concept of "conversational art" was a core component of my Yee Clun Project. During the production of Yee Clun, I met groups from the diverse community groups that collaborate on Canadian-Chinese history, such as the Chinese Culture Society of

¹² Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Oakland California: University of California Press, 2013

¹³ Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011

¹⁴ Amish Morrell and Diane Borsato, *Outdoor School-Contemporary Environmental Art*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, May 1, 2021

¹⁵ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Oakland California: University of California Press, 2013, p1

Saskatchewan, the Heritage Community Association,¹⁶ and artists and scholars from University of Regina Art History department. On the Regina Art Park unveiling day, I met with Yee Clun's family. Twenty-seven members of Yee's family travel to Regina from across North America.¹⁷ Yee's daughter, Mamie Wong, returned to Regina after seventy years.¹⁸ Talking to Yee's family, I realized what I had made was not only an object. I had made a connection point that reunified Yee's family and reconnected their stories and memories. By reading Kester's book and reviewing it in relation to my Yee Clun Project, I realize that the conversation between people, groups, and community is a significant part of my practice. Through producing an art piece, I use visual art as a vehicle to engage different demographics and create stimulating dialogues. In turn, MIXING RICE was my first investigational experience in conversational art practice as a curator, in which I organized the exhibition and participated in it as a mentoring artist.

Fulfilling the roles of an artist and a curator simultaneously demands more precise distinctions for both positions. I found *Education for Socially Engaged Art* by Pablo Helgura instructive for these distinctions. Pablo Helgura is a Mexico-born artist, curator, performer, and educator. In 2013, Helgura's book *Education for Socially Engaged Art* described the material and techniques for social practice. It encompassed a review from the executive director of the Liverpool Biennial, Sally Tallant, who said: "it provides a curriculum and framework for thinking about the complexity of socially engaged practices."¹⁹ This book introduces socially engaged art to the emerging practice level and offers a clear framework for the practice and methodology.

¹⁶ Heritage Community Association, <https://heritagecommunityassociation.com/art-park/>

¹⁷ Danica Lorier, *Lost and Found*, SaskCulture, January 2018 <https://www.saskculture.ca/impact/success-stories/lost-and-found>

¹⁸ Ronald Rudin, "The Yees Return to Regina", Active History, May 2018, <https://activehistory.ca/2018/05/the-yees-return-to-regina/>

¹⁹ Sally Tallant, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, Review, Google Books, https://books.google.ca/books/about/Education_for_Socially_Engaged_Art.html?id=fQXSygAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

Helguera's book provided me with valuable insights into the spontaneous collaboration between the roles of artists, educators, and curators in Socially Engaged Art (SEA). In the introduction, Helguera compares education and social practice, combining the identifications from both areas, stating that "today, it is no secret that standard education practices-such as engagement with audiences, inquiry-based method, collaborative dialogues, and hands-on activities- provide an ideal framework for process-based and collaborative conceptual practices."²⁰ Helguera's model for SEA draws inspiration from an education project led by Loris Malaguzzi. Malaguzzi started an early childhood education school that aims to re-envision the child not as an empty container but as an individual with rights, potential, and diversity. The curriculum encouraged participation without homogeneity, which makes every group's learning experience is "different, and it functions as a process of co-construction of knowledge."²¹ In turn, this example is central to the ethos of my collaborative practice in the MIXING RICE. By pairing artists and restaurants together, MIXING RICE calls for creativity and collaboration that honours diversity of experience and knowledges.

In *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, Helgura also mentioned the challenges for SEA, which has sparked my concerns about the challenges facing MIXING RICE. An example of this is the expansion of participants from outside of the art community of MIXING RICE. It is common to see such consideration in the SEA project. As Helguera says in their book:

most historical participatory art has been staged within the confines of an art environment, be it a gallery, museum, or event to which visitors arrive predisposed to have an art experience or already belonging to a set of values and interests that connect them to art. Many SEA projects still follow this more consecutive or

²⁰ Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Handbook*, New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011

²¹ Ibid.

traditional approach; the more ambitious and risk-taking project directly engages with the public realm-with the street, the open social space, the non-art community – a task that presents so many variables that only a few artists can undertake it successfully.²²

Although it is challenging to have artwork in the restaurant space, MIXING RICE encourages spontaneous engagement through participants. These participants are artists, curators, educators, and restaurant customers from diverse backgrounds, to produce dialogues with less expectation but more interaction with the art piece in the restaurant environment.

Another text that inspired my curatorial strategy to place artworks in restaurants in MIXING RICE was Amish Morrell and Diane Borsato's latest book *Outdoor School-Contemporary Environmental Art*, published in 2021. This book addresses how the environment plays a vital role in education, creation, and knowledge sharing. In the introduction of the book, Morrell writes about the importance of considering the relation of the gallery to what lies outside its doors, stating that "the collection and exhibition of art objects in museums and galleries also affirm European and colonial concept of art and culture as consisting of things that can be owned and exhibited, separate from the land and communities where they were made....artistic activities are not just outdoors, but also exist outside of the world of museums, galleries and the writing of art history, and that are part of living culture processes."²³ Working with a project inside of Chinese restaurants, and outside of the gallery space, MIXING RICE seeks a context for the conversation of art and community separate from the mainstream fine art site: galleries, finely decorated high-end dining establishments, and public venues that affirm European colonial concepts.

²² Ibid.

²³ Amish Morrell and Diane Borsato, *Outdoor School-Contemporary Environmental Art*, Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, May 1, 2021, p22

Kester, Helgura, Morrell and Borsato's books about conversational, socially engaged, and outdoor environmental art within a community have inspired MIXING RICE's community-based curatorial focus. By engaging in conversation with the local Chinese community, creating opportunities for collaboration with artists, shifting the exhibition focus away from the gallery space, and mixing art and non-art communities within an Chinese restaurant context, MIXING RICE actively creates dialogues between communities by hybridizing creation and exhibition practices.

3. EXHIBITION CONTEXT

History – Riversdale Business Improvement District and Saskatoon

When I began planning MIXING RICE as an artist and community engagement project, I instantly thought about Riversdale Business Improvement District. Though Saskatoon never built any Chinatown, Riversdale is considered a hub for Chinese business and communities. On 20th street at Riversdale, there are three Asian markets and numerous Asian restaurants. First, there needed to be a plan – to deal with restaurants and food descriptions. After reading my proposal and plan, Randy Pshebylo, the president of Riversdale Business Improvement District, agreed to my exhibition idea and to support the project. I then met Pshebylo at his office, where I learned more about the history of Riversdale, the business of Riversdale BID, and Pshebylo's research. Pshebylo showed me his archive of newspapers, photographs, and posters from the previous events in the past 20 years. Pshebylo mentioned that a Chinese community once hosted a Chinese New Year parade in the late 1990s. One of the buildings has a giant dragon graffiti painted by a Chinese Canadian. Pshebylo expresses his hope for having more diverse businesses in the district. He also showed me his research about the history of the building, which maps out the district with the historical concept.

Working with the Riversdale Business Improvement District was necessary for this project with the history of Saskatoon. As one of the three founding communities uniting to form the city of Saskatoon in 1906, Riversdale was the natural home for many immigrant families arriving by train, registering at the Immigration Office where the Farmers' Market is located and residing in nearby homes. As property records show, after the displacement of many Chinese businesses with new construction a century ago, Riversdale became home to a larger Asian population and business area. They joined people from many cultures worldwide and created a strong business network in Riversdale and the 20th Street Commercial Corridor.²⁴

Saskatoon was a city with a population of 25,739; 228 of them were Chinese in 1921.²⁵ During the early 1930s, more Chinese businesses moved to Riversdale, and it became a historical Chinese settlement, while the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway employed the Chinese immigrants and established businesses. Riversdale was home to many Chinese restaurants and stores. This district still retains the cultural atmosphere unique to early Chinese immigrants. However, the Riversdale district is still not considered Chinatown to the city of Saskatoon.²⁶

In history, Chinese immigrants experienced discrimination from 1885 from the federal anti-Chinese, the head tax. This bill was passed in 1885 for \$50, and it was increased to \$500 in 1903.²⁷ In addition, the “White Women Labor Law,” which requested that Chinese restaurant owners apply for a permit to hire a white female waitress, was established in 1912. In 1947, the

²⁴ Riversdale Business Improvement District, official website, <https://riversdale.ca/about/the-history/>

²⁵ The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, “Chinese Community,” University of Regina, https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/chinese_community.jsp

²⁶ Leena Latafat, “Your Neighbourhood: Early Chinese Canadian in Saskatoon,” Feb 4 2016, Global News, <https://globalnews.ca/news/2496916/your-neighbourhood-early-chinese-canadians-in-saskatoon/>

²⁷ Matthew McRae, “The Chinese head tax and the Chinese Exclusion Act”, Canadian Museum for Human Rights. <https://humanrights.ca/story/the-chinese-head-tax-and-the-chinese-exclusion-act>

Chinese Immigration Act and the Female Employment Act for Chinese businesses were repealed in 1969.²⁸

In the broader context of Canadian history, the first recorded visit of an ethnically identified Chinese person was in 1788.²⁹ Fifty Chinese workers, smiths, and carpenters sailed from Canton to Vancouver Island. They were hired by Captain John Meares, a British trader. By the mid-1840s, as the result of the Opium War, a series of migrants happened from China to North America. Chinese businesses were gathering and operating in specific districts known as Chinatowns. In 1850, North America's first Chinatown was established in San Francisco in honor of the work ethics of the Chinese immigrants.³⁰ Built-in 1858, Victoria has Canada's oldest Chinatown.³¹ Chinatown has become one of the business districts in Canadian cities. In most business districts, the Chinese restaurants, also called Chinese "cafés" after the gold rush in the 19th century, were established as family businesses in and for the Chinese community.

Chinese family restaurants/cafés were established in Saskatchewan in the 1920s. Wong Get How, known as Charlie Howe, set up the Star Café established at Marcelin, Saskatchewan, in 1923. Inherited by the son, David Howe, this restaurant ran for 79 years in business until 2002.³² In recent days, in most small towns in Western Canada, the Chinese "café," often the only one, is still establishing the business to support the immigrant family. These Chinese "cafés" exist as an icon of towns on the Prairieland. Those restaurants also serve as a foothold for a new Canadian community.

²⁸ The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan, "Chinese Community," University of Regina, https://esask.uregina.ca/entry/chinese_community.jsp

²⁹ Paul Crowe, "A Brief Chronology of Chinese Canadian History, From Segregation to Integration," Simon Fraser University, http://www.sfu.ca/chinese-canadian-history/chart_en.html

³⁰ "The story of Chinatown," Chinatown Resource Guide, PBS, <https://www.pbs.org/kqed/chinatown/resourceguide/story.html>

³¹ Michael John Lo and Guoliang An, "Victoria Chinatown," The Canadian Encyclopedia, Mar 11, 2022, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/victoria-chinatown>

³² "Chinese History in Saskatchewan: The Howe Family and The Star Café," Western Development Museum

In the legend of two-gun Cohen, a bodyguard for Dr. Sun Yat-sen, the father of modern China, I found the early Chinese restaurant owner in Saskatoon, Mah Sam. Cohen met Mah Sam in the restaurant located in Riversdale in 1909. Cohen and Mah Sam built a friendship when Cohen stopped a robbery in Mah's restaurant. As a result, Mah introduces Cohen to his future job as the bodyguard for the Chinese revolutionary leader, Sun Yat-sen, who ended the reign of feudal China.³³ Today, there are 55 restaurants, and their customers are from every diverse group in Saskatoon, including Indigenous and Metis peoples on whose traditional Treaty 6 Territory lands Riversdale and Saskatoon are located. In this respect, Riversdale offers the potential for a community-based curatorial practice to cultivate relationships with Indigenous communities, immigrants, second generations, and settlers of diverse historical contexts and backgrounds.

Artists

In relation to the key tenets of community-based curatorial practice, it was important to envisioning MIXING RICE to work with local artists from Saskatoon, which included an emerging artist group Biofeedback Collective; and artists specializing in painting (Qiming Sun, Jinglu Zhao), sculpture (Negar Tajgardan), and photography (Barbara Reimer). By rallying these artists to create artworks and events in those Chinese restaurants on 20th street, I envisioned MIXING RICE as a collaboration project that will inspire artists to engage in Asian culture and assist Riversdale's Business Improvement District in its goal building a culturally diverse community striving for social equity.

³³ Brian L. Evans and Eli Yarhi, "Morris 'Two-Gun' Cohen," The Canadian Encyclopedia, 2008, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/morris-moishe-cohen>

Through a selection process that combined inviting artists to apply and also issuing an Open Call, (Figure 1, Figure 2), I finalized my choice of participating artists based on criteria of cultural diversity, discipline variety, and the artist's intimate knowledge of Asian Cuisine.

CALL FOR SUBMISSION

MIXING RICE

An Asian Restaurant Art Project
Kyuubi Culture Artist Collective



MIXING RICE is calling for emerging and mid-career artists from City of Saskatoon (Treaty 6) to create and install artwork in three selected Asian restaurants at Riversdale Business Improvement District (RBID) to provide Saskatoon's Asian community visibility.

With the recent rising racial tension and the increasing violence against people of Asian descent fumed by COVID-19 induced hysteria, Kyuubi Culture, as a representation of the Asian Canadian artist collective, must break the silence and stand up for our communities. By rallying a group of local artists to create artwork and events in those Asian restaurant spaces at 20th street, this collaboration project will lead artists to engage in Asian culture and further promote Riversdale Business Improvement District as a culturally diverse community striving for social equity.

Kyuubi Culture is firmly committed to equity and diversity within its community. We especially welcome submissions from female artists, LGBTQ2S+ artists, BIPOC artists, and other young emerging artists who may contribute to the further diversification of ideas.

Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Your artistic interpretation of Asian Culinary Culture
- Historical Asian Cuisine research: the authentic Asian food and its North American adaptation
- Asian Restaurant during the pandemic
- Food and Home: the taste, the ingredients, and the memories
- Travelling Ancestral Recipe: the history and transformation of Asian- Canadian cuisine through the lens of diasporas

Formats may include but are not limited to:

- 2D Artworks (painting, drawing, photography, printmaking, textile, etc.) of small to medium scale.

- 3D Sculptural/Installation works of small to medium scale.
- New Media Art (Must provide necessary display equipment and installation)

Submission package:

1. A Project Proposal that explains your intention for this project(150 words max).
2. An Artist Bio(50 words max), with an artist profile photo (can be a photographic image of yourself, a self portrait, or one of your most iconic artwork).
3. One PDF file containing 5-10 work sample images that correspond to the proposal. Please attach an image list that states the (Title, dimension, medium, year created) of images. Should you wish to submit video or audio files, please include media links only.
4. An Artist CV(2-pages max).

Important Information:

1. Exhibition Launch Date & Opening Reception: October, 2021.
2. Exhibition Site: Three selected Asian Restaurants in Riversdale Business Improvement District.
3. Selected artists are required to produce artworks and finish the installation prior to the Launch Day, give a 30minutes Artist Talk (Date TBA), and attend the opening reception.
4. Selected artists will receive a small Artist Honorarium (including Artist Fee, Material Fee, and Artist Talk Fee.). Artist must provide detailed invoice for all received fee.

To Submit:

Please email your submission package to: kyuubiculture@gmail.com

Submission Deadline:

June 25, 2021. @ 23:59CST

Jury Council Decision Announcement Date:

July 1, 2021

(Figure 1, Figure 2, Call for submissions)

Biofeedback, an artist collective of Kelsey Ford, Lauren Warrington, and Emily Zdunich, caught my attention with their innovative project proposal and recent new media project. This interdisciplinary group of Saskatchewan artists is engaged in expanding the mind-body relationship. They examine how collective consciousness influences identity and the implicit self. The collective emphasizes equality, care, and collaboration as they develop work in response to their environment, actively questioning their surroundings and the reality in which they reside. In 2020, Biofeedback created a virtual gallery that confronts visitors with the extended notion of public space. By rendering traditional art configurations, such as paintings,

sculptures, and photography, into digital format, this innovative exhibition featured themes of expanding exhibition space for emerging artists who had lost opportunities to showcase their artwork in new and unprecedented ways. In addition, Biofeedback's unique way of curation through a digital space collaborates with the local community alongside the current global pandemic crisis. Impressed with their concrete proposal and unique perspective, I spoke directly to the group via Zoom meeting. Their enthusiasm and cohesive presentation further assured me that Biofeedback would make an excellent addition to my project.

My next choices were two Chinese Canadian artists in Saskatoon: Qiming Sun and Jinglu Zhao. Although drastically different in their styles and experiences, these two artists share similar cultural backgrounds. Qiming Sun is a Saskatoon-based Chinese-Canadian artist and a practicing witch. He received his MFA and High Honours BFA from the University of Saskatchewan. He specializes in oil paintings and sculptural works inspired by nature, the human body and condition, mythology, life and death, symbolism, “magick,” and shamanic spirituality. His works have been widely exhibited; many were included in permanent collections of several Canadian institutions and galleries. From the southwest Sichuan province, China, Sun represents the ancient and enigmatic culture of minority ethnic tribes residing in the Sichuan and Yunnan border jungles. Sun is proficient in witchcraft, jewelry crafting, and other art creations with tactile experience with materials. Aside from his artistic skill, Sun is also a prolific chef who has an intimate knowledge of spices and possesses the ability to integrate his visual art into culinary art. In the proposal, I was astonished by his comprehensive research of historical Sichuanese cuisine, making him another pivotal candidate for this project.

Jinglu Zhao is another Chinese-Canadian artist who lives in Saskatoon. She holds a BFA and MFA degree from Sichuan University, China, and obtained her master's degree in Art &

Design from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. Zhao specializes in paintings that explore the concept of family and cross-cultural communication. With acrylic and other material, Jinglu Zhao's paintings are primarily figurative with the theme of the Saskatoon landscape. Zhao spends her spare time painting in her basement studio as a mother of three. Through Zhao's proposal and work samples, I see the care and emotion about family and heritage through her brushstroke and color in the painting. Family is an essential element for most Asian Canadian restaurants, and most Chinese establishments here started as small family diners. Zhao's work especially emphasizes family relationships, which made me confident that she can deliver an essential concept of Chinese restaurants through her painting. Both Chinese Canadian artists represent the cross-culture of Chinese and Canadian art education. With solid academic training background in figurative painting, Sun and Zhao's works narrate their unique stories of contemporary Chinese diasporas residing in North America.

Another artist with a contemporary immigration background, Negar Tajgardan, is a visual artist interested in sculpture, installation art, and photography. Tajgardan's works are based on her memories of coming to Canada from Iran and broader concepts of immigration and displacement. She completed her MFA degree at the University of Saskatchewan, and her works were exhibited in Iran and Canada. Tajgardan creates small-scale furniture with translucent and water-soluble materials. The brief appearance of her furniture reflects her connection with her hometown Iran and her home in Canada. Tajgardan's miniature tables remind me of my own experience when I initially moved to Canada: I was always afraid to own heavy furniture or expensive items. This notion of not wanting to possess large valuables caused by the fear of instability lingers in my mind. This nomadic concept of impermanence echoes the voice of

people like us: diasporas, always roaming, uncertain when or if we can ever settle down. I see Tajgardan's work as a reflection of immigrants who always need to pack and keep moving. Her concept resonates with me deeply. Her work brings a unique perspective of an Iranian diaspora residing in Saskatoon.

Barbara Reimer works with photography, digital media, and installation. Past and present work influenced the documentary sculpture, "the responsible photograph," the institution, travel, and the processes and materiality of experience. Educated in Saskatoon and Toronto, she has an extensive background in the commercial photographic and digital specialist areas. Reimer has exhibited nationally and internationally, showing in Nicaragua, Canada, the US, and Wuhan, China. Reimer practiced their photograph skills and darkroom techniques. As a third-generation settler in Saskatoon, Barb knows the street, the Chinese restaurants, and the changes the city made in the past 30 years. Reimer reflects through historical perspective about the changes in the communities, Chinese restaurant community, and the land.

Restaurants (Dialogue with the restaurant owners on 20th street, Saskatoon)

My initial plan was to find five Asian restaurants for the exhibition venue, which would ideally have included Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cuisine. However, due to limited funding and resources, as well as logistics, I ended up working with three restaurants operated by Chinese families. They are: Jing Jin Cuisine, an authentic northern Chinese restaurant with 12 years of history on 20 street; Little Szechuan, a restaurant with a specialty in authentic Sichuan cuisine that opened just before the pandemic; Odd Couple, a hybrid diner that combines Western and Cantonese cuisine. To ensure smooth negotiations with the restaurant owners, I asked all artists to select their ideal restaurant spaces and prepare a short presentation for the owners. Before we

embarked on our “diplomatic ventures,” I contacted each restaurant owner with a formal email that briefly described our intent.

Little Szechuan was the first restaurant we approached. It was a warm July eve 2021; I met with our first pair of artists: Qiming Sun and Negar Teagarden, in front of the building. Ren, the restaurant owner, recognized us immediately when we walked in. Although he was excited, the high demand from the rush hour kept him chained to the kitchen. So, we sat down and ordered food as Ren tended to his business. We ordered three iconic Szechuanese dishes: Kelp Rib Soup, Szechuan Cold Chicken, and Stir-Fry Minced Pork with Glass Noodles. Little Szechuan possesses charm and décor style: rosewood furniture covered with flannel cloths, cream-colored plaster wall adorned with a fish scale texture, giant posters of signature Sichuan dishes, ornate foyer tables with flower arrangements, and a giant vintage mural of Greeting Pine at the back.

As we sipped our last cup of tea, Ren emerged from the kitchen after the rush hour craze. I introduced the artists to him and relayed our installation plans to him. Ren was ecstatic about our proposal and expressed that we have his complete support. When we left the restaurant, I asked the artists whether they had any concerns regarding the installation or the exhibition space. Both artists were enthusiastic about the space. We also noticed that the large storefront window, which provides enough natural lights for the artworks, can be used as a vignette for the pedestrians walking past the restaurant. There were only three months left before the project launch day.

Each restaurant owner had different concerns. The Odd Couple owner, Andy Yuen, is a second-generation Chinese Canadian family that grew up in Saskatchewan. Yuen’s father used to own a Chinese restaurant called “Chop Suey” at Warman, a small town near Saskatoon. When Yuen and his father open the Odd Couple, they aim to put two generations’ perspectives about food for one community. Yuen mentioned he had rejected numerous artist proposals before our

conversation. The previous proposals were disconnected from the restaurant. I explained that the restaurant's in-situ artwork means to make the restaurant the subject of the artwork, including the owner's background, history, and context. After hearing the proposal from Jinglu Zhao and Biofeedback, Andy was excited to see the upcoming art installation in the restaurant.

Jing Jin Cuisine has made authentic Chinese delights from scratch for the Riversdale community for 12 years. The honest owner and her hearty Northern Chinese cuisine won over many patrons' hearts and are well-loved by local diners and traveling epicures alike, despite barely speaking English. The language barrier was never an issue for the owner. Jing Jin Cuisine's long prosperity is a testimony of Saskatoon's Chinese immigrants' diligence, compassion, and steadfastness. The owner of Jing Jin Cuisine has always been an art enthusiast and is always eager to support artists by becoming a reception caterer for AKA Artist-Run Centre next door. However, with her language barrier and no formal art education, the owner often expresses frustration about not understanding contemporary art and her fear of visiting the "intimidating" galleries.

To engage with Jing Jin Cuisine's owner, I described artist Barbara Reimer's work and my plan for photographing the building and portrait for them. To emphasize the idea of an in-situ exhibition, I told the owner the idea of the exhibition was to "rent" the restaurant's wall and turn it into a gallery. The Jing Jin owner instantly refused my offer because they believed that their restaurant was not suitable as a gallery space. I realized that the collaboration between the restaurant business and art community is distinct for every participant. With the further explanation that having artworks fit in the restaurant atmosphere was the goal, the Jing Jin owner warmed to my suggestion.

4. EXHIBITION LOGISTICS AND REALIZATION

Installation (artworks, photographic documentation, description, statement)

Between October 1st to October 14th, 2021, was the installation period.

Jing Jin Cuisine. As planned, Barbara Reimer and I brought our framed photographs to the Jing Jin Cuisine on October 11th. My photograph was made with a color-digital camera, and Barbara Reimer's photo was made with her 8 X 10 large format camera through the coffee process. Both pieces were printed and framed to the exact size and discussed the same subject matter: the history of the Jing Jin Cuisine building. To minimize the restaurant's installation time, we have planned out the layout before bringing the artwork into the space. Jing Jin has blue-tinted drywalls and wooden racks, making our installation a swift two-hour job.

The next day, I revisited Jing Jin Cuisine and was shocked to find our artworks missing. I was livid and anxious, fearing that the restaurant staff, who had no gallery training or a fundamental understanding of fine art, may have mishandled the artworks. I panicked, thinking that my idealistic design to turn restaurants into gallery spaces might be impractical. An environment where hot oils and soy sauce's splash merely inches away from the greasy walls is the last place any sane person would be installing fine art.

"Where are the photos?" I asked the owner. The Jing Jin lady says: "The afternoon sunlight directly hit the photo. I am afraid it will ruin the photo's color." Thinking about the family portraits at my grandmother's house back in Wuhan, they all turned yellow after years of hanging on the wall, and I see why Jing Jin's owner was worried. I researched the photo paper that Barbara Reimer suggests using. I explained to the Jing Jin lady that those photo papers were

fixed well enough to resist the sun. After talking to the lady, Barbara Reimer and I had a big meal at the restaurant with our artwork presented for all to see. (Figure 3)



(Figure 3, Artwork installed in Jing Jin Cuisine)

Little Szechuan. October 11th, the same day Barbara Reimer and I installed in Jing Jin Cuisine, Qiming Sun and Negar Tajgardan were installing their work at the Little Szechuan. Qiming Sun finished his two oil paintings. Negar Tajgardan's one-piece miniature furniture inside a white color frame with no backboard. She plans to use the organic restaurant wall as the background of the artwork. The plaster wall with fish scale texture in Little Szechuan gives them a hard time to the artist to install their artwork. Both Qiming Sun and Negar Tajgardan's canvas and frame request at least one nail to hang. However, the concrete wall needs a special drill and will leave notable damage on the wall afterward. Ren, the Little Szechuan's owner, recognized our concern and told us not to worry about the wall. We successfully installed Sun and Tajgardan's work near the restaurant front window under the collaborative effort of the artists and the restaurant owner. (Figure 4, Figure 5)



(Figure 4, Figure 5, Artwork installed in Little Szechuan)

Odd Couple. Biofeedback and Jinglu Zhao installed their piece the next day. Jinglu Zhao brought her two acrylics paintings, which are refereeing from the family photo supplied by Andy Yuen and Rachel Wong, the Odd Couple’s owner. As a young couple who loves traveling worldwide, Jinglu Zhao selects their favorite concept and paints it into a diptych that describes their relationship with food, culture, and places.

Biofeedback’s piece is a 3-dimension miniature indoor greenhouse lit by magenta grow lights. The object requires floor space and a wall plug. Biofeedback has planned the dimension, location, and direction for the wall plug within their proposal. There is also an adapter with a timer for switching the day and night lights to compresence the space light.

The Odd Couple has the most modernistic design and impenetrable walls compared to the other two restaurants. I was pleasantly surprised to find a long softwood lining tucked between the gaps of brick walls covering the utility lines, providing a discreet and sturdy surface to hang Jinglu Zhao's paintings. Without drywalls to drill through, it was seemingly impossible to hang any pictures inside the restaurant at first glance. Meanwhile, Biofeedback's installation underwent several location alterations within the restaurant space until they finally settled for the most aesthetically pleasing yet customer-friendly configuration (Figure 6)



(Figure 6, Artwork installed in Odd Couple)

Seminar, Reception, and Land Acknowledgement

To encourage the engagement between artists and the Riversdale community, I proposed two artist seminars at the RBID, the office near the selected Chinese restaurants, and artistic spaces such as AKA artist-run Centre,³⁴ Paved Arts,³⁵ and The Store Front.³⁶

The agreements signed by five guest artists include attending two mandatory seminars at the Riversdale BID office with Randy Pshebylo. These two seminars gave significant meaning to the artists' production, enabling them to fully engage and communicate by presenting their project plans. During the first meeting, I presented the poster draft and asked the artists for suggestions. The poster was to create a font that mimics the popular font from Chinese restaurants' menus. With a photo background showing the street view of 20th street, the poster presented the restaurant name, restaurant logo, artist name, sponsors, and organizer's name. (Figure 7) After that, Randy Pshebylo showed the artists his archive of photographs and newspapers. We briefly glimpsed 100 years of 20th street's history through those precious materials, marveling at the architecture and its transformations throughout the age. (Figure 8)



(Figure 7, MIXING RICE Poster)

³⁴ AKA artist-run Centre, <https://www.akaartistrun.com>

³⁵ Paved Arts, <https://www.pavedarts.ca>

³⁶ The Store Front, <http://www.thestorefront.ca>



(Figure 8, Seminar at Riversdale BID office)

The second meeting at Riversdale BID was about the art installation, opening reception, and artist talk schedule. After seeing all the finished artwork and presentation, Randy Pshebylo was motivated and encouraged us to have an in-person reception. For the reception, we planned to have the opening on October 15th. According to the timeline, all the artworks had to be installed on-site before October 14th. Randy Pshebylo called around to ask for reception space near Riversdale at the end of the second seminar. After a few calls with the store owner, theatre director, and restaurants owners, Veronica Tricker, the owner at ON2U Tattoo,³⁷ had graciously lent us her shop space for the reception.

The ON2U Tattoo shop, located on 20th street, Saskatoon is within walking distance of the selected restaurants; the shop uses its walls to present the owner's impressive art collections. Upon entering, I see three Chinese ink paintings hanging on the wall, surrounded by plants and

³⁷ ON2U Tattoo, <http://on2u.ca>

wooden benches. Walking through the reception area, I see an ample open space with three tattoo benches. Intricate decorations and whimsically designed furniture surround each bench.

The owner, Veronica Tricker, is a well-known tattoo and piercing artist in Saskatoon. She is also an art fan who organizes local artists' annual summer art residency called Emma Collaboration.³⁸ The residency takes place at Ness Creek in northern Saskatchewan, and it gathers artists that would venture north into the woods for two weeks. They would create artworks using natural materials found in nature during this time. Having a chance to know Veronica and her art activities enhances the MIXING RICE's engagement progress.

On the reception day, all the artists, family, and friends came to celebrate the opening of MIXING RICE. After the seemingly endless pandemic lockdown, the art reception provided much-needed human interactions and appreciation towards the Saskatoon art community. The guests came from AKA Artist-Run centre, Paved Arts, Saskatoon Nuit Blanche committee, University of Saskatchewan, RBID, and artists living in Saskatoon. I prepared a short launching announcement at the opening ceremony. In the opening speech, I explained the concept of MIXING RICE and prepared a Land acknowledgment that shows my appreciation from a Chinese immigrants' point of view (Figure 9).

³⁸ Emma Collaboration, <https://www.emmacollaboration.com/the-event>

Land Acknowledgment

We want to acknowledge that our project MIXING RICE is based on Treaty 6 Territory, the traditional gathering ground of diverse Indigenous peoples, and is the ancestral home of the Métis Nation, whose histories, languages, and cultures continue to influence and inspire our vibrant community. We are gracious for the Indigenous people who shared their compassion and resources with our Asian compatriots who left the chaos of their native homes and relocated to this land in the past few centuries; so we as immigrants, diasporas, and settlers could continue to offer our contribution in building this abundant land we now call home.

In the past 6 months, our attempt in the approach of diversification and decolonization in Riversdale has encouraged a deep engagement in how we understand attachments to architecture, histories, and land. We want to express our utmost sincere gratitude towards SK Arts and Riversdale BID. Without their generous support, our project could not have come to such fruition.

(Figure 9 MIXING RICE, Land Acknowledgement)

COVID-19 created a paradox for the MIXING RICE, including the decision to have the reception outside the restaurant and gallery space to avoid the unnecessary barrier created by the vaccine passport mandate. Due to the public health restriction, the reception could not serve any food or drink. To show my appreciation to the valuable guests who attended the opening, I prepared 30 gift cards for the reception guests. Each gift card is a 10-dollar coupon for the selected restaurant. I hope the reception guests enjoyed the artwork and food later in the restaurant space with their family and friends (Figure 10).



(Figure 10, MIXING RICE Artists at the ON2U Tattoo)

5. SOCIAL IMPACT

Artists talks

Central to my plan for outreach for the exhibition were three artist talks scheduled for the day after the exhibition opened. The original plan was to host the talks inside the restaurant space. Through in-person or zoom meetings, artists sit in front of their artwork and present their working experience and research results.

However, considering the commercial nature and restaurant traffic, I canceled that plan after consulting with the restaurants. Our alternative plan was to borrow the meeting space shared by AKA Artist-Run Centre and PAVED Arts. These two artist-run centres share ample meeting space on the second floor. The meeting space can easily host an artist talk with 30 visitors. However, due to the uncertainty caused by the second wave of COVID, the artist-run

centres could not confirm the use of the space. With all the uncertainty at play, I decided to prepare an online artist talk through Zoom. While I lost the in-person aspect of speaking in a physical space, the Zoom platform had the advantage of reaching a larger range of audiences in Saskatoon while providing accessibility to viewers who lived outside of Saskatoon and potentially across the globe.³⁹

The three artist talks were titled “MIXING RICE Artist Talk – Dish One/Two/Three – Artists’ names – Restaurant name” (Figure 11).



(Figure 11, Artist Talk poster for social media)

The artist's talks are the highlights of MIXING RICE. Each artist got a chance to describe their process, purpose, and statement to the public. During the talks, we received numerous recognitions and comments. The artists need to realize the value of artwork and community engagement. We have received many positive comments and questions throughout social media, during the artist talk, and the reception. After the experience of this project, all the guest artists formed a closer connection with the Riversdale community. Restaurant owners are happy with the experience; they appreciate the energy of artists' research and creation for their restaurants, family, and buildings. By the end, all the restaurant owners had told me that the project enhanced their connection to the community. Customers would ask for more information about the project

³⁹ Artist Talk, MIXING RICE, <https://www.mixingrice.com/artist-talks>

or the artists. The communication and engagement between communities improved from the project.

Social media and Kyuubi Culture

I started the project with google drive, a platform that offers share access with all the restaurant owners, guest artists, and Riversdale BID. This platform can be interpreted in many ways. It encourages participants to encounter each other's work in progress, research questions, and relationship. Participants can upload, download, and exchange photos, video clips, and news related to this project through this virtual media.

For the public media platform, including collecting images with an agreement, I have documented the photo for the two seminar meetings opening receptions and installed artwork in the restaurant space. Later, I have recorded artists' talks through zoom meetings. These are the content prepared for the public social media platform: fakebook Instagram and the official website.

Each social media platform has its feature and etiquette, but its general purpose is to create social interactions to promote engagement activities.

a. MIXING RICE Official website:⁴⁰ By constructing a website, I made the platform a vehicle to deliver general information, including exhibition statements, artists' information, artwork, and installed artwork in the restaurants.

b. Artists' social media: After two seminars, multiple materials on Google Drive are available to be published: exhibition poster, exhibition statement, and edited images ready for

⁴⁰ MIXING RICE official website, <https://www.mixingrice.com>

unveiling. I encouraged artists and restaurant owners to apply that material on their social media platforms, expanding connections through their communities.

c. Social media through Kyuubi Culture⁴¹: Kyuubi Culture is an artist collective I founded in 2016. This Chinese-Canadian artist collective's activities encompass art projects, community engagement, and exhibitions across Canada and China. Kyuubi Culture has cultivated its cross-culture community, which hybrid the Canadian artist group, the Chinese immigrants' group, and the Chinese artists' community. Embracing Kyuubi Culture's Facebook page, Instagram, official website, and WeChat platform, MIXING RICE, has engaged the group with the raised notion of culture, food, and visual art between the two cultures.

Social impact for restaurants and artists

I have received numerous positive responses via social media after the work was installed, most of which were about how refreshing it is to see the unique fusion of visual art and culinary art in a public space: an aspect of cultural mixing devoid or rarely seen previously in Chinese restaurants. The owners of participating restaurants also mentioned how exhibiting work in their spaces through MIXING RICE has significantly boosted their revenues. “No patrons of mine would leave without taking a picture of the artworks!” says the owner of Jing Jin Cuisine. She even asked me whether the exhibition could stay up longer in the restaurant, for she would love to have more of her regular customers come in and marvel at the artworks while enjoying their dumplings.

The Biofeedback collective was inspired by their experience in participating in MIXING RICE to initiate community-based opportunities for the Saskatoon artists to collaborate in

⁴¹ Kyuubi Culture Artist Collective, <https://www.kyuubiculture.com>

organizing events, workshops, and relational projects.⁴² MIXING RICE also has created lasting relations between the Chinese restaurants, local artists, and Riversdale communities. It has established a sustainable framework and context for contemporary curatorial practice that is community-based and relational in its ethos. The most exciting comment I have received is from Jake Moore who asked: "Is MIXING RICE a precursor/framework for more similar exhibitions in the future?" My answer is yes; more exhibitions will be taking place in Chinese restaurants, Asian restaurant, and other underrepresent public space.

6. FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE EXHIBITION

Subsequently I received an email from AKA Artist-Run Centre, stating their interest in my MIXING RICE project. AKA invited me to create a spin-off series in collaboration with the Riversdale Community Fridge project. During the time, I contacted Lisa Myers, an independent curator and artist who had a participatory performance at a social gathering. Myers' "Shore Lunch," an ongoing/ multi-site project, makes an art venue for the camp kitchen. This project researches and discusses the history of Canadian fruit farms that reflects migrant workers' history. Meeting through a zoom session, Myers's hybrid practice of combining visual art and food reassured and encouraged me to continue my experimental practice. During the meeting, I introduced my upcoming project plan with AKA. I told Myers about how I admire her concept of ingredients shared between different culinary cultures. Myers presents another artist, Richard Fung, and his project, Dal Puri Diaspora, a film about the Indian food Dal Puri and the cultural

⁴² Biofeedback Collective, *The Community Project*, Art Placement, Saskatoon, 2021-2022

<https://www.thecommunityproject.ca>

context behind the food. Fung's film further motivated me to elevate my concept of combining elements such as food, relations, and community through visual art.

After the meeting with Lisa Myers, I titled my AKA project DOUGH NATION, a name inspired by Richard Fung, which aims to create a dialogue between immigrants, settlers, and indigenous through the popular ingredients-dough. A recent article I read, "Saskatoon Bannock Delivery Business Takes off" from 2020, introduces the new business on Riversdale BID-Saskatoon Bannock Delivery. This discovery solidified my desire to create a project which discusses dough: a common ingredient shared by different cuisines and contains numerous associated memories and cultural identities. Building on the momentum created by MIXING RICE, this project aims to directly emphasize the connection and engagement aspect of my new practice.

7. CONCLUSION

During the exhibition of MIXING RICE held from October 15th, 2021, to April 15th, 2022, I experienced and engaged with community-based art (relational aesthetic). As the curator/mentor artist for this project, I realized that we are not just making art objects installed in a public space. The exhibition is a collective art practices that gathers tensions from multiple communities and creates connections that help communities understand each other and engage through exhibiting visual artwork in restaurants space. I also have a more comprehensive understanding of the research-creation methodology by building a framework for the exchange of artistic and Asian communities in Saskatoon.

The biggest challenge during the implementation of this project was the balance between fine artwork and the mundane public space in Chinese restaurants. Most artists I selected were

professional artists who only had experience with the gallery space—the art gallery space dedicated to the presentation of fine arts. When working with galleries, all the necessary tools for installation were readily available. With the exhibition space maintained to an optimal condition, the staff who are well versed in logistics are happy to assist. However, nothing mentioned above applies in a public restaurant with high business density. The guest artists and I had to adapt to unfamiliar environments and collaborate with, negotiate with, and educate restaurant owners. Artists faced the barrier that the restaurant was not designed for the individual's art aesthetic and installation and had to produce and adapt artworks that can fit the restaurant space and context.

Another challenge I confronted during the exhibition was the paradox/schism between “decolonial practice” and a “renovation with visual art” through the Chinese restaurant space. Initially, my goal was to create artwork that enhances the restaurants' atmosphere. Ideally, I wanted to collaborate with the art community and Chinese restaurant community to build trust and avoid the action of artwork that “colonizes” the restaurant space. In this respect, I was clear that restaurants should not have to change any decoration or layout because of the addition of artwork (Figure 12). However, I realized it is impossible to control the interactions caused by the artworks. Therefore, I spent some energy explaining and balancing the needs of and between artists and restaurant owners. After the project was close to finished, I considered my “decolonial practice” as a goal that needed further research and practice.

In this project, I have explored how MIXING RICE was able to initiate a series of art activities, including community-based art and engagement that disrupts the mainstream exhibition tradition, and re-envision the identity of the artist and curator during the global pandemic era. MIXING RICE cultivates various perspectives that challenge the racialized discrimination against Asians in North America directly and indirectly caused by COVID-19. As

the mentor artist/curator for MIXING RICE committed to creating connections through the exhibition of visual artworks, I have sought to foster conversations and collaborations between merchants and non-profit organizers and artists, and in so doing have been able to generate and sustain community relations between the local art community and the businesses of 20th street that have contributed to diversifying the cultural fabric of Saskatoon.



(Figure 12, Artwork installed inside of the restaurants)

8. ARTISTS BIOGRAPHIES AND PROJECT STATEMENTS

Biofeedback Collective: (Kelsey Ford, Lauren Warrington, Emily Zdunich)

<https://biofeedbackcollective.com>

Biofeedback is an interdisciplinary group of Saskatchewan artists engaged in expanding the mind-body relationship. Biofeedback examines how the collective conscious influences identity and the implicit self. Emphasizing equality, care, and collaboration, Biofeedback develops work in response to their environment, questioning their surroundings and the reality in which they reside.

Within the smell and taste of each different plant or herb are personal meanings and memories attached to each member of Biofeedback. Experiencing the past and the present simultaneously. We hope to encourage the viewer to reflect on their own connections with food and the natural world. The taste, scent, and texture of new sprouts bring the viewer into the present moment while simultaneously experiencing feelings and emotions of the past, compressing time. Connections with both yourself and those who came before you. Like a plant gone to flower, sowing seeds for another season.

Timelessness.

Qiming Sun

<https://qimingsun.squarespace.com>

Qiming Sun is a Saskatoon-based Chinese-Canadian artist and a practicing witch. He received his MFA and High Honours BFA from the University of Saskatchewan. He specializes in oil paintings and sculptural works inspired by nature, the human body and condition, mythology,

life and death, symbolism, magick, and shamanic spirituality. His works are widely exhibited, many of which are included in the permanent collection of several Canadian institutions and galleries.

Food is more than mere sustenance for human beings; it is an amalgamation of ingredients and culinary techniques imbued with memories, emotional associations, and cultural iconographies. A soulful meal possesses the power to transcend time and space; the unique combinations of certain spices and specific ingredients in homemade meals can create distinct flavor profiles that evoke complex and raw sensations that could only be described as 'the taste of home.'

The diptych I have created for this project features classical Szechuanese dishes: the food I grew up eating; in a surreal combination with the landscape from which the viands originated. I aim to represent Szechuan cuisine in a symbolic, highly personal, and magical manner, hoping to translate and visualize the comfort and nostalgia I felt while enjoying authentic Szechuan cuisine through my usage of visual language.

Negar Tajgardan

<https://www.negartajgardan.com>

Negar Tajgardan is a visual artist interested in sculpture, installation art, and photography. Tajgardan's works are based on her memories of coming to Canada from Iran and broader concepts of immigration and displacement. She completed her MFA degree at the University of Saskatchewan, and her works have been exhibited in Iran and Canada.

In the transitions of our lives, we remember places we go to and leave from. We are constantly making new memories; we know that nothing in our lives is permanent, and even the memories will fade away eventually. My works are small replicas of useful objects of everyday life made out of dissolvable fabric. This material is chosen for its fragility and as an analog to the vulnerability in life as a result of displacement; the artwork itself is a way of finding a new home.

Our sense of 'home' and food are so blended that a familiar taste can help to heal the feeling of homesickness, a traditional flavor or smell can take one back to the years before and reawaken faded memories. I made small replicas of the very common objects in the restaurant, the very common objects which can make magic in bringing the memories alive again.

Jinglu Zhao:

<https://www.facebook.com/zhaojinglustudio/>

Jinglu Zhao is a Chinese artist residing in Saskatoon. She holds a BFA and MFA degree from Sichuan University, China, and obtained her Master's and Research degrees in Art & Design from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. Zhao specializes in paintings that explore the concept of family and cross-cultural communication.

“Make a Wish” is the title of this project. My inspiration is from the photos sent by Andy Yuen and Rachel Kong, the young couple who work in the Odd Couple restaurant.

Praying in Buddhist temples is one of the essential traditions in some Asian countries. I composed these two paintings with one figure in front of a distant view of the city from

high above. The other figure in the second panel is holding the red stripe with the logo of Odd Couple restaurant, praying at temples for good fortune. I want to create an environment that blends reality and fantasy. By combining two images, I want to demonstrate that: no matter where this couple is in the world, together, they make it home.

I am grateful to produce two contemporary paintings for Odd Couple Restaurant at Riversdale Business Improvement District (RBID) to support Saskatoon's Chinese Restaurant community.

Xiao Han

<https://www.xiaohanart.com>

Xiao Han is a Wuhan-Saskatoon-Toronto-based artist and curator. With photography, Xiao's artwork talks about identity and gender issues, exploring crossing cultures between Canada and China based on her experience. Xiao has curated numerous exhibitions collectively (via Kyuubi Culture - Artist Collective) with artists and art institutions between Canada and China as an independent curator. Xiao creates and researches through the lenses of contemporary feminism eco-media. Indigenous and decolonial studies.

Jing Jin Cuisine's owner has always been an art enthusiast and is always eager to support artists by becoming a reception caterer for AKA Artist-run center next door. To organize this project, I want to bring art into their environment, making art education comforting and accessible for Jing Jin and other Asian restaurants. The Jing Jin couple has served the local community for twelve years since 2009. The most intriguing part to

me is the owner had never renovated the space. Their tremendous impact on the building and to the community is from their food and care. I took this photograph while this couple stood behind the building. In this image, the Jing Jin couple becomes part of the landscape where they make their living. This photograph records the imprints of the Jing Jin couple's twelve years of coexistence with historical architecture.

Barbara Reimer:

<http://reimereason.ca>

Barbara Reimer works with photography, digital media, and installation. Past and present work has been influenced by documentary sculpture, “the responsible photograph,” the institution, travel, and the processes and materiality of experience. Educated in Saskatoon and Toronto, she has an extensive background in the commercial photographic and digital specialist areas. Reimer has exhibited nationally and internationally, showing in Nicaragua, Canada, the US, and Wuhan, China.

My practice of developing film in coffee started with a search to find “the responsible photograph” that led to travel and a lot of discussion of how the photograph is made, processed, and disseminated. (Finding a Green Photo, 2007-2013). For the Mixing Rice project, I have chosen to focus on the building itself: photographing with large and medium format studio cameras and still developing film in coffee to create a snapshot portrait of Jin Jin Dumpling. Hopefully, this will show a bit of the physical history of Saskatoon's Chinatown, and the processes of the project, while inviting conversation with the space and the stories from within. Through Jin Jin Cuisine’s purposeful decision not

to renovate, the building itself marks the history of its existence and the people that had a hand in building and feeding this community.

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Tea Base

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Youth Collaborative for Chinatown

<http://ycc-yvr.com/whoweare>

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