

WATERLOO REGION

Photography exhibition planned at Ion stations asks, 'Where is home?'

'Unfortunately many people don't think I belong here because of the way I look ... which kind of makes me feel homeless,' artist says



By **Terry Pender** Record Reporter
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KITCHENER — The photographs are about international travel, funeral rites in China and the meaning of home.

"I Have Been There" is an exhibition by Montreal-based Chun Hua Catherine Dong that will be displayed at Ion stations and other points along the light rail line during the contemporary art festival CAFKA.

The exhibition has photographs of Dong stretched out on the ground and wrapped in a colourful duvet in cities around the world. She started out as a performance artist and later moved into the visual arts. This work combines the two.

"It is a travel-based work, wherever I went I made a new duvet of Chinese traditional silk fabric," said Dong.

She covers the duvet with historical signs, landmarks and images of tourist attractions and other significant locations to reflect the culture and the space of the setting.

The CAFKA exhibit will feature a tiny number of the total she's produced since she started work on the project in . She's visited cities in countries and was photographed in locations. Some locations are famous and others obscure.

In all of them, Dong is wrapped in a colourful duvet. It is a nod to the funeral rites in her native China, where the children of a deceased parent sew a colourful duvet-like wrap made of silk. Each adult child is expected to sew one.

"If the elder has six different children, the body will be covered by six different covers, layer by layer," said Dong. "That is how my father was covered, six layers."

Dong appears to be sleeping in all of the photographs, which were staged in public places. Usually, the only people sleeping in public places are homeless people.

"Some people might think about the homeless, but the picture is also beautiful," said Dong. "So for me, it raises the question — where is home? What is the definition of a home?"

Those questions have added significance for someone like Dong. She is the only member of her family to come to Canada. This is her home now, and has been for years. But she does not always feel that way.

"We often say: 'Where your heart goes is where home is.' So, I really feel my home is here in Canada. Of course, I have a physical home here as well, and I feel I belong here," said Dong.

"But it is very sad and unfortunately many people don't think I belong here because of the way I look, and because of where I come from, which kind of makes me feel homeless as well," said Dong. "I have a home, but at the same time I feel homeless."

The exhibition has been planned for a while now, but it goes up at a time when anti-Asian violence is on the rise and China is blamed for causing the COVID- pandemic.

Dong was born and raised in mainland China. She came to Canada nearly years ago to study art at the Emily Carr University of Art + Design in Vancouver, and a master's at Concordia University in Montreal. She became a Canadian citizen years ago, married and lives with her partner in the Rosemont neighbourhood in Montreal.

She is thrilled to be part of CAFKA, the contemporary art festival that is held in Kitchener every other year. Because of the pandemic the event was not held last year, as scheduled, but will go ahead this June instead.

Regional council is providing , to help pay for the exhibition "I Have Been There." The photographs will be displayed at six Ion stations, nine bus shelters and on two billboards.

"I am very happy about that," Dong said.

The photographs will be located in places where Ion passengers and pedestrians can both see them, said Helen Chimirri-Russell, the region's director of cultural services.

"There is something interesting about integrating the Ion into our social lives, not treating it as just a piece of infrastructure," said Russell.