

The Drift Latitudes

Chun Hua Catherine Dong



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March 17 to April 28, 2018

Interview by Michael DiRisio

Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre

305-370 King St. W.
Kingston ON K7K 1W8

info@modernfuel.org

Gallery Hours

Tuesday-Saturday, 12-5 pm

www.modernfuel.org

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Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre is a non-profit organization facilitating the presentation, interpretation, and production of contemporary visual, time based and interdisciplinary arts. Modern Fuel aims to meet the professional development needs of emerging and mid-career local, national and international artists, from diverse cultural communities, through exhibition, discussion, and mentorship opportunities. Modern Fuel supports innovation and experimentation, and is committed to the education of interested publics and the diversification of its audiences. As an advocate for contemporary art. as well as for artists' rights, we pay professional fees to artists in accordance with the CARFAC fee schedule.

The Drift Latitudes

We are pleased to be presenting Chun Hua Catherine Dong's solo exhibition *The Drift Latitudes* in our Main Gallery from March 17 to April 28, 2018.

The Drift Latitudes features Chun Hua Catherine Dong's new 4-channel video *They*, presented as an immersive multi-projection video installation spanning our entire Main Gallery. In our Window Space we are excited to feature a selection of photographs and video from her recent series *Mother*, a project involving 14 mothers, all close friends and relatives of her own mother.

Chun Hua Catherine Dong: ***The Drift Latitudes***

Interview by Michael DiRisio

Michael DiRisio: You state that your work reflects on the gap between the body as an image and the body as experienced reality; can you elaborate on this?

Chun Hua Catherine Dong: Body is both artwork and material for a performance artist. Body as an image in my work refers to performance photographs, performance video, and documentation of performance because my work is not only about live performance, but also photograph and video. Although they are all body-related works, they are different. For instance, there is a difference between live performance and the documentation of live performance. Live performance only exists at a certain period of time, and traditionally it requires that audiences experience it. The documentation of performance extends the life of performance itself and transforms it to another form of art. My work explores these differences and gaps between them. Body as experienced reality refers to "art is life, life is art," how performance merges art and life and becomes both. Body is a primary material in my work. As material and life itself, the body lives, feels, experiences....

MD: I noticed that you are speaking of the body not only as an object, but as an object being seen. Is your focus more on the visual realm here? And is there a tension between the body as both a subject that is seeing and an object being seen?

CHCD: Yes, you are right. Body is both subject and object. The relationship between seeing and being seen is very similar to the relationship between art and viewers. How "the subject that is seeing" is embodied in the artwork itself, but how "this object being seen" cannot be controlled by the subject herself. In fact, as an embodiment, how "the subject that is seeing" is not important at all, but provides more space for viewers to interpret and expand.

MD: You write that your series *Mother*, on view in the Window Space, is dedicated to your absent mother—an absence that you state is in itself a form of presence. While this series reflects on visual expressions of memory and loss, your 4-channel video *They* in the Main Gallery serves as a broader consideration of women whose bodies have been marked as other. Both works express this presence, whether of the body or of the memory of a loved one, yet seem to operate with a different tone, the former quieter and more reflective, with the latter work feeling more animated. Can you speak briefly to the origin of each work, and how you feel they resonate with each other?

CHCD: This is the question that I have been struggling with for a while. At the beginning when we talked about which works to show, I saw more connections between *They* and *Pink Vagina*

(Unfortunately, we didn't get a chance to show *Pink Vagina* in this exhibition). I was a little hesitant to show *Mother* because I couldn't see the connection between them, but I thought it might add different tones and another layer to the exhibition. At this moment, I still cannot see deep connections between the two works, maybe it is because *Mother* is based on my own experience, and I am so close to it that I am unable to distance myself from it.

There are some similarities in the two works. *Mother* explores how my mother and I reunite and become one, and how the mother/daughter relationship is experienced as a site of empowerment. *They* explores the power of sisterhood: the four women are different individuals, they mirror each other, they see strength in each other, support each other, and empower each other.

Shame is a main subject in my work in general. Originally, I planned to explore the visual culture of shame in relation to loss in *They*, such as loss of loved one, loss of youth, loss of home due to war, loss for culture or language due to immigration, loss of self (physical, emotional, or mental etc). However, the work changed a lot when I made it. In fact, the work has led itself to its own way. Although the concept might have changed a little bit, shame still plays a major role in the work. For instance, it depicts how shame is sensed, how the four women's bodies react, and how they deal with shame in their lives, and how they deconstruct shame by transforming their bodies to a site of social and political transgression and resistance.

I do feel a tremendous sense of shame and guilt after losing my mother, for filial piety is so rooted in Chinese culture. As her daughter and living so far away from her, I didn't fulfill my duty of taking care of her when she was alive. This work is not only dedicated to my lost mother, a *memento mori*, but also a way of self-healing and self-care. Recent feminist discourse discusses the potential power of embracing our vulnerabilities because if "I matter, we matter, we are transforming what matters." Instead of hiding my shame and letting guilt eat me, I explore it and embrace it, and I transfer this vulnerability to something else that transcends emotion and loss, in hope of connecting my audiences as well.

Another similarity in the two pieces is time. The video of *Mother* explores the passage of time, and how I gradually become my mother in time, and how all mothers and I gradually vanish at the end, only the vast landscape is left. Time is literally depicted twice in *They*. The symbol of time, clock, appears twice in the *They*. There is a broken clock in a scene of a woman reading a book. In another scene the same woman traces a clock that runs backward in salt with her finger while talking about time, aging and death in the voiceover.

MD: I had not seen that initially, but the idea of time is certainly a thread running through both works. It seems less the ordered "clock time"-although that is present too-and more how time is experienced. This seems to connect back to your interest in the body and lived experience, foregrounding how time is felt.

CHDC: Yes, I didn't see that either. The third question you asked pushed me to dig more deeply about this aspect in these two works, and how they relate and differ from each other. Both performance art and video art are time-based art. but how time is experienced is different. In performance, time is experienced in real by both an artist who is doing the performance and audiences. But in our digital era, time in video or film is not necessary to be experienced by characters/actors/performers themselves, video/film explores possibilities of how to manipulate time and to create a sense of time and space for audiences to experience.

In the contemporary art world, we usually emphasize how audiences experience art, but not the artist, as if an artist's job is to make artwork and the process of how to make it is not important. This might apply to object-based artwork, but not performance art. In performance art. especially in durational performance, the artist experiences time more intensively than the audiences. Audiences can come and go if they wish, but the artist must keep going. As I mentioned performance as a medium has the capability to merge art and life. However, when an artist lives in her/his/their performance, sometimes how to survive in her/his/their piece can be very challenging.

For instance, in a performance I did in Boston called *A Fair Day's Work*, I watched a clock, turning a light on and off and stamping PAID on paper every minute from 9am-5pm to address unpaid labor in the arts in relation to capitalist economy and subsidy culture. Of course, I never mentioned that during the 8 hours,

I didn't take any water. food, didn't go to the washroom neither but kept still for 8 hours. I never talk about how my body felt, how much pain I had, how physically and mentally challenging it was on my body, etc neither. Audiences came and left, they experienced real time not only in reality, but also experienced time in concept and imagination after they left. However. time was experienced by the artist. myself. so consciously that I felt no way to escape. I experienced each second, each minute, each hour. But each second, minute and hour seemed to be extended and felt so long. I also started to notice my body and my own existence, how my body felt as time passed. At some points. I felt that time gradually drove me away to somewhere empty and vast. and then it got lost and I felt the moment of death or I could die at certain moments....

This example might give you more insights about why I said, "body is experienced reality." Here I am not saying that I try to raise awareness of how an artist's body is experienced in their performances-it is an artist's own choices. and we are responsible for our own choices-but just thought it might be interesting to share because it is something we normally don't talk about.

MD: I certainly see that experience of enduring time as an important element of your work that would not be visible to all audiences. Regarding viewers. there is also an openness to your work, where you seem to be leaving space for other readings of your work.

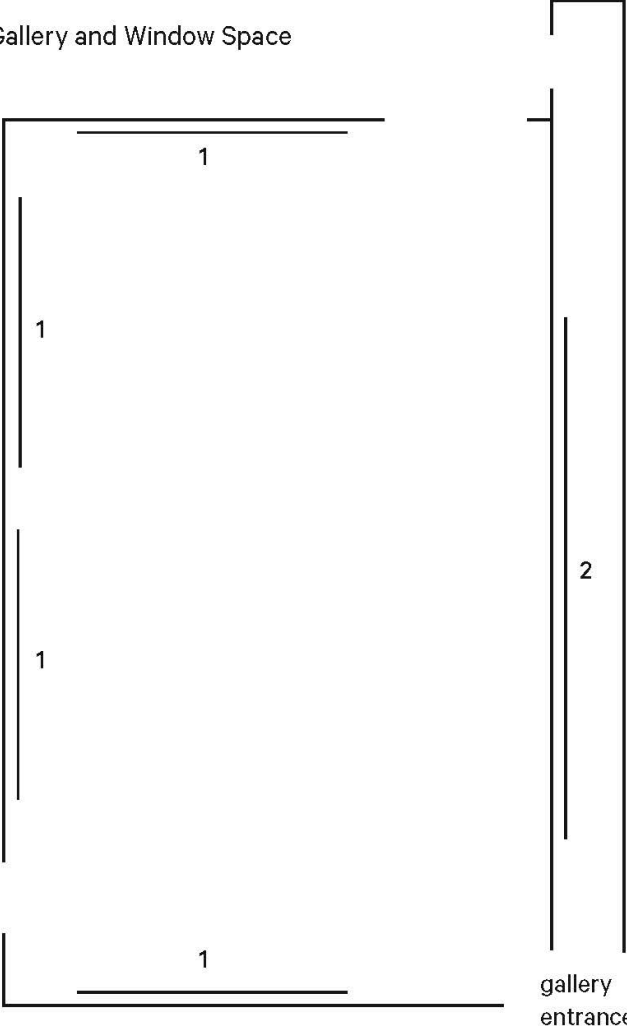
CHCD: I am very open to other interpretations, and very interested in seeing what kind of connections and reflections audiences might have, and how they will interpret them. It resonates with your second question as well: for me, how the subject is seen is not important, what is more important is how the object is seen and seen differently.

Chun Hua Catherine Dong is a Chinese born Montreal based visual artist working with performance photography, and video. She received a MFA from Concordia University and a BFA from Emily Carr University Art & Design in Canada. She has performed in multiple international performance art festivals and venues, such as, The Great American Performance Art in New York, Rapid Pulse International Performance Art Festival in Chicago, Infr'Action in Venice, Dublin Live Art Festival in Dublin, Miami Performance International Festival, 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art in Toronto, Experimental Action/ Performance Art in Houston, ENCUENTRO Performance in Santiago, Internationales Festival fur Performance in Mannheim, Place des Arts in Montreal, and so on.

She has exhibited her works at Quebec City Biennial, Kaunas Biennial in Lithuania, The Musee d'Art Contemporain du Val-de-Marne in France, Canadian Museum of Immigration, The Aine Art Museum in Tornio, The Schusev State Museum of Architecture in Moscow, Gera Museum in Vrsac, Fernando Pradilla Gallery in Madrid, New Art Center in Boston, Art Museum at University of Toronto in Toronto, Delhi Photo Festival in Delhi, and Articule in Montreal. Her video work has been screened in Brazil, Mexico, Finland, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Colombia, Spain, The Netherlands, Finland, Poland, Greece, Romania, Croatia, Denmark, Sweden, Scotland, China, USA, and Canada.

Exhibition Floor Plan

Main Gallery and Window Space



1. They

4-channel video installation, 2017

4K, colour, 29 minutes 20 seconds, loop

Cast: Carla Coma, Chun Hua Catherine Dong,

Jacqueline Van De Geer, Enok Ripley

Director: Chun Hua Catherine Dong

Director of Photography: Michael Wees

Editor: Daniel Araquiel Dietzel

Color: Jean-Maxim Desjardins

Sound: Mitchell Stafiej

Music: Shane Turner

VoiceOver: Alison Matthews

Text: Giacomo Leopardi

Assistant Camera: Victor Chan

2. Mother

photographs and video, 2017

14 pieces of photographs, inkjet prints, 16"x20"

Photo credit: Zeng Jin Wen

Video: HD, color, 08:24mins, loop, 2017

Music: Shane Turner

Editor: Chun Hua Catherine Dong

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