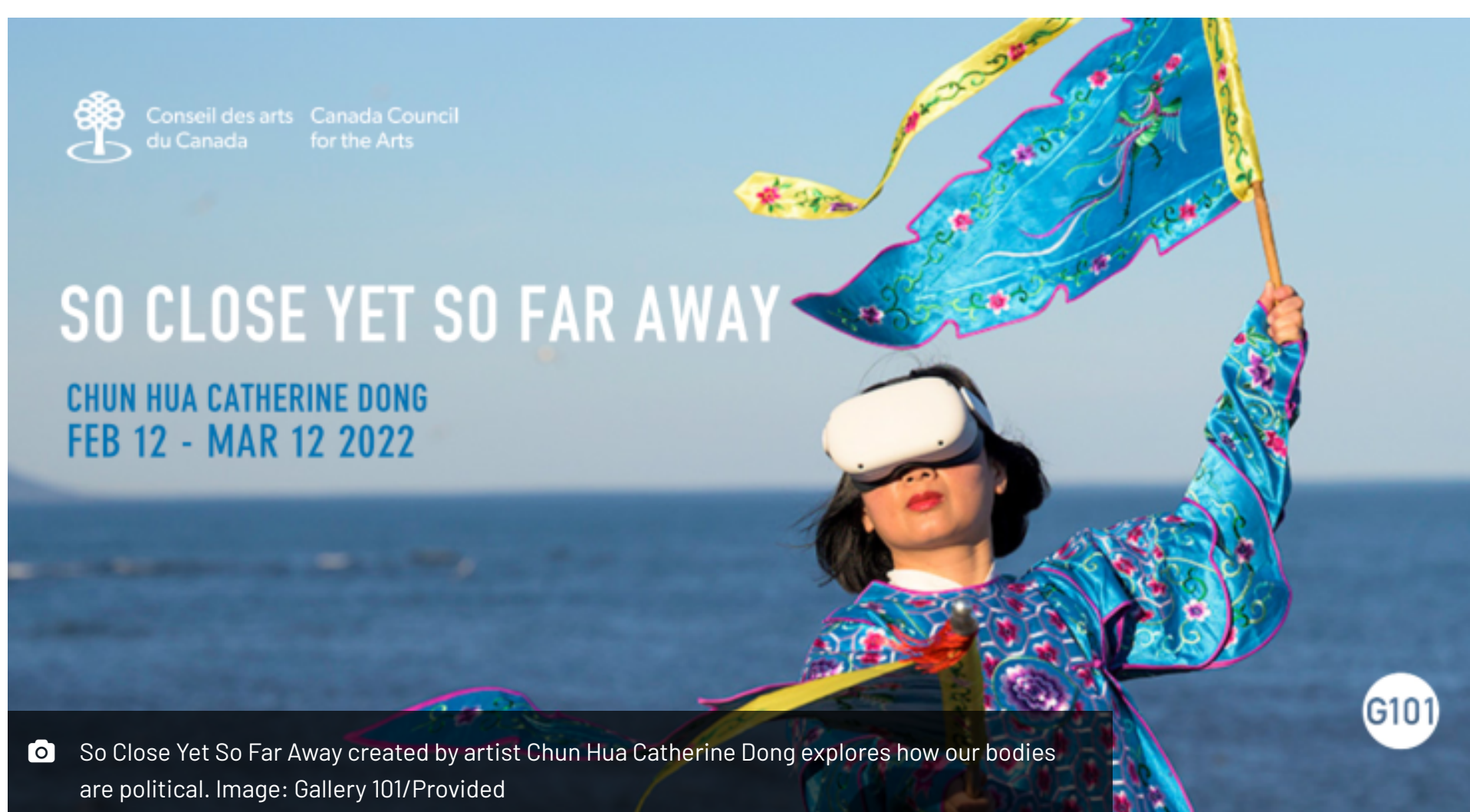


## Arts

### So Close Yet So Far Away perfectly captures the boundaries that we are facing in our society today

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#### NEW GALLERY 101 SOLO EXHIBITION OPEN UNTIL SATURDAY

On Feb. 12, Gallery 101 welcomed a new solo exhibition, which will be available to view until March 12. The exhibit named *So Close Yet So Far Away* and created by artist Chun Hua Catherine Dong explores **the ways in which our bodies are political**. This exhibition includes five different works created by Dong over the span of three years.

The first piece which welcomes visitors is called, *When I Was Born, My Father Said I Was Just Another Mouth to Feed*, and consists of three white 3D-printed sculptures of teddy bears. Dong made this piece while thinking about the child labour and domestic abuse against children that is sometimes hidden from the world, although we know of its existence.

While a teddy bear is often seen as a comforting stuffed animal for children, these teddy bears are kneeling down, and one even has its arms and legs tied behind them. Dong explained the significance of this in an interview.

"The kneeling gesture in many societies is a corporal punishment, and the teddy bear is showing child-like innocence," said Dong.

The teddy bears also had two sets of ears, one for the child and one for the mother, signifying a sort of protection which can be found between maternal bonds.

*Reconnection*, which consists of five performance photographs of Dong at the St Lawrence River in Quebec. While her body is in Quebec, her eyes are where virtual reality (VR) goggles, looking at the Great Wall of China. In the photos, Dong is wearing a traditional costume from the Chinese opera, *Mulan*.

Dong explained that for these improvised shots – which were taken by Donald Lavoie and Michel Antoine Castonguay – she wanted to bring in the idea of being in two places at once. While she performed on the St Lawrence River, Dong's eyes were back in China looking at a historic and significant place. Not only does she wish to be there, reunited with her motherland and family, but the photographs also represent this idea of feeling free – like the St Lawrence river – while the Wall acts as a sort of barrier, blocking Dong's eyes from some kind of freedom. This piece really spoke to the name of the solo exhibition, the feeling of being *So Close Yet So Far Away*.

The exhibition also included a video installation, *Becoming Feng-Huang*, which shows lots of dragons and phoenixes. In China, the dragon and phoenix – both mythological creatures – are very important symbols in the culture and history. However, Dong uses them to show the duality within herself. In the past, the dragon and the phoenix were two mythical creatures with no gender assigned to them. As time went by, the dragon became the symbol of the imperial class.

"Later the Chinese imperial class took the dragon as their own... no other animal has the power of him," explained Dong, adding, "So they made the Phoenix the female empress... this is how gender has been imposed and changed by the political power."

This video installation is representing Dong, becoming the phoenix herself.

"Becoming a phoenix is like becoming a plural because it's still connected to the dragon," said Dong.

*I Am A Rainbow*, consisted of a neon sign which read "I am a rainbow." However, the sign was in neon pink, again showing this idea of duality. While Dong uses this sign and the term "rainbow" as a way of **breaking gender binaries and barriers**, the neon pink shows the stigmas that still exist around **women and the colour pink**.

The final piece in this exhibition, *Mulan*, is a VR installation where visitors can submerge into Dong's art and imagination. The piece includes two women, the female warrior *Mulan*, underwater, facing each other, and holding onto opposite sides of the same pole. But they are the same women.

"This piece was actually my interpretation of a performance art piece by **Marina Abramović called Rest Energy**," said Dong.

Both women are depending on each other, even though they are the same person. If one of them lets go of the pole, they both fail.

This solo exhibition explored so many boundaries that society faces today. Whether it be through the gender binary, or through proximity to the rest of the world due to the pandemic, everyone can relate to Dong's exhibition and feel the emotion behind it being so close and yet so far away from whatever it is we want.

*So Close Yet So Far Away* will be on display at Gallery 101 until March 12, no entry fee is required.