

## ***Soy Dreams of Milk***

Artists: Patty Chang, Michael Ho, Lap-See Lam, Tan Jing, Zadie Xa, Xiyadie

Curated by Nick Yu

13 September - 29 October 2022

### **Curatorial Text**

Blindspot gallery is pleased to present *Soy Dreams of Milk*, a group exhibition of 6 East Asian artists that explores the poetics of migration experiences, itinerant belongings, and diasporic worlding. The exhibition title entangles a compact imagery comprising of everyday items, relating "soy", a legume essential to the diet of East Asia and a major export crop in the Americas; "milk", a nourishing liquid evocative of the Biblical promise land "flowing with milk and honey"; and "dream", a cherished aspiration or a series of scenes and sensations occurring unconsciously in the mind while asleep. In its surrealist assemblage, *Soy Dreams of Milk* attempts to stage the complex sensorium conjured by the restlessly wandering subject. What is the experience of leaving, of being diaspora, and of returning? Why are you here, and what are your dreams made of?

The selection of 6 artists in *Soy Dreams of Milk* gathers a sample of a diverse network of global migration routes. Some artists speak from a diasporic perspective of people of Asian origins emigrating and making home in the West, whilst others speak of repatriating from Southeast Asia or migrating internally within China. Their conditions are underlined by the urge to navigate the different places they could call home, make sense of the multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism afforded by their mobility, and create meaningful associations, relationships, and memories along the way.

Sometimes this means being a stranger in a strange land, feeling lonely, othered, tokenized, misunderstood, or mistaken for someone else. Sometimes the fleeting sense of self is shattered, while being tethered to a hyphenated identity. Not being anywhere, while being everywhere all at once. A familiar scene, smile or smell may trigger chaotic memories from the past, searching for, yet not fitting into a placeholder in the mind. Together, artists of *Soy Dreams of Milk* formulate an animist, mnemonic, and elegiac aesthetic that attempts to articulate this fragmented state of itinerant belongings and in-betweenness.

~

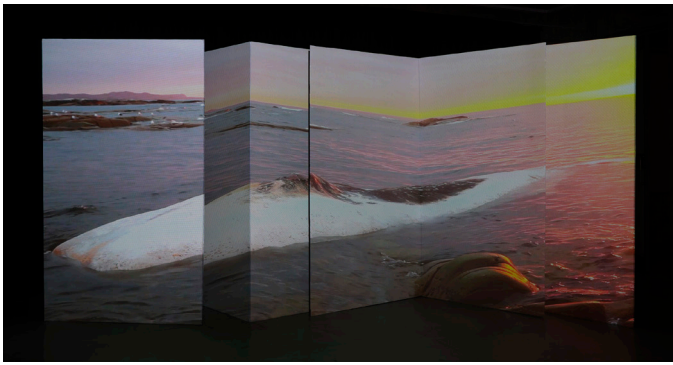
Thinking fluidly by viewing migration as natural history in a non-anthropocentric lens, *Soy Dreams of Milk* posits these migration narratives as part and parcel of a continuously unfolding ecological narrative. They often take the forms of an array of non-human species, such as animals like whales, dogs, foxes, and butterflies; trans-human beings like ghosts and cyborgs; man-made stuff like food and boats; and natural elements like movements of waters.

**Zadie Xa**, in collaboration with her partner **Benito Mayor Vallejo**, paints a scene depicting a fantastical procession of shapeshifting animals, female shaman, and shadowy spirits, creating a world centered on the folkloric imagination of a faraway ancestral land. Zadie Xa's *Parade* (2021) is a 5-panel folding screen painting a mythological procession of shapeshifting animals like foxes, scorpions, wolves, and humans. Holding the belief that animals are non-human people, Xa channels the folkloric power of these animal avatars to tell stories and reveal human conditions in the logos of diaspora worlding. These otherworldly stories feature fantasy and travel, acting as portals that transport viewers to a distant past to a mythic ancestral homeland, just like how Korean folklores were central to the artist's upbringing and formation of cultural identity.

The artist's deep reading into these figures reveal how beings become vessels of changeable ideas that subvert societal norms: the fox, a shapeshifting trickster in the East Asian symbolic order, becomes a menace to human agrarian world to be hunted in the West; while the powerful matriarch-shaman is vilified, accused, and publicly executed for practicing witchcraft in the middle ages. Xa's folding screens is a theatrical set that separates the known world from the spectral stage of shamanic ecstasy, trans-species seance, and the ventriloquism of dead ancestors.



Zadie Xa and Benito Mayor Vallejo, *Parade*, 2021, Oil on linen, bleached and dyed denim on handmade cherrywood frames, 200 x 325 x 6cm. (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)



Patty Chang, *Invocation of a Wandering Lake*, 2016, Dual-channel video, cardboard, installation size variable; 12'58". (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

The project also makes urgent demands about human-caused climate change and geopolitical actions that displace rain patterns, disrupt ocean currents, and destroy biospheres. *Invocation for a Wandering Lake* (2016) consists of two video projections on cardboard screens that shows Chang ritualistically washing dead non-human beings, an act of ablution that symbolizes purification and transcendence across different religions.

In the arid desert of central Asia, the artist finds a boat abandoned on the seabed of a once lush Aral Sea, washing and scraping the rusty monument of a utopic vision gone bust. Switching wet for dry, on the remote beaches of Fogo Islands at the tip of Newfoundland, Canada, relentless waves from the Atlantic keep churning and pushing the corpse of a sperm whale. By being in the water with such a massive dead animal thing, the artist is overwhelmed with a sense of humanity. The invocation for the gods of wandering becomes harrowing with songs of sorrow, followed by the silence of indescribable emptiness.

~

Living and dying along the way, the artists of *Soy Dreams of Milk* summon ghostly scaffolding and messy signifiers in the process of emigration and assimilation. Aided by speculative archeology, the theory of hauntology, and the belief in reincarnation, artists grapple with the sense of loss in the history of clans and kins.

Prompted by her family's retirement and change of ownership of the family restaurant Bamboo Garden, Swedish-Cantonese artist **Lap-See Lam** collaborates with her relative and filmmaker **Wingyee Wu** to create *Mother's Tongue* (2018), a video and mobile phone app that tells the story of a fictional Chinese restaurant. Using laser-point technology to scan the interior of multiple Chinese restaurants in Stockholm, Lam discovers to her surprise that the scans are far from faithful replica, but leaky clumps of glitchy details of chinoiserie lacquer, jadeite, columns, folded napkins, kitchenware, and ornate columns. Lam further exploits these ghostly digital fragments by 3D-milling and printing these objects, producing sculptures such as *Table (wingshing)* (2020) that look like decaying melting artefacts excavated from a shipwrecked trove. Their condition curiously echoes the predicament of the decommissioned Jumbo Floating Restaurant boat that allegedly capsized in an accident near the disputed archipelago of Paracel Islands in the South China Sea on 19 June 2022.

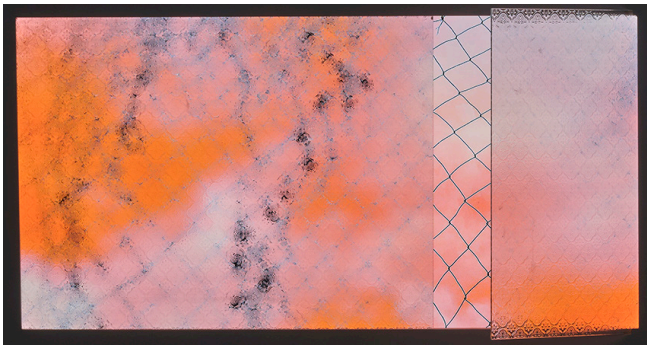


Lap-See Lam in collaboration with Wingyee Wu, *Mother's Tongue*, 2018, Single-channel video, 17'42". (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

Visualizing these 3D scans, *Mother's Tongue* is divided into three chapters, each centred on the fictional autobiographical history of three generations of the family operators of the restaurant, the daughter, mother, and grandmother, voiced by the artist's mother and relatives. Respectively, the time-travelling stories narrate the lived experience of growing up in the restaurant in 1978, its changing hands to mandarin-speaking buffet-offering owners in 2018, and its eventual closing after the robotic waiting staff system fails to update in 2057. The narrative not only chronicles the rise and fall of Cantonese-Chinese restaurants in the city, it theorizes the inevitable sense of loss in the passing down of culture from one generation to the next. Highlighted by the imperfect plagiarism and egregious glitches of scanning technology, the film's faulty representation is analogue to the callous abstraction of Chineseness fit for Western consumption.

In keeping with the need for fictional intervention against imperfect fragments of diasporic inheritance, **Tan Jing** creates a multi-sensorial account of her family's history of repatriating from Southeast Asia to China. In *Trancing Lap Hung* (2021), the Shenzhen-based artist traces her grandparents' repatriation from Thailand in the 1950s under rising anti-Communist sinophobia. Frustrated with her family's inability to speak of the traumatic migration to an equally alien "homeland", Tan intervenes after grandpa Lap Hung's death when he was interred in his ancestral home village abiding to Confucian edict. Reincarnating Lap Hung as a dog, the artist dreams that the dog is lost and wanders around the in-between places of Lingnan and Nanyang.





Tan Jing, *Trancing Lap Hung*, 2021, Single channel video installation, glass, 13'09".  
(Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

Decentring the primacy of human sight, Tan Jing favours the canine's keen olfactory, haptic and aural faculty in creating a site-specific multisensorial installation that evokes non-verbal and subconscious memories. The corridor entrance hangs a row of hand-made beads mixed with fragrant herbs and citronella spices, beckoning viewers to step into the mnemonic portal. Strewn on the floor are plaster bricks, and as one steps on it, the bricks crack into pieces, further releasing the scent of lemongrass evocative of tropical Siam. At the end of the tunnel, a half-open window framed by Begonia-patterned press glass obscures a moving image showing trances of changing lights and meandering street scenes.

~



Xiyadie, *Gate*, 2013, Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper, 140 x 140 cm. (Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

Cruising to waves, yearning to be touched, and longing for love, the sensual journey of *Soy Dreams of Milk* is nonetheless filled with queer jouissance and salty dreams. Sexuality is a powerful libidinal locomotor as we travel in a sea of desires.

**Xiyadie** is the artist's chosen name (meaning Siberian butterfly) that denotes the resilient butterfly that soars and thrives despite the harsh environment of the Western Asian steppes of Siberia. Xiyadie's biography is one of pursuit of freedom and self-expression: growing up in the agrarian countryside of Shaanxi, he learnt the traditional art of papercut from his female relatives, and was married and fathered children. Having kept his homosexuality solitary, while practising his homoerotic papercut in secrecy, he finally came out to his family and moved to the capital city of Beijing as a migrant worker. For Xiyadie, his new found home of Beijing is a place of long-sought freedom and acceptance, new-found kins and community, unchained desires and experimentation.

Xiyadie's meticulously executed works are part autobiography and part fantasy that channel earnestly homoerotic desires. Taking cue from the traditionally auspicious Chinese character

of double-happiness (囍), it is no wonder so many of his works are titled Joy, as happiness is simple and universal, but the unfettered joy of being gay takes infinite sensuous forms. His piece de resistance is *Gate* (2013), where the artist creates the scene of a gay couple pleasuring each other in front of Tiananmen square, the symbol of sovereign power and civic society. In this scene, Xiyadie also refers to the Kaiyang bathhouse, a location in the vicinity of Tiananmen gate long frequented by the gay community of Beijing that is now shuttered.

Growing up as a queer second-generation Chinese immigrant in Germany, whose parents ran a Chinese restaurant, **Michael Ho's** practice is a constant inquiry on the in-betweenness of multiple homes, itinerant belongings, and the feelings of being othered. This "in-betweenness" is materialized in his double-sided manipulation of the permeability of canvas and the viscosity of oil paint. Applying thick layers of blue and purple pigment en verso (on the back), the artist creates a pastel twilight background en recto (in front), an amorphous dreamscape bathed in moonlight.

Against this liminal space, Ho places figures and objects that narrativizes a certain feeling and motion, laying bare the fragility of cross-cultural relationality and meaning making. *A Cowboy Renaissance* (2022) features a worn pair of leather cowboy boots, relating the story of a Chinese student from Yunan who went to Texas to study and completely assimilated, vocalizing a southern accent while donning full cowboy outfit. The peculiar case of a Chinese cowboy speaks to an uncanny hybrid of Asian masculinity against Western ideals. *Drachenklauen* (2022) shows the mighty dragon claws devolving into chicken feet, Chinese delicacies considered unpalatable and difficult to adapt to western taste. *Common Feelings Met Halfway* (2022) illustrates muscular arms wrestling each other in an intimate bind too tenacious to let go, while *See You When I See You* (2022) portrays a deceased partner, charting an insurmountable distance rendered in indelible poignancy.



Michael Ho, *Common Feelings Met Halfway*, 2022, Oil on canvas, 25 x 40 x 2 cm.  
(Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery.)

~

Whether temporary or permanent, the journey to move is motivated by idealistic aspirations, economic incentives, political exigencies, or simply chance encounters. We are sojourners inheriting precarious boats, shipwrecking in islands inhabited by powerful magicians and spirits. Our unique journeys take us to solemn temples, fantastical pageants, and feasts of the fatty milk of whales. An inexhaustive list, these are but some of the stuff our dreams are made of.

## About the Artists

### Patty Chang (b. 1972, San Leandro, US)

Patty Chang works in performance, video, writing, and installation. Her work has a capacity to explore complex subjects nearly simultaneously, as does life. Her work has been exhibited internationally at such institutions as the Museum of Modern Art (New York, US, 2014); Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, US, 2011); New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York, US, 2005); BAK BAK-basis voor actuele kunst (Utrecht, the Netherlands, 2011); the Hammer Museum (Los Angeles, US, 2005); Chinese Arts Centre (Manchester, England, 2005); the M+ Museum (Hong Kong, 2015); the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (San Francisco, US, 2011); and the Moderna Museet (Stockholm, Sweden, 2006). Chang's work received a 2003 award from the Rockefeller Foundation and a 2012 Creative Capital award.

Chang currently lives and works in Los Angeles, US.

### Michael Ho (b. 1991, Arnhem, Netherlands)

Michael Ho graduated from the Architectural Association in 2019. As a second-generation immigrant from China, Ho's works investigate the notions of the Chinese diaspora, cultural mismatch, and subsequently cultural rediscovery through his painting practice. He employs a specific technique of painting from back to front, superimposing diluted images with resolved brush strokes. Ho's critical engagement with the orientalist images and tropes is multifold: from the playful to the political and from the erotic to the domestic. His solo exhibition with his previous work partner Chiyan Ho includes: Kūnlún, V.O Curations, London, 2021. His works have been featured in group exhibitions at ICA, London; Guts Gallery, London; Gallery Vacancy, Shanghai; Intersticio, Madrid; Soft Opening, London; and Delphian Gallery, London. His film projects have been screened at Piccadilly Circus, London and at the ICA, London. Ho's newly commissioned video work by FVU, London will be part of the group exhibition Hollow Earth: Art, Caves & the Subterranean Imaginary on view in September 2022 at Nottingham Contemporary, co-organized with Hayward Gallery Touring.

Ho currently lives and works in London, UK.

### Lap-See Lam (b. 1990, Stockholm, Sweden)

Lap-See Lam holds an MFA from the Royal Institute of Art in Stockholm, Sweden. In 2020 Lam was listed in American Forbes as one of Europe's "thirty under thirty" most promising people in arts and culture. In 2023 she has upcoming solo exhibitions at Portikus, Frankfurt am Main and at Studio Voltaire, London. Recent solo exhibitions include Bonniers Konsthall (2022); Trondheim Kunstmuseum (2021); Skellefteå Konsthall, Skellefteå (2019) and Moderna Museet Malmö (2018–2019). She has taken part in group exhibitions at venues including KINDL - Centre for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2022); Power Station of Art, Shanghai (2021–2022); PinchukArtCentre (2021); Performa 19 in New York (2019); Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain, Paris (2019); Luleå Biennial (2018); Kópavogur Art Museum, Kópavogur (2018); and Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2017). Lam was the winner of Dagens Nyheter Culture Prize in 2021 and a recipient of the Maria Bonnier Dahlin Foundation Grant in 2017. In 2021 she was shortlisted for the Future Generation Art Prize.

Lam currently lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden.

### Wingyee Wu

Wingyee Wu is a filmmaker educated at New York University and Central Saint Martins, as well as an entrepreneur with roots in the Hong Kong. Wu currently lives and works in Stockholm, Sweden.

## About the Curator

### Nick Yu (b. 1990, Hong Kong)

Nick Yu is a trilingual curator, writer, and researcher from Hong Kong. His artist-centric curatorial practice focuses on gender discourses and biopolitics at the intersection of decolonial struggles, movement of peoples, and history of ideas. His exhibition projects include "Soy Dreams of Milk" (2022), a group exhibition centred on migration experiences of the Asian diaspora; "Play and Loop" (2020–2022), an ongoing video screening programme, and "Holy Mosses" (2019), a group exhibition exploring non-anthropocentric queer eco-aesthetics spanning non-binary ancient mythologies and asexual post-humanist technologies. As a writer, he contributes reviews to ArtAsiaPacific and Ocula, in addition to producing all the bilingual curatorial texts for Blindspot Gallery. He is currently the Associate Director of Blindspot Gallery.

### Tan Jing (b. 1992, Guangzhou, China)

Tan Jing obtained her BA in Chelsea College of Art in 2015 and her MA at the Royal College of Art in 2017. Tan is keen on experimenting with textures, materials, and form within sculpture and installation. Her practice combines her expertise in the unpredictable composition of materials and techniques, with her whimsical intertwist of elements from biology and folklore. She often creates scenarios of the surreal striking the viewer aesthetically and psychologically, aiming to make visible and sensible the trauma and solitude of individuals in society, along with the object and space respectively. Her works have been shown internationally in institutions such as HB Station, Guangzhou (2022), Para Site, Hong Kong (2021), Guangdong Times Museum, Guangzhou (2020), Alt Handelsschule, Germany (2018), Spielzeug Welten Museum, Basel (2018), Camden Art Center project, London (2017), and more.

Tan currently lives and works in Guangzhou, China.

### Zadie Xa (b. 1983, Vancouver, Canada)

Zadie Xa was born in Vancouver, Canada on unceded, ancestral and continually asserted territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and Sel̓ilwataʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations and is now based in London, UK. Xa earned an MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art in 2014 and a BFA at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2007. Her practice focuses on familial legacies, interspecies communication and diasporic worlding. Throughout her practice, Xa uses water and marine ecologies as metaphors for exploring the unknown whilst also alluding to abstract notions of homeland.

Xa's practice is highly collaborative, and she has developed ongoing exchanges with dancers, and musicians. Since 2006, Xa has worked closely with artist Benito Mayor Vallejo. Together they have staged live performance, moving image, installations and painting. Xa is slated to open her solo exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, London, in September 2022.

Xa currently lives and works in London, UK.

### Xiyadie (b. 1963, Shaanxi, China)

Xiyadie is a self-taught traditional Chinese papercut artist who started creating works with homoerotic themes to tell his narrative of transformation. Xiyadie means Siberian Butterfly, a name he chose after his move to Beijing as a migrant worker in 2005, where he found an accepting community in the burgeoning gay subcultural scene. As he relates, the Siberian Butterfly is a northern creature. Surviving in the harshest conditions, it maintains its vanity and pursuit of freedom in an environment that does not lend political agency or representation to queer-identifying people.

Since his debut solo exhibition at the Beijing LGBT Center (2010), Xiyadie's works have been shown extensively. He was a participating artist in Spectrosynthesis: Asian LGBTQ Issues and Art Now at BACC, Bangkok (2019) and MOCA, Taipei (2017) marking the largest survey exhibitions of its kind in Asia. His works have also been shown at Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art, Warsaw; Long March Space, Beijing (2019); Gwangju Biennale (2018); Nome Gallery, Berlin (2018); Para Site, Hong Kong (2017); Galerie Verbeeck - Van Dyck, Antwerp (2015); Topenmuseum, Amsterdam (2015); Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg (2013); Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm (2012); and Flazh!Alley Art Studio, San Pedro, USA (2012). Xiyadie's works are collected by the Tate Collection, UK.

Xiyadie currently lives and works in Shaanxi, China.