Screaming Yellow

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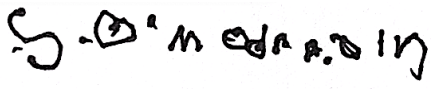

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Screaming Yellow:

Social Practice and Exploration of Color of Asians

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Candidate, MFA
University of Michigan
Summer 2021

Rey Jeong MFA '21

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Abstract

Screaming Yellow is a social-practice platform, a video installation and a campaign vehicle, which examines dialogue between racially marginalized people. The work embodies critical race theory, and histories of discrimination against Asians. It also creates a theoretical framework for articulating the intersection of art and one Asian woman's "minor feelings." One methodology used is exploring yellowness within the black and white racial dichotomy in the U.S.

Keywords

Asianness, Dialogues, Diaspora, Racism, Socially Engaged Art, White Privilege, Social Practice, Social Sculpture, Socially-Engaged Art, SEA, Asian

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INTRODUCTION

All art is ultimately social; that which agitates and that which prepares the mind for slumber. The writer is deceived who thinks that [s/]he has some other choice. The question is not whether one will make a social statement in one's work—but only what the statement will say, for if it says anything at all, it will be social.

- Lorraine Hasberry

My art practice and research are driven by my own deeply felt experiences as an Asian immigrant woman in the United States and the awareness that mine is a piece of a larger diasporic experience so common in the world today. The theoretical grounding that has given language to and informed my practice as an artist include postcolonialism and critical race theory, but my true interest is creating liminal spaces to listen to the stories of marginalized people, observing the intersections between race, gender, work, storytelling, and empathy, and ultimately creating a public space to claim freedom for myself and others to speak and share and be heard.

I wanted to create a platform as social practice art for people to present their truths as loudly as possible so they might counter the issues of misrecognition and lack of representation. As a woman of color with a thick Korean accent, and a graduate student at the University of Michigan, I realized there were few spaces to voice my indignity at facing racial discrimination - I wanted to scream. That is, I wanted to amplify my voice and the voices of young Asian immigrants by collaborating with them and playing with the fluid and intersectional natures of the research subjects' identities.

During my MFA program, I internalized the lack of spaces for Asians to speak and to be comfortable because I have not processed what it means to live, work and be in the U.S. There is a great diversity among us under the title Asian, and there is no common language or vocabulary to incorporate who we all are, how we feel, how we get hurt, and how to heal with narratives we can claim as our own. This realization led me to the following uncomfortable, yet necessary questions: Why are Asians labeled yellow? What does it mean to scream in order to be heard? Why haven't other Asians screamed as loudly as I want to? These urgent trappings of the immigrant experience marks a backdrop to an era marked by misinformation, animosity, and more videotaped, virally distributed, racially charged violence directed at Asians.

The first action plan that came to mind was having a small group dis-

cussion within but not limited to Asians and People of Color. The group discussion's format involved inviting people to create a total of six filmed group discussions. Then, I began building a Korean electioneering truck to distribute and to propagate these collections of stories as widely as possible. The type of truck that I envisioned is similar to those very popular during election season in Korea. The process of finding a suitable pickup truck became an interesting process because I wanted to incorporate as many facets about my body as an Asian woman into the role of a buyer meeting truck sellers. I met a wide range of people who were surprised to realize that the truck was for my own use; sellers included a caucasian couple expecting a baby from a rural part of Michigan, a house flipping gangster whose Facebook profile picture shows him holding a sniper rifle, salesmen working at large Ford dealerships, a skilled mechanic with a strong Southern accent, and an Indian used car broker in Atlanta. I visited them with my partner, Kevin, an Asian man. While inspecting trucks, negotiating, and making deals, everybody always looked at Kevin, not me, even though I asked questions and asserted that I will be the person who will own and buy this truck. These interactions provided ample opportunities to observe and witness how ordinary Americans see me and how I see others. I became more curious about my positionality and more enthusiastic about performing the opposite roles than those assigned to Asian women in the U.S.

As an artist who works closely with marginalized communities, I was curious about how social practice art can become a process of healing for racial minorities' generational traumas. And I continually questioned how I can conduct my practice without inappropriate interactions, exploitation, and misuse of community, which remain the main concerns in executing social practice art. Lastly, I wanted to deconstruct the concept of 'collaboration' in socially engaged art and my art practice because working with people does not necessarily result in a 'collaborative' end result. Through this investigation and research, I aimed to find a new vocabulary regarding my value and inclusive meth-

ods for working with people.

Ultimately, my work outlines interdisciplinary and cross-theoretical strategies and tactics for how young Asian diasporas can use identity fluidity and hybridity to chart and visualize their own futures and to articulate collective imagination. Also, I will talk about why we need to scream, and why we need to talk about yellow as Asian identity between white and black dichotomic racial poles. These questions are part of a more cohesive and aware social practice art that uses a new methodology: cascading active listening.

Through this thesis, I investigate the history of oppression towards Asians and where "yellow" Asians fit in the racial spectrum. I also introduce "diaspora" as a common thread in my art practice. My research focuses on the social practice genre and applied learnings to my methodology and practice.

CONTEXTUAL SECTION

Part I :Intersectionality Between Women and Asians

“We have also been victims to systemic racism throughout history, but we have been conditioned to pretend that it doesn’t exist, to minimize it.”

- Cathy Park Hong

Figure 1. Nicole Craine, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/03/17/us/shooting-atlanta-acworth

Shootings in Atlanta-based Asian Massage Parlors

In the early morning of March 17, I was awakened by my partner's shaken voice. He told me that a series of mass shootings occurred at three Asian-owned spas and massage parlors in Atlanta. And six of the eight victims were Asian women - their names are Hyun Jung Grant, Suncha Kim, Soon Chung Park, Yong Ae Yu, Daoyou Feng, Xiaojie Tan. Four of the six Asian women were of Korean descent. Robert Aaron Long, 21, the white shooter claimed he was driven by 'sexual addiction,' who wanted to eliminate 'temptation' away from god's grace and his atrocious act was described as Long "having a bad day" by law enforcement who apprehended him unharmed [1]. Asian communities were terrified and traumatized after Long's mass shooting that targeted Asian women as "temptresses" and who led him astray from his God. Even though the murderer targeted Asian massage shops, investigators have not identified this case as a hate crime with the excuse of

insufficient evidence of motivation.

I became conscious of my color and my status as an immigrant, woman of color and diaspora only after arriving in the U.S. The shift in my positionality from a privileged working woman to a marginalized woman of color prompted a lot of self-reflection. I was unaware of my privilege and agency as part of the 97% majority Korean population. Moving to the U.S, I thought deeply about where I am as an Asian woman, who the people are in the communities I belong to, what common or uncommon things we share, as well as who is excluded from those communities. While navigating social and academic life in Ann Arbor, I often felt invisible and insignificant as people seemed to view me not as a human being, but as "another Asian woman." And, I realized that people who look like me are excluded, undervalued, and have trouble finding a sense of belonging in the U.S. My understanding of racism in the United States was supplemented by Cathy Park Hong, author of the book, 'Minor Feelings: The Asian American Reckoning.' During an NPR interview about her book, Hong said:

> My mother, for instance, doesn't understand race in America, you know? She doesn't even see herself as Asian American, you know, or even Asian. She considers herself Korean.[2]

This short anecdote illustrates how I felt when I first moved to the United States, having never considered my race as part of my identity. Isabel Wilkerson makes a similar point through a James Baldwin quote, "No one was white before he/she came to America," and included an anecdote by a Nigerian-born playwright who said, "in Africa, there are no black people and they are not black until they arrive in America or in the U.K."[3] These quotes helped me understand why I felt unsettled and uncomfortable while passing through public spaces in the U.S. - I felt the dismissive gazes of others and was distressed by how I was being treated as a person of color in the U.S. I wanted to draw attention to my first taste of racism and microaggressions.

However, I counted it a blessing that I encountered few forms of physical violence as a result of racism. Microaggressions and feeling invisible in the eyes of the majority white population was emotionally scarring, and it was disheartening to read in the news that Asians continue to be excluded from top universities due to misapplied affirmative action laws. But physically, I felt mostly safe in spite of my status as an East Asian in a white majority country with a history of oppression towards people of color. I realized that some of my Asian community members and colleagues had told me they had not encountered much racism as a result of being a member of the "model minority." In addition, I have witnessed many of my light-skinned Asian peers (in Asia and in the U.S.) assuming themselves to be akin to white America in the way they would consume and relate to characters and narratives that are disseminated by Netflix, YouTube and academic reading lists filled with white canonical authors.

The pervasiveness of white norms and white beauty standards being mass-produced around the world is particularly worrisome as an artist and student asking what it means to be Asian. This misconception of my own positionality and safety completely changed on the day of the Atlanta shootings. I had been lying to myself to protect myself. And I quickly began work to learn the language of fighting back against the structures that pit Asians against Black, Latinx and other groups of color, and the premises that give Asians a false sense of security. I searched for historical precedents to contextualize the terrible violence that happened to Asians in Atlanta. This tragedy steered my research to the history of physical violence wrought onto Asian communities. I realized that author Cathy Park Hong was right - we were minimizing the threats made against us as a form of self-defense or as self-denial.

The Page Act of 1875, Chinese Exclusion Act and beyond

The aftermath of the mass shootings in Atlanta led me to research how this white shooter came to think of Asian women as deserving to die for tempting him. I quickly found active legislation which declared all Asian women as immoral until proven fit to immigrate to the U.S. As a precursor to the Chinese Exclusion Act, The Page Act of 1875 effectively banned the immigration of Chinese women from entering the U.S. because this group was deemed inherently "loose in morals" and may have frequented "houses of prostitution" in Hong Kong, Macau or mainland China. Based on George Anthony Peffer's article, under the Page Law, at least 200 female applicants were asked to answer the following questions.

> Have you entered into any contract or agreement with any person or persons whomsoever, for a term of service within the United States for lewd and immoral purposes? Do you wish of your own free and voluntary will to go to the United States? Do you go to the United States for the purposes of prostitution? Are you married or single? What are going to the United States for? What is to be your occupation there? Have you lived in a house of prostitution in Hong Kong, Macao, or China? Have you engaged in prostitution in either of the above places? Are you a virtuous woman? Do you intend to live a virtuous life in the United States? Do you know that you are at liberty now to go to the United States, or remain at home in your own country, and that you cannot be forced to go away from your home? [4]

After the law was enacted, the Chinese female population dropped 20 percent between 1870 and 1880 [5], which caused a decrease in the number of the Chinese laborers on the U.S. west coast and eventually the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

> The Page Act of 1875 actually predates the Chinese Exclusion Act [of 1882] ... They thought of Chinese women as all prostitutes ... they carried venereal diseases and actually that they were temptations for white men. [6]

After the Civil War, the white supremacists who remained in power blocked the seeds of 'another racial problem' by legislating the Chinese Exclusion Act and The Page Act. Miscegenation laws that already existed in the U.S. were extended to female Asian immigrants to cease Chinese women becoming "temptations" for white men who largely populated gold mining and railroad towns. After the Page Act of 1875, the Chinese Exclusion Act was enacted in 1882, which was the first legislation banning all members of a specific ethnic group from immigrating to the U.S. This exclusion was effective until 1943 when the Magnuson Act was enacted, which allowed 105 Chinese nationals to immigrate per year. All racial barriers were abolished through the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965.

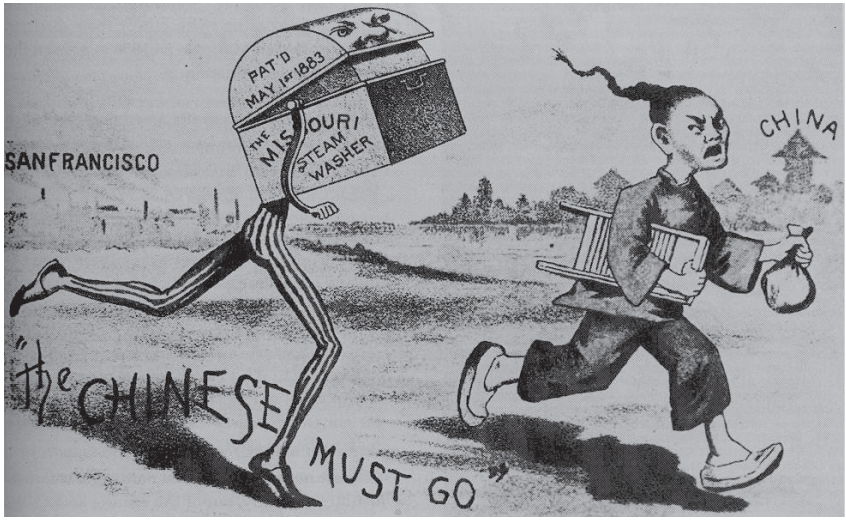

Figure 2. The Chinese Must Go!, trade card from the Missouri Steam Washer Company of St. Louis, Missouri, 1883, https://kadist.org/program/journal-plague-exhibit/.

> Part I also suggests that Asian exclusion had effects similar to domestic racial discrimination, by disadvantaging a group of nonwhite Americans. Just as the Jim Crow laws approved by Plessy had the purpose and effect of excluding African Americans from the benefits of citizenship, the Asian Exclusion Laws were intended to minimize Asian-American Population and influence, as they are today, a tiny minority.[7]

In 'Segregation's Last Stronghold', Chin introduced Asian Exclusion Laws and the political intentions of recently diminished southern lawmakers after the American Civil War. Asians or 'Coolies' were framed as an undesirable race unable to assimilate into white, English-speaking Christian culture and another potential flashpoint for race relations, like newly emancipated slaves, if the domestic Asian population grew to become too large. The motivation of 90 years of Asian Exclusion Laws was to keep the Asian-American population small and marginalize Asian groups' culture, politics, and economy, whether they were immigrating from "China, Japan or other oriental countries." In addition, Congress maintained anti-miscegenation laws to control minority groups. Browning says "The lack of such laws frequently reflects the fact that Negroes and Orientals are a negligible part of the population in these states, and that intermarriages are so few that the question can be ignored." In other words, white groups maintained economic and social advantages by oppressing minorities' cultural solidarity and social mobility.

I included a fake political party number "5.6" in the thesis show title, Screaming Yellow, as a reference to the percentage of Asians that make up the U.S. population. Asians did not become a racial minority by accident. Rather, the size of this demographic was designed to remain politically inert and subservient to grand infrastructure projects symbolizing white supremacy and the "refinement" of indigenous lands.

Figure 3. Screaming Yellow(The billboard design collaborating with Yen and Nick Azzro), 2021

No matter what kind of designation is placed on Asianness, we must remember that Japanese Americans were interned in the twentieth century and that honorary whiteness is a toxic newcomer to the U.S. lexicon. 120,000 of 127,000 Japanese Americans were forced to relocate and were incarcerated in concentration camps ordered by President Franklin D. Roosevelt after the Pearl Harbor attack. In addition, Vincent Chin, a Chinese American engineer in Detroit, was murdered by two white auto workers in 1982 during a surge of anti-Asian racism in the U.S. as response to Japan's dominance in the light, fuel efficient automobile category. Chin was mistaken to be Japanese. The murderers, Ronald Ebens and Michale Nitz, plead guilty and served no prison time, only probation and a $3,000 fine. [8]

Through my research, I realized there are many laws, social cues, threats of physical violence and microaggressions related to the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) experience. We have been targeted or labeled a "model minority" as needed to serve the interests of the state. I really wondered, then, why we have minimized our suffering and what are the results of this denial, though there are tons of precedents and recorded instances of anti-Asian discrimination.

These structures of denial and absence of self-determining language has left many in the AAPI community without the language to respond effectively against aggression towards African Americans, Muslims and undocumented migrants who are also being targeted by agents of white supremacy. And now it's our turn, Asians, who were once accepted, or perhaps tolerated as the mythic model minority, but have returned back to the position of scapegoat, vectors of disease, and temptations that must be eliminated to protect the purity of the English-speaking, white, Christian majority.

Intersectionality in Women of Color

In the chapter 'Structural Intersectionality and Bettering' in "Mapping the Margin'' by Kimberle Crenshaw, the author describes physically, mentally, and legally vulnerable immigrant women in detail.[9]

> The freedom, power, status, and self-realization of men is possible precisely because women work for them. Gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labor to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to women. Christine Delphy(1984), for example, describes marriage as a class relation in which women's labor benefits men without comparable remuneration. This creates a new system of the exploitation of women's domestic labor mediated by state institutions, which she calls public patriarchy.[10]

Needless to say, women have been exploited through their labor, care and sacrifice under patriarchy throughout history. In Young's article, five different types of oppression are outlined: exploitation, marginalization, cultural imperialism, powerlessness and violence. Most of them apply to women of color. On top of this exploitation, Crenshaw illustrates that women of color are pushed into the margins in the way of 'People of Color' and 'Women." She brings to light the problem of political consequences intersecting with antiracist and feminist thought by saying that "one often implicitly denies the validity of the other." In addition, she explains that immigrant women are often excluded from decent jobs, shelters, and the world outside of home due to language barriers and threats of deportation. These factors become much harder in the face of domestic abuse. Worst of all, many immigrant POC women chose to stay with abusive husbands rather than being deported. Crenshaw introduces a case of a Latina woman who was refused accommodation at a shelter for battered women because of her lack of English proficiency. Even after receiving repeated threats of violence from her husband, she was never given sanctuary by the women who

managed the shelter. The threat of being deported, and turning away those who do not speak English, is destroying human dignity because they are 'People of Color' and 'women.'[11]

In Collins's 'Black Feminist Thoughts,' she explains how the position of Black women has been shaped in this country by the term, "mules uh de world" from Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston. Collins explains U.S. Black women have dealt with overrepresentation as super-moms who work for family, nursing homes, and all low-paying jobs:

> When combined Black feminist-inspired analyses of paid and unpaid work performed both in the labor market and in families stimulate a better appreciation of the powerful and complex interplay that shapes Black women's position as "de mule uh de world." Such analyses also promise to shed light on ongoing debates concerning connections between work and family.[12]

On the other hand, white identity and whiteness is the ultimate protection to guarantee basic needs and survival. Harris adds that "Whiteness was the characteristic, the attribute, the property of free human beings."

The premises over Asian women and women of color, that we are "immoral" until proven otherwise remains the same now as it did in 1875. From a legal perspective, I was under the threat of deportation at any time under the marriage fraud provisions of the Immigration and Nationality Act. The law itself presumed I may commit fraud to get a green card just because I am not a U.S. citizen and have married a U.S. citizen. This presumption already lays out the hierarchy in a person's marriage life. We are asked and requested to prove 'we are not committing marriage fraud' nor 'purposes of prostitution' when requesting visas to travel to the U.S. In addition, women of color remain in a blind spot between white feminism and activism for people of color due to the fact that we are not in positions to call out offenders of the "Me

Too" movement, or the deadly violence perpetrated by the hands of armed white police officers.

Part II: Yellow in the racial spectrum

Who is dispensable and who is not?

> "In this country, American means white. Everybody else has to hyphenate."
>
> — Toni Morrison

In 'Five faces of oppression' by Iris Young, she describes exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness related to power dynamics and oppression. The oppressions created by social division can be explained by the structure of who benefits from whom and who is dispensable.[14]

Wilerson briefly alludes to racial hierarchy during COVID-19 by pointing out who is working for whom while the world faces this devastating novel virus. Documented hate crimes towards Asians during this pandemic fits into the narrative which I am attempting to address in my practice, namely the story of marginalized peoples in a time of fractured global politics and insufficient resources to combat social injustice. The COVID-19 pandemic speaks volumes in terms of how systems of oppression work against the Asian community, especially when empowered racists can spread lies about who 'belongs' or who is 'native' in an embattled society. In addition, it became clear during the early months of 2020 where the U.S.' inherent racial hierarchies and racial disparities exist; between black or brown communities on the frontlines and a majority white population whose privilege allows them to shelter in place and work from home. This virus has especially devastated POC communities who live in the U.S. because of unequal access to healthcare and accurate information. Therefore, I wish to address these ineq-

uities through my work psychologically, ethically, and philosophically.

In the final days of the Trump administration, Asian communities were faced with frequent racist attacks and were labeled as vectors of COVID-19 with phrases like “Kung Flu” and “Chinese virus.” These racist memes preyed on age-old stereotypes and made elderly Asians as easy targets for racially motivated attacks in East and West Coast areas of the U.S.[15]

While filming one discussion with four Asian women in August 2020, the topic quickly shifted to hate crimes against Asians in cities right after the pandemic took hold. All four of the guests nodded in agreement that there were few avenues and no language to talk about racism toward Asians. Asians must raise their voices over the long term, permanently scream, to protest the wheel of scapegoating which always turns, refreshes and grinds whoever is next easily targeted.

I wanted my artwork to serve as an avenue for greater racial equity and social justice, not only for members of the Asian diaspora I belong to, but also for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color.) To make this happen, I began having conversations with Asians first, to reflect on this group’s representation and future action. To bring about Asianness as a viable, visible and self-determined status, I attempted to define it without discussing other people of colors’ cases. But I found it’s difficult to discuss without using whiteness to compare with.

White Supremacy and White privilege

While enrolled in a Critical Race Studies course, most of the readings and debates heavily focused on whiteness, white entitlement, white privilege and white supremacy. I was confused because I assumed the course would focus on the voices of African-American women and the lived experience of those most impacted back racism, rather than highlighting whiteness. However, I learned it is necessary to first grasp

the implications of whiteness before learning how oppression towards people of color and systemic discrimination through law continues to be propogated to this day. As Toni Morrison said in an interview, "If you can only be tall if someone is on their knees, then you have a serious problem."[16] Ms. Morrison's observation is that a society is doomed if its ruling powers can self-actualize only on the basis of subjugating another group of people. But ironically, the instability of the ruling power becomes even more apparent because they must step on the backs of those they have oppressed. Based on this idea, I began to wonder where I am located in this racist caste system based on whiteness.

One marker can be how the Latinx community is treated because of its proximity to a toxic power plant called Exide. This case study can be one determinant of Latinx immigrants' positionality. In the article, Geographies of Race and Ethnicity, Pulido begins by differentiating between White privilege and white supremacy:

1. White privilege highlights the benefits that white people take for granted about prioritization on taking, including land, wages, life,

Fig. 4. Brian Feinzimer, 2020. lataco.com/exide-california-vernon

liberty, health, community, and social status. Also, white privilege allows reproduced racial injustice in the system.

2. White Supremacy is explained with the example of Exide in Vernon, CA. Large numbers of low-income Latina/o immigrants reside in Bell, Maywood and Huntington Park. In the neighboring city, Exide is a hazard area with 88 different regulated chemicals including cancer-causing arsenic. Even though the community members are in danger, Exide chose to ignore laws and not to protect the residences.

Laura Pulido explains how financial well-being for whites and the Exide plant is prioritized over the health and welfare of local Latinx residents and identifies this lapse in government regulation as a form of white supremacy.[17] The Exide plant is abandoned but is still emitting toxic chemicals in the local area where Latinx communities live close by - the court allowed Exide to walk away from its plant without proper clean up.[18]

Pulido adds white supremacy is an attitude of racial superiority by saying that people have a harder time empathizing with those who are:

1. They are Latina/o
2. They are Low-income
3. They are mostly immigrants.

Pulido distinguishes white supremacy from white privilege by explaining how white privilege does not fully explain the various forms of environmental racism. White privilege emphasizes the generational wealth and benefits only available to inheriting whiteness. The Exide example in Pulido's article shows how white supremacy exposes other community members to health risks, and willfully chooses to ignore laws that would have protected residents of color.

In 'Racial Capitalism,' Nancy Leong explains a form of racial diversity that ultimately benefits white institutions and whiteness by providing them with the mental equipment to relish experiences with diverse races before entering the working world, to promote their school as welcoming to paying students of color, and to be free from the stigma of being 'racists': "Obviously, whites want black friends so as not to appear racist." This formulation is useful when deciphering how the cause of diversity has become another tool for profit and reinforcement of white institutions and whiteness. I often witness this type of promotion - while driving in Ypsilanti, many of the street lamps are adorned with flags that showcase the university's supposed diverse student body. Dozens of smiling multi-ethnic faces promote Eastern Michigan University's public image. I could not stop staring at each of the flags, wondering if the faces of an African-American boy, an Asian girl, and a biracial woman were there to appeal to me, or someone else. The deconstruction of the structures of oppression, and the revealing of forces that shore up white supremacy, has helped me understand what it means to be white, a person of color, to be a black woman, and even what it means to be, and where it leaves Asians in the racial spectrum. As Leong points out, we need to talk about motives and methods of practices to achieve true racial diversity.[19]

Leong says when Korean-American employees appeal to be promoted to leadership positions, they need to be perceived as American rather than Korean as a response to cultural imperialism. "Cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other."[20] Iris Young points out how cultural imperialism produces dominant cultures and renders the perspective of one's own group invisible because they self-deny and self-stereotype members of their own community as Other.

‘Me’ and ‘them’: the in-between where ‘my identity’ tends to change organically.

- Nikki S. Lee

Fig. 5. Nikki S. Lee: Project, 1997-2001, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/nikki-s-lees-shapeshifting-art-cultural-appropriation-1202682096/

The artist, Nikki Lee, actively plays with cultural assimilation. She chose to assimilate into social subcultures, to become one of them, including young punks, senior citizens, yuppies, and hip-hop fans by mimicking their style. (fig.5) She saw identities and assimilation not as fixed things but interchangeable. Ironically, her work was significant to me because her mimicry of so many different styles of life clashed with the stereotype of her Asian femininity. Her work is relevant because of how she draws attention to the confinement of roles for Asians in mainstream society and makes me ask myself whether driving a yellow pickup truck is outside the roles assigned to me as an Asian woman, or if I am playing the role of trying to get out of the assigned identity role?

Leong stated “only white males can escape group marking and can be individuals.”[21] These beautiful remarks fully explain why I felt like half a

human being as a woman and a person of color in social situations and professional settings in the U.S. I had denied feelings of dehumanization, but learned that they were not hallucinations. By learning where my own positionality is within the spectrum of white and black, I can learn with others where new spaces might exist to explore and articulate our individuality and Asianness. I armed myself with the tools for collaboration, for challenging and navigating around systems of oppression.

Part III: What is being Asian?

> The legislation says: "If your skin be yellow, if your father and mother were Mongolians, you may be as pure, as good, as law abiding, as useful, as honorable, as honest as any man who lives, but because of that into which no moral quality possibly can enter, the color of your skin, you shall be made an exile or a criminal, or sent to the penitentiary, if you stay." Representative Cassidy's argument that "all of them are bad."[22]

In the U.S., there are many grey areas and politically charged questions about where Asians lie within the spectrum of Black and White racial poles. In the article, 'Is Yellow Black or White,' the author, Gary Okihiro, said "black" meant "non-white," and "white" excluded all persons of color.[23] During the course of slavery in the U.S., many Asians, especially Chinese were employed to maintain white political supremacy through cheap labor and tacit acceptance of not having voting rights. These people were called "Coolies." And, he added that Asians and Africans share status and repression as the Other and there "lies the liberating nature of African-Asian unity."

Within the grey area of racial supremacy and Otherness, I was not too confident in understanding whether: "I qualify as a member of Black and Brown communities?" or if "I am privileged or underprivileged as an East Asian?" and "Will other POC disparage me if I voice my strug-

gle with racial oppression?" until the shootings in Atlanta happened. The most obvious tool of social control I found was the big umbrella term 'Asian' used to describe a broad category of peoples living in this country, including immigrants from Central Asia, Northeast Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and Pacific Islanders. This purposefully amorphous label hides the fact that we all look different, practice different customs and cultures, and lack a common language which, over time, can be gathered and organized into one unified, powerful voice.

Double consciousness and shame of being Asian in the U.S.

Iris Young introduces W.E.B. Du Bois's "double consciousness" in 'Five Faces of Oppressions,' which says people of color always look at themselves through the eyes of whiteness.[24] Du Bois's double consciousness aligns with why I want to create alternative spaces for underrepresented people like me: I wish to address not only lack of representation but also to challenge norms set by whites within our consciousness. Within liminal spaces, we can have hopeful talks about said norms, how they became norms for Asians in the U.S., what norms need to be dismantled and how we can arrive there. The act of gathering to discuss racist, sexist or homophobic forms of violence can subvert and destabliize privilege or the dominant group's interests.

The concept of double consciousness made me recall two cases of targeted violence against Asians. The first is an Asian man who was expelled from a United Airlines flight in 2017 (fig. 6). Dr. David Dao was injured and dragged off a fully-booked plane by security officers after he refused to surrender his seat. The scene of Dr. Dao being slammed into an arm rest and bleeding from the head was video-taped by another passenger and went viral. I was flabbergasted after seeing footage of Dr. Dao being helplessly dragged by the authorities, hearing only verbal complaints of fellow passengers protesting his rough treatment, and learning how he had refused to give up the seat because he had to see

Fig. 6. Twitter picture by Tyler Bridges, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-39562288

his patients the following day.[25] I contrast Dr. Dao's treatment to many videos circulated on TikTok or Reddit of white passengers who are handled more gently by U.S. marshalls for more egregious violations, such as lighting a cigarette aboard the plane or refusing to comply with mask mandates.

Another video which reminded me of the concept of double-consciousness was shared by a student on Canvas in the class I was teaching; this video depicted an animal rights' activist group's protest at a duck farm (fig. 7) - the protesters hung U-locks around their necks to protest conditions on industrial slaughter chains. Among the 20 participants in the protest, only one person was injured, an Asian man who was lifted off his feet by the chain around his neck.[26] It was a terrifying scene, not because he was in pain, but because the video ended without explaining if the Asian man was alright, and whether he received medical attention. These two terrible images of Asian figures cast long shadows on my consciousness. On top of these shameful cases, there is an absence of spaces to talk and discuss these instances of Asian targeting. Cathy Park Hong says,

Fig. 7. Bryan Ke, 2019, https://nextshark.com/animal-rights-activist-protest/

> To grow up Asian in America is to witness the humiliation of authority figures like your parents and to learn not to depend on them: they cannot protect you. The indignity of being Asian in this country has been underreported.[27]

Asian fathers seldom become heroes capable of protection unless they are extremely smart or special in other ways. Witnessing indignity of being Asian within the family often perpetuates self-hate or racism towards other groups even if they are under the same category of race. Hong adds that the insufficiency of Asian identity is explained by the way whites see us.

In the contemporary art world, there is double consciousness and stereotypes in the way of seeing and valuing Asian art: orientalism or subjugation. In the article, "The Critical Theories for Korean Contemporary Art: The Post-colonialism and Beyond in Sooja Kim's Art Works," Whui-Yeon Jin explains how we are mapping culture and aesthetics based on shifting boundaries, liminal positioning, hybridity and difference. There is a lack of understanding for Asian arts because art from Asia or Asian artists' works are often interpreted, judged and reviewed from the perspective of "Western" art history. She explains "if the

theory is still dependent upon the hierarchical difference and severance between West and East and regards East as the receiver of the central trends, the post-colonial theory is self-contradictory and [falls] apart. Postcolonialism, the Westerner's view of the East, depends upon the division between East vs. West, man vs. woman, spirit vs. material."[28] In terms of 'Being Other' in western-centered art, Asian artists' works are often interpreted through the lens of whiteness. In particular, an article on Sooja Kim's work (fig. 8) uses the descriptor Post-colonial; however, the author points out that postcolonialism itself exemplifies the male invention, which supports the western centric form of mythology without understanding Sooja Kim's work with fresh eyes.

Cathy Park Hong says "You don't like how you look, how you sound" as we see ourselves through the lens of whiteness. The symptoms of racial self-hatred make it easy to believe a mock-up of white assimilation: honorary whites.

The concept of 'honorary white' is introduced in the book Caste by Wilkerson for a light-skinned person of color. In the caste system, the

Fig. 8. Sooja Kim, Bottari Truck, 2000, http://www.kimsooja.com/texts/tae.html.

structural roles assigned to people can provide avenues similar to what the dominant caste enjoys. However, proximity to whiteness never guarantees escape from being scapegoated. Wilkerson illustrates well how plays can be a perfect metaphor of stereotyping and assigned roles:

> Everyone knows who the hero is, who the supporting characters are, who is the sidekick good for laughs, and who is in shadow, the undifferentiated chorus with no lines to speak, no voice to sing, but necessary for the production to work. You are not yourself. You are not to be yourself. Stick to the script and to the part you are cast to play, and you will be rewarded. We are all players on a stage that was built long before our ancestors arrived in this land. We are the latest cast in a long-running drama that premiered on this soil in the early seven-teenth century.[29]

Later in her book, she makes a point about weathering. Highly educated people of color are prone to be more weathered by racism, which leads to emotional and physical health degradation because they are fully aware of the oppressions and violences weighing onto them. Faux privileges and avenues to dominant white cultures given to honorary whites such as light-skinned Asians or Latinx alarms me, especially when people do not fully recognize the motives and intentions of their being given access. I had to consider who I had elbowed aside while trying to escape the "packed, flooded basement." And, of course, the unspoken knowledge that the most effective way to get out of flooded basements is collaborating with other groups - we can form an orderly line to justice, to escape the basement and save ourselves through self-determination.

Diaspora as a common thread: displacement and hope for empathy

I found that diaspora is a common thread during my research of critical race theory, history, and shared lived experiences of 'non-whites.' As Young said, we need to avoid crowding into 'groups' to escape from stereotypes and shaped perceptions from a dominant society while acknowledging the fact that every person is different. Even if Korean immigrant women have many shared customs, norms and cultures, every member of the Korean immigrant community is different. In addition, even though African-Americans and Asian-Americans share similar histories of oppression from race-based laws, these two groups have been pitted against one another, and still Anti-Asian sentiment within African American communities is real, and vice versa, which only serves to reinforce white supremacy. Then, how do we combat the system of oppression, racial discrimination and white supremacy at the same time as one collective voice? What narratives can we focus on to unify those displaced from our homelands, to bring one's own culture front and center in the U.S. As we accept that we all are in some relation to diasporas and we all are different, we can find new and creative ways to promote racial justice, to resist white supremacy and organize ourselves

In 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' Stuart Hall emphasizes the importance of representation for a variety of diaspora communities because mixed layers of identities lead to discovering and bringing to light modes of escape from the continuities of hidden suppressions. While pointing out the modes of producing cultural identity, Hall highlights the needs of opening a dialogue, an investigation on the subject of cultural identity and its representation.[30] Expanding a spectrum of cultural identities itself is worthy - that is why I pursue my art practice. Minority members' suffering has been insufficiently documented and heard because retelling personal encounters with racism and oppres-

sion is often considered complaining, rather than compelling. In fact, there are persistent deficits surrounding the language and audience for these narratives. The diaspora has an ever-changing identity due to shifts in geopolitics and the global economy - each new generation puts in its own efforts to come to terms with shifts in the cultural and political landscape of the United States, and to establish their own communities.

Understanding a cultural point of origin and the "new world" gives young people camelionizing traits, such as code-switching, based on where they are and who they are with. It means continually re-inventing one's self, re-being, that is, 'becoming.'[31] Young people in the U.S. must navigate a new hybrid culture defined by multi-locality and connect with others, both "here" and "there."[32] Their identities inevitably are producing and reproducing experiences of the migrant through generational traumas, including dislocation, displacement and hybridity. In the global realm, diasporic communities play with "transnational connectivity" through digital media, and they refine a hybridized identity which responds to conditions on the ground in multiple localities.[33] I began searching for hybridity and fluidity as mediums of my social practice and method of art-making.

Part IV: Social practice

My art practice initiates a dialogue or group discussion among marginalized communities as 'social practice' by inviting people to debate, collaborate and engage with commonly held assumptions about Asians' positionality in U.S. society. To reinforce the notion that all art is social, I wrestled with what may be the most effective way of distributing messages, concepts, and social movements. I explored Critical Race Theory, history, and everyday incidents in the first three parts of the contextual section to understand what 'non-white,' 'Asian' and 'Asian women' mean in the States. Now, I will shift gears to social practice

art to examine existing problems, precedents and possible solutions as part of art practice. Before diving into the problems of social practice art, I want to define the term first.

What is Social Practice Art? Problems with social practice

Social practice is a broader term of socially engaged art, social engagement art and community art as part of the new genre of public art.[34] Before art, the term social practice applied to broad fields of study such as psychology, activism, education, and literature. In art, social practice is similar in concept to activist art, performance, ethnography, relational aesthetics, and conversation pieces. It functions as social and political in the way of addressing political issues.[35] Pablo Helguera says "social practice avoids avocations of both the modern role of artist (as an illuminated visionary) and the postmodern version of the artist (as a self-conscious critical being)." Social practice includes democratizing functions that make artists into individuals who work with society, who share identities with the community, who collaborate, participate, and conversate for public art. When I applied for an art project grant at Arts Engine at the University of Michigan for my thesis show, I was surprised when a committee member asked me: "I don't see this as art. Why is your work not just a conversation, social work or sociology?" It concerned me that this art grant committee member needed to be convinced on how contemporary art is conceptual. Helguera answers this question well - social work and social practice art share similarities such as a value-based project aiming for the betterment of humanity and work for justice and human dignity; however, it is different in the way that the artist may work using method of ironizing, problematizing, and enhancing tensions to reflect the subject matters.[36]

> For too long Social Practice has been the notoriously flimsy flip-side of market-based contemporary art: a world of hand-wringing practitioners easily satisfied with the feeling of 'doing good' in a community, and unaware that their quasi-activist, anti-formalist positions in fact have a long artistic heritage and can be critically dissected using the tools of art and theatre history."
>
> —Claire Bishop[37]

If as Lorraine Hasberry says, 'all art is social' and art is a tool to deliver a message to the outside world, the form of the message is crucial to social and political ends. Even though social practice and socially engaged art articulates communities' situations, raising political issues in communities and collaborating with people is fraught with potential problems. In addition, Helguera defines the functions of documentation:

> The tendency to use documentation as proof of a practice and as the relic of a work may be related to the legacy of the action-based art of the 1970s. ...SEA[38] documentation must be understood and utilized in full recognition of its inadequacy as a surrogate for the actual experience (unless it is meant to be the final product, in which case the work would not be SEA).[39]

Documentation of SEA can hardly match the experience of witnessing or participating in an ongoing artistic work on the street or in a gallery space. Polished artistic documentation is largely misunderstood to be 'art.' However, I learned through my practice the differences between artistic practice and documentation.

Who is the giver and who is the receiver?

> "I would like to start by saying that I find the concept of "generosity" problematic in that it assumes a hierarchical structure between a giver and a recipient. I think there are very few artists interested in such a structure, especially if they are working in a social context."
>
> —Jorgen Svensson[40]

The means of generosity or 'doing good' always carries a power dynamic. I pushed myself to more consciously consider who is the giver, who is the receiver and what politics are behind the hierarchical power structure in the context of generosity. I found this form of giver/receiver structures everywhere. Normally, when artists work with a community, artists act as givers and community members become receivers. However, the following artist uses the concept of 'generosity' in an interesting way.

Jane Jin Kaisen challenges the norm of cultural generosity, which in reality is formulated and governed by privileged members of Western cultures. She makes films, installations, photos and performances about borders, migration, power dynamics in translation, and cultural practices of diverse communities. In the work, Loving Belinda (2006/2015), Kasien destabilizes reality by staging and reversing the racial "order" within transnational adoption. In one of her mockumentary films, she depicts an Asian couple adopting a blond, blue-eyed girl. What is captured is the unusualness of this fake situation and what is revealed is the existing racial hierarchy in adoption culture. According to Kaisen, the work exposes some of the uneven economic, racial, and cultural relations of power that are embedded within the practice but that tend to remain unspoken. Through this project, she tries to deconstruct and dismantle assumptions about generosity and rescue behind the phenomenon (and business) of international transracial adoption of Asian children.

Fig. 9. Jane Jin Kaisen, Loving Belinda, 2006/2015.

Speaking for Others and Hierarchy between artists and participants

> I would stress that the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise.[41]

Linda Alcoff highlights the hierarchy between artists and community members when artists speak for others. She stresses the importance of developing strategies to accurately identify the source of a community's problems instead of distributing the ability to speak or be heard, because it is not a solution for the problem itself. In addition, Ben Davis argues in his article, 'A critique of social practice art: what does it mean to be a political artist?': "repeating the problem is not helping but suggesting solutions is what the community wants."[42] We can think about "whether a social practice work is what the community members really wanted or not." If not, a social practice artwork can be categorized as a symptom of the artist's savior complex and artists' generosity for feeling good 'doing good.' Based on these quotations by Alcoff and Svensson, how can we enhance (self-)recognition and action for a better resolution especially in socially related arts; in addition, what are the dangers posed by artwork which address issues outside of the artist's own community if there is a hierarchy when artists speak for others? When artists speak for other communities, the community can benefit from the 'art or artist' in specific cases according to Linda Alcoff:

> The rituals of speaking that involve the location of speaker and listeners affect whether a claim is taken as a true, well-reasoned, compelling argument, or a significant idea. Thus, how what is said gets heard depends on who says it, and who says it will affect the style and language in which it is stated, which will in turn affect its perceived significance (for specific hearers.)[43]

Alcoff's quote applies to Ai Weiwei's work (fig.10). Ai Weiwei defines his position in art as that of an activist for the cause of social justice, an artist who is compelled "to give a voice to people who might never be heard." Recently, his work touched upon the theme of refugees and migrants who arrived in Europe by covering the columns of Konzerthaus Berlin with life jackets.

Fig. 10. Ai Weiwei, https://www.thisiscolossal.com/2016/02/ai-weiwei-konzerthaus-refugee-life-vests/

However, this work received much criticism because it repeats and reimagines a problem in a disingenuous way: his intention is to highlight the tragedies of mass displacement and migration by jolting people to pay attention. I found the limitation of his art due to its momentary nature. After all, Ai Weiwei will eventually de-install his work, he will return to his studio, and the problem of migrants drowning in the Mediterranean Sea in their attempts to settle in Germany will continue. This criticism applies to almost all social art practitioners because the motivations or aftermath of the work falls into two different categories:

1. Artists are invited to the community to do service. In this case, artists receive commission but artists can question is this art or service?

2. Artists direct a project and then invite community members. It is easy for artists to request community members to perform or do certain actions based on what the artist imagines.

Ultimately, voluntary community involvement would be best, but matching up everyone's benefits to the intention or motivations of an artist is almost impossible.

There are several more artists working with communities where they do not belong, but have overcome the limitations of only temporarily being involved in local community issues. First, Suzanne Lacy speaks widely about women and other people in the street. Her various themes of addressing social issues are all strongly tied to women's voices. She found a common thread with her participants, spectators, and audiences, who are all women, as a woman. But some of her works happened in the street where she allowed people to speak their own voices such as The Oakland Projects (fig.11).

> Lacy proposed a series of workshops that would address the mutual distrust between Oakland youth and police officers. Lacy and collaborators from The Roof is on Fire created a series of six weekly dialogues between eighteen youth and ten police officers, collaborating with Police Captain Sharon Jones and a facilitator from the U.S. Justice Department.[44]

I felt her most powerful works, such as De tu puño y letra (2014-2015) (fig. 12), The Circle and The Square (2015-2017), and The Oakland Projects (1991-2001) (fig. 11) did not take place in her own communities. De tu puño y letra took place in Ecuador with domestic abuse survivors and their families; The Oakland Projects was with a community that deeply mistrusted the police; The Circle and The Square took place in Northwest England. I was very curious about how she found the

Fig. 11. Suzanne Lacy, The Roof is on Fire, 1993-1994, Oakland, California. https://www.suzannelacy.com/performance-installation#/the-oakland-projects/.

Fig. 12. Suzanne Lacy, De tu puño y letra, Quito, 2014-2015, Ecuador https://www.suzannelacy.com/performance-installation#/de-tu-puno-y-letra/

validation to speak for others? I found 'time' (Lacy's work often takes between two and ten years to complete) as one approach to earn trust within communities to act as a spokesperson.

The research for my art projects focused heavily on Critical Race Studies, which made me aware of what it means to have a yellow, brown or black body in the U.S. And most importantly I was able to understand my own positionality: Asian woman in the West. The research provided ample cases of injustice, exploitation and hardships from history and the current moment. Meanwhile, group discussions on pan-diaspora social issues, and exercises that required speaking with and for other marginalized, non-conforming groups, filled in the gaps between ethnic categorizations and racial hierarchy. Thus far, my work has focused on collecting voices from people living on the margins, those not easily seen in mainstream media and voices that too often go unheard. I found the urgency of creating a venue for/with diasporic communities while society minimizes the severity of the problem and scapegoats a vulnerable population. While conducting interviews and group discussions with many people of color, my investigations into diaspora centered on immigrants, most of whom are Asian women. My work aimed to empower Asian women to break stereotypes and to create a positive connotation of Yellowness.

During the art-making process, I continually paused and asked myself whether I am empowering a more diverse group of diaspora by archiving their voices, if this is what these people want, or if this project is simply a justification to borrow their voice for my own artistic ambitions. But one interviewee's feedback encouraged me when she said "No one has ever asked me these questions before about my own experiences of exclusion" - I found a possibility to explore and listen to the community where I can stand in proximity. This approach to art-making and social activism is what I have arrived at to nullify my own hesitation in speaking for others and finding just solutions to social problems. But still, an important question remained for me to

answer: will this method of investigation, data collection and execution fill the gaps of otherness in the arts?

Krzysztof Wodiczko is an influential artist who works with marginalized communities. He uses projection art to combine interviews of marginalized citizens including the homeless, immigrants, survivors of domestic violence and war veterans in the public sphere by speaking mainly about war, trauma, memory and communication (fig.13). Even though his participants' ethnicities, races and genders are diverse, he uses displacement from conflict and the status of refugee as the main thread of his work. This was possible because he knew what being a refugee meant based on his own lived-experience. He was born during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in Poland, so he moved frequently.

> Wodiczko was born in Warsaw in 1943, three days before the start of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, the enormous act of Jewish resistance during World War II. His mother's side of the family were among the thousands of Jews who perished. As a baby, he was hidden with his mother, then smuggled through the front line to the Soviet side with the help of his father's family, who were Christian.

He found a common thread as being a refugee and speaking for others including himself.

In contrast, if artists use icons, symbols, or issues of different communities where the artist does not belong, he or she can be accused of cultural appropriation. I have seen 'Napalm girl' photographs, the symbolic image taken by Nick Ot in 1972 during the Resistance War Against America, in many artworks. Artists may have used this image to show their perspective of seeing Asia, Asian victimhood and racial power dynamics. However, to what benefit is this to the victims of aerial bombardment? If the benefit received by the image's subjects is zero despite the use of the image, then it can be deemed as cultural appropriation. The identification of these old questions and problems,

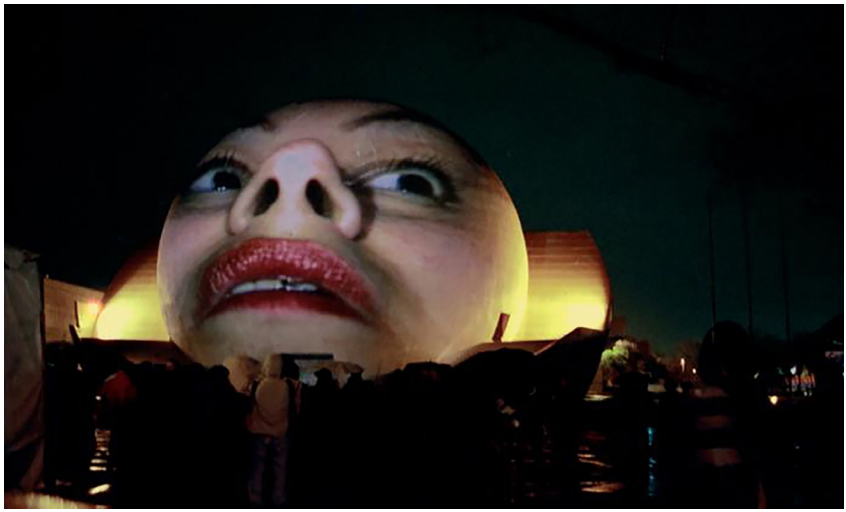

Fig. 13. Krzysztof Wodiczko, The Tijuana Projection, 2001, El Centro Cultural, Tijuana https://www.krzysztofwodiczko.com/public-projections#/new-gallery-79/

Fig. 14. Nick Ut, 1972, Trang Bang, Vietnam, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/nick-ut-photojournalist-who-made-famed-vietnam-war-napalm-girl-n1254517.

and the pursuit of new solutions derived from art-making with communities, has led me to activities which enhance social awareness of standardized norms. There are several social practice and community-based artists who showed me alternative approaches in creating social arts. They are speaking for themselves and also include those who are adjacent to others.

There are two required factors for gaining validation and the right to appropriately speak with/for the community:

1. Proof of stake: the artist's fortunes are tied to how well or badly a community does in the long-term. Once the artist's sense of belonging is established, then the community enables him or her to speak on their behalf.

If the artist is not from the community, we can ask what is the motivation and intention behind the practice. Otherwise, these questions must follow: Is this community project for the benefit of your artistic career, or is this work commissioned?

2. Extensive time spent listening to the voices of the local community to become a newly welcomed member.

My intent is echoed in Lucy Lippard's statement, "We take for granted that making art is not simply "expressing oneself" but is a far broader and more important task - expressing oneself as a member of a larger unity, or comm/unity, so that in speaking for oneself one is also speaking for those who cannot speak." I would add here that I am speaking with as well as for those whose voices I amplify through my art. When the artwork wants to create a bridge between the community's reality and the representation of it within the arts, artists need to be situated/saturated in the problem itself which they talk about.

METHODOLOGY

To hear unheard voices of community members, I aimed to create liminal spaces, but I faced the problems of speaking for others. That is to say, I encountered a dilemma of advocating for an issue through the voices of participants in my artwork, and I became self-conscious about speaking for them as an outsider, an artist who visualizes the problems, and then inevitably leaves. My methodology entails carefully documenting discussions among young members of an Asian diaspora group and disseminating these talks on a moving screen.

In addition, I used dialogue as a method. Helguera varied conversation into several categories (fig. 15). He adds that conversation may include too casual exchanges without brainstorming, so that discursive format can be a conjunctive between conversation and discussion. The verbal exchange embraces unexpected outcomes, spontaneity and tangents instead of chasing a goal. My art practice consists of sharing and articulating knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation through dialogue similar to Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy.[45]

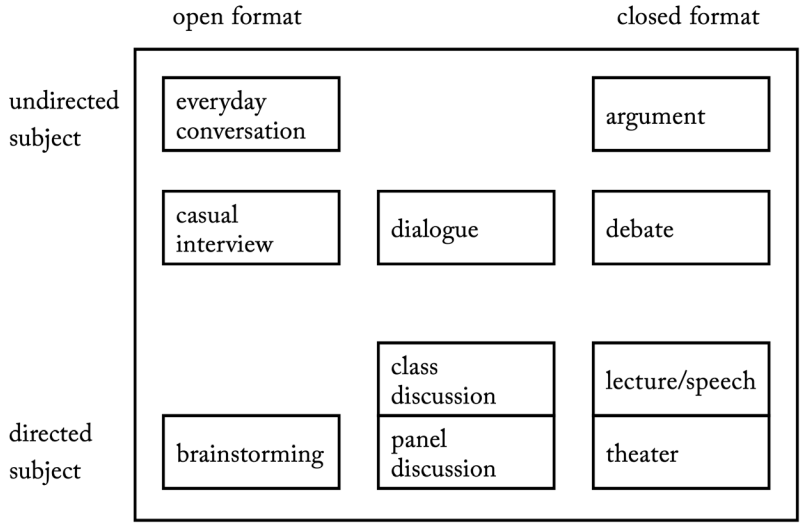

Fig. 15. Helguera, Pablo. Diagram in Education for Socially Engaged Art: 45

Documentation in my work was not just "proof of work" or the relic of a work; on the contrary, the videos became the staging of relation as a moderation. The video-documentation of participants' discussion functioned not only as archival material but also as an artist moderator which keeps delivering previous participants' questions to the audience in the present.[46]

Cascading Active Listening

Social practice and community-based art can be processes for building bridges between people in a community and those outside that community, as well as between art and politics. By using art as a vehicle for truth seeking and seeing, we can identify modes of invisible oppression, reveal their nature, and discuss how to shed more light on approaches that resolve real issues. Through social practice and research, I aimed to create a space in communities where I belong and do not belong. When I seek validation for speaking for others as an activist, I attempt to stand in relation to proximity to minorities and furthering social

justice because I am aware that injustices prevail in all societies and are tied to one another. In addition, I questioned why some art is considered outstanding even though the subject is not in the artist's community; on the other hand, some forms of art-making that attempt to incorporate or challenge the boundary between majority groups by highlighting similarities are invalid. I investigated this narrow window of validation by introducing examples of speaking for others (in and outside of class) and showing their differences and similarities.

After researching social practice and socially engaged art projects, I found that a material lack of active listening ultimately leads to projects failing due to the artist savior complex coupled with a lack of understanding about the needs of the community. My approach is to start a dialogue among community members or target audiences and to center their own voices as the main piece; next, I create methods for their voices to cascade with one another, to flow and feed into the next dialogue. During the two-year MFA program, I have documented and actively listened to a total of forty hours of group discussions and interviews. Furthermore, my method involved requiring participants to listen to what previous participants and community members have said before their discussion begins in earnest. Therefore, I always played the previous participants' films during the first ten minutes of small group discussions. This introductory screening enabled four or five members to do a deep dive into the subject matter at the core of the films. This process also jump-started the creation of their own narratives, which then cascaded to the next discussion in the future.

Process-oriented Practice

One of my main methodologies is process-oriented art practice. I dislike defining the final outcome before beginning, controlling the process, and polishing the final product under pre-existing beauty standards and aesthetics. This philosophy is based on my belief that art should

provide value for the future and not be viewed as a commodity in the present. To avoid following the mainstream standard in art for selling, I chose not to have a final product idea. Instead, I navigated the art making process through intuition, followed through on newly opened opportunities by retracing previous steps, and embraced coincidence as a method.

I extensively interviewed Yena Song, a first-generation Korean American woman living in L.A who I was introduced to by a friend during my first semester of MFA. I decided to meet her in-person because of her deep interest in issues related to racial justice. While staying in a budget hostel in L.A, I met an Argentinian student who had booked a long-term stay in the same dorm. She was singing Korean boy band songs in the communal shower booth. While she was drying her hair, I commented "sounds like you were having a lot of fun in there." She burst out laughing and we quickly became friends. She is also an immigrant, so I invited her to a group discussion with two other Korean Americans, including Yena, and a student from Korea I coincidentally met in L.A. After having an hour-long video-documented discussion, I edited the group talk into a 3-minute film. This came to be the first cascade among members of minority groups. I was struck by the idea of weaving together different discussions among Asians and racial minorities in my class, my work, or friends and family.

After presenting my first film-discussion, I was asked to narrow down my target audience, specifically to a group such as Korean-Americans, even though I do not identify as one. I understood the intention and purpose of the request, but I reasoned that choosing who will participate in my art practice for my own benefit did not make sense. In other words, I decided not to pick who my participants were. Therefore, I found the most challenging task to be choosing who is invited and who is not. I began to question how inclusive of a space I can formulate especially for those who are invisible - my approach was opening up a conversation and letting participants decide, which made a huge

difference whether this art is for the artist or for the community. Taking my ego and artistic direction out of the picture enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of what the community wanted, needed and what had to be done to do this together.

In addition, showing previous conversations edited into 3-10 minute films functioned as an icebreaker by providing a deeper context of shared trauma without further explanation or cues. As many iterations took place, I witnessed how the conversation evolved, how personal the stories of participants became, and how they were revealed during the conversation.

After making four films, I decided to borrow the concept of an Asian politician campaigning on a mobile stage to disseminate stories of Asian and Latinx. In democratic countries in Asia, politicians promote their faces and their party while driving an election campaign truck in densely populated districts. I intended to recreate this phenomenon after seeing the Tate Modern website: "Social practice art can be associated with activism because it often deals with political issues."[47] As social practice is intimately tied to politics and social justice, I wanted to dive deeper into what politics can offer - I borrowed the concept of electioneering and adapting politicians' tools to broadcast our yellow, brown, and black faces in a white-dominated society. In other words, I aimed to repurpose a unique trait of Asian democracies and elections to further the cause of racial justice in the country that prioritizes exporting democracy.

My initial outline was to import a Korean electioneering truck. However, this plan was quickly met with obstacles because import-export laws designed to protect American automobile companies prohibit the importation of Korean trucks that are less than 25 years old. This limitation was a deal-breaker because a truck this old would be environmentally harmful and unsafe to drive. To better understand how to harness the power of the public forum, I needed to conduct research on Greek amphitheaters, the structure of open mics, and the method of elimi-

nating hierarchy to foster open discussion. In addition, I researched how Korean electioneering trucks leverage lighting and charisma to draw big crowds, showcase the faces of political candidates, and leave impactful impressions in their wake.

That is why I decided to purchase a Ford pickup truck and renovate it into a Korean electioneering truck as a hybrid cultural product and a mixture of Asian and American sensibilities. While looking at used pick-up trucks on various digital platforms including Facebook Marketplace, Craigslist and car dealerships, I became fixated on purchasing a yellow pickup truck. My intuition told me that this vehicle color would be suitable for my project, but there were only four or five yellow used pickup trucks available in the entire U.S. Among this small selection, only two of them were equipped with automatic transmissions: one was located in South Carolina and the other in Atlanta. After having a virtual tour with an auto broker in Atlanta, I flew to the state of Georgia to see the truck. I purchased a pick-up truck whose manufacturer dubbed the paint job color as "screaming yellow." I thought this copywriting for a color matched the spirit of my social practice so well that I named my social sculpture after the color developed by Ford's marketing department. This fateful decision became clear after the city of Atlanta became the site of a series of hate crimes against Asian women on the basis of racism, sexism and misogyny. The site of recent Anti-Asian violence is also the most appropriate to share or "scream" stories of Asians: the streets.

Breaking Down Hierarchy Between Artist and Participants

My vision was creating a platform where participants can freely engage with each other and the artwork to reinforce their own narratives, all outside of the artist's ego or plan. I had to work to find a balance between inviting participants to a group discussion and leading them to navigate on their own. Sometimes, the beginning of the group talks

were awkward, but I let it ride. I gave no introduction for my participants after opening the discussion. I gave minimal directions in a simple format; 1) participants gathered in circle seating. 2) they watched 3-10 minute films of previous discussions. 3) they navigated the conversation - participants organically asked each other questions, sometimes a moderator figure emerged from the group, and several stories were shared which had never been told to anyone. 4) lastly, at the end of the discussion, participants asked one question while looking at the camera. My participants were all strangers. Some chose not even to share their names or occupations, which allowed them to anonymously share empathy or reveal identity, trauma, and heal through being heard and seen. In other words, their stories were enough. They did not have to explain or prove their emotions, experiences and traumas in the group.

CREATIVE WORK

1. **External Dialogue**
   - *Screaming Yellow*
   - *Cascade Voices*

2. **Internal Dialogue**
   - *Mining Gold*
   - *News & Letter*
   - *Water Correspondences*

I aimed to create channels for communication, conversation, and dialogue. I discovered a dichotomy in my practice; one is an outreach method and the other is inward communication with self. I approached Screaming Yellow and Cascade Voices by centering community members and my audiences in the work and created a platform for/with them. News & Letter examines the relationship of communication with my family in my homeland during the COVID era. This inner communication led me to continue discovering my own language with visual

poems, which culminated in the self-publication of a poetry zine called Mining Gold. I collaborated with Ellie Schmidt to create a work entitled Water Correspondences, as an overlapping exploration of outer and inner communication.

Screaming Yellow

Screaming Yellow is a social sculpture in the form of a pick-up truck, a fake politician's persona, and short films that explore identity, culture and diaspora. I deployed a truck, replete with its own stereotypes related to whiteness and masculinity, as a mobile platform to project BIPOC faces and to propagate their voices; the speech I give in the truck's bed touches on fluidity, invisibility, and empowering others to scream; the small group discussions are connected by a string of questions like a water drop turning into a deafening cascade. The questions posed by participants range from a call to arms to expressions of self-hate. The artwork recontextualizes diasporic communities' shame, otherness, and legacy and examines the power of sharing collective trauma.

Fig. 17-18 (Opposite). Screaming Yellow (detail), 2021, pick-up truck, screens, chair.

Fig. 18. Screaming Yellow (detail), 2021, pick-up truck, screens, chair.

There are four TV screens placed behind a yellow pickup truck. In front of the truck, five yellow chairs are placed in a semi-circle so that participants can watch one TV that has been placed inside the truck bed. The truck has been renovated to resemble a Korean politician's campaign truck. The words Screaming Yellow are painted on the side of the truck in purple and white lettering.

The truck has three functions. First, it is a stage for Asians to share their stories - in the pickup bed, there is a chair and a megaphone with a microphone. A black metal step is installed on the tailgate to make it easier for participants to come up and speak up. The five yellow chairs are situated below a sound dome to watch a fifteen-minute video called Cascade Voices #5, shot inside the Duderstadt Library's video studio. Participants are encouraged to hold their own small group discussions in the space. A 7 x 5-foot poster is affixed to one side of the truck, prominently featuring the artist's face as she screams. The text includes "Vote for Yellow Party," and "The time to scream is now!" An

Fig. 16. Screaming Yellow, MFA Thesis installation view, 2021.


Got
Diaspora?
MFA Thesis Show
MPS Gallery 3/12 - 5/2

installation in the form of a neon sign features the text “Got Diaspora?” in yellow and blue colors. The text signifies the theme of the work, which encourages participants to publicly share their stories related to identity, cultural heritage and celebrating the state of diaspora.

Normally, Korean election campaign trucks serve to gather large crowds, disseminate political visions, and make campaign promises in public. My next step was building a stage and attaching a screen inside the bed of a pickup truck - the screen on wheels will play a series of group discussion films, Cascade Voices, and I drove the truck around town for promotion. The function of building a mobile screen was to drive to where my Yellow, Brown and Black comrades often work as essential workers, and to broadcast allies’ voices. Lastly, I used the billboard affixed to the back of the TV to show my screaming face - this fake politician persona promotes Asian women and to break down the stereotype of Asian women as meek, submissive or non-confrontational.

I use short films as tools to encourage strangers to have meaningful conversations and to ignite and share unexplored memories about cross-cultural experiences. During interviews, field research and group discussions, I found that marginalized people are often compelled to assimilate to white norms, to fit into white spaces, and to perform identity roles. To subvert these structures of power, I created Cascade Voices, which invites young diasporic people to share unspoken stories and to discover shared narratives or co-empowerment.

A total of twenty people—Asian, Latinx and Middle Eastern—appear in six discussions entitled Cascade Voices. Six hours and twenty-five minutes of discussion became five separate films ranging from three to fifteen minutes long. The films ‘cascade’ into one another, meaning each successive film features the previous films somewhere in the frame - this picture-in-picture quality lends continuity, but also gives the viewer the sense of an unending dialogue linking past to present to future. Group 1 discussed having two identities and feelings of “always

Fig. 19. Korean election campaigning truck, https://www.asiatoday.co.kr/view.php?key=20200410010006427

Fig. 20. Politicians and the usage of the truck, http://www.cvinfo.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=8675

Fig. 21. Cascade Voices and Screaming Yellow, 2021, social practice, Video Studio at Duderstadt Library.


Discussion #1
2021 MFA Thesis Show
Stamps Gallery 3/12 - 5/2
5.6
YELLOW

not being enough," and Group 3 talked about difficulties communicating with their first-generation parents, especially around the topic of race. Participants asked future groups, "Have you been racist to someone of your own race?" and "What can you do for the future generation to break the cycle of silence." I collected a wide spectrum of Asian and BIPOC stories ranging from microaggression, discrimination, assimilation, and hidden identity conflicts through this group dialogue.

While organizing and filming these discussions, I found an answer to the question 'what can be the most inclusive social practice work?' I opened a series of discussions in succession, with faculty, staff and students at the University of Michigan beginning in 2019. I did not anticipate how people would naturally share stories of themselves. I did not know who would show up to volunteer their stories. One participant sat with four others and revealed a hidden identity: her grandmother is Filipino and intentionally married a white man "to improve her race." The participant's public examination of her identity was a revelatory moment for my understanding of the power of open discussions. I realized that genuine inclusivity can be created by giving audiences and participants the option to join or not.

Fig. 22. Cascade Voices #3 (video still), 2020.

Fig. 23. Cascade Voices #4 (video still)

News & Letter

I filmed *News & Letter* as a Korean immigrant who was unable to return home in the summer of 2020 due pandemic-related travel restrictions. While creating this experimental video, I was able to capture surreal and absurd moments in March, April and the months leading up to successive lockdowns. While shooting the video, I played live broadcasts of BBC and CNN. The day's stories centered on the coronavirus and rumors about Kim Jong-un's poor health. These broadcasts were incorporated as an audio collage within News & Letter. In the film, the news in the background becomes louder and gradually erodes the entire scene. The letter in the video is written in Korean and is addressed "Dear Mom and Dad."

Fig. 24-25. News & Letter (still image), single channel video, 2020.

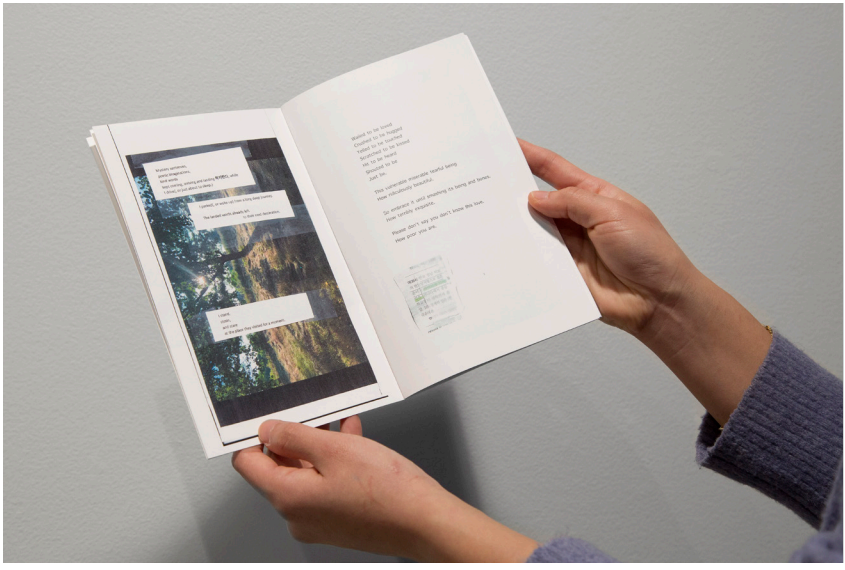

Fig. 26. Mining Gold, visual poetry, 2021.

Mining Gold

During the winter semester, I did an independent study with Jennifer Metsker on creative poetry writing. This independent study was for creative exploration into a new medium to broaden my methodology of communication by establishing channels of insight with the inner self, and then translating this internal dialogue into visual language. This writing studio practice led me to study Asian diaspora poets such as Ocean Vuong and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha who write about war, memory, families, and colonialism with beautiful word choice. I wrote a total of 21 visual poems, which became Mining Gold, a 36-page zine about my own experience as a member of the diaspora. It includes poems in the form of diary entry fragments, photo collages and other visual media. The poem's themes include identity, dreams, spirituality and relationship with fluidity as a member of the diaspora.

After immigrating to the United States in 2017, I began the arduous process of learning English as a second language as an adult. I became increasingly conscious of how the people around me responded to my broken English; however, I came to see the beauty in misused English as a creative way of re-inventing. My stumbling English and incorrect grammar turned out to be advantageous in deploying new ways of seeing with languages and ideas. In 'Minor Feelings: Asian American Reckoning,' Hong reveals her own relationship with bad English as a poet and writer. She said "it was once a source of shame," but now she investigates a literary lineage with writers dedicated to "unmastering of English—who queer it, twerk it, hack it, calibanize it, other it by hijacking English and warping it to a fugitive tongue." Through this studio course, I can break apart words, grammar and rules of English and use words as an object and materials for sculpture. Switching the functionality of words and objects is an integral part of my collaboration project, *Water Correspondences*.

Water Correspondences

Water and fluidity have been constant mediums in my practice during my MFA program. Water has many metaphors and meanings in culture, time, and space. And a first-year MFA, Ellie Schmidt also presented water in her work, so we began collaborating beginning in mid-October 2020. Ellie and I introduced a wide spectrum and interpretations of water: wild, brain chemistry, transformative / spirituality, identity, and philosophy. We passed on handwritten water journals to each other. This project expanded to a zine, installations, and call and response films as process-oriented work inviting the public to reflect on their own memories of water. *Water Correspondences* was part of the thesis mini group show with my cohort.

There are two carpets in the 15' x 10' darkroom, one full-sized bathtub, and an aquarium that is twenty inches wide. One edge of the aquarium is propped up from the floor with a metal wedge and chains attached to the lip of the aquarium to prevent it from toppling forward. Small water pumps circulate water, creating ripples on the surface. Projectors are positioned on the ceiling to shine videos on the water's surface, and the ripples refract and reflect onto the dark room walls. A speaker plays the two artists reading poems, letters and journals about water.

Fig. 27. Water Correspondences, 2021, water collection.

Fig. 28. Water Correspondences, 2021, performance, projection, installation.

Fig. 29. Water Correspondences, MFA Thesis installation view, 2021.

CONCLUSION

Community members do not tell “stories” for artists’ benefit. If an artist wants to create a true ‘collaboration’ or ‘social practice’ work, the project should provide mutual benefits to the artist and the community. If the artist is not from the community and wants to build trust and validation to speak for them, then the artist needs to spend a prolonged period of time in the community to completely blend into the community. Only then is the artist ready to listen to the community and to find methods of problem-solving as a member of the community. An artist

considered an outsider of a community cannot fill in as a hero. He or she cannot solve a community's problems because ultimately a lack of understanding or the time limitations of a temporary project will diminish its authenticity and impact.

When I did my work and research on Critical Race Study, I found that I needed to find a method of challenging stereotypes, a line of inquiry to disavow honorary white status, and the confidence to assert oneself as a person working to dismantle structures of racism. I believe we must

begin by saving people in the same boat. By saving those around us, we save ourselves. As Lucy R. Lippard wrote about Carol Jacobsen's work: "I have long claimed that artists cannot change the world alone but with the right allies they can make a difference." I certainly found allies through my work and empowered them, myself and my work together. This concept gives me hope about sharing open discussions which cascade over to the next discussion. My body of work was able to overcome the interim nature of its genre. This work threads questions from the past, present to the future. In other words, the stories of others living inside Cascade Voices and Screaming Yellow do not end; rather, they evolve through the addition of more conversations and empathetic moments.

During my MFA program, I learned the importance of the question 'who is your target audience?' and why it is wrong to ask it in art critiques. I witnessed only students of color being repeatedly asked this same question, even though the work is related to their culture or racial justice. I see this happening due to a lack of historical knowledge, cultural fluency, and wielding white privilege. This question implies that 'non-white art' needs specific target audiences because white privilege provides protection against exposure to and learning from other cultures in America.

Through my research, I discovered that attempts to redirect lines of inquiry within each ethnic group in the name of 'inappropriateness' in speaking for others is a strategy in the service of white supremacy. Through active listening and incrementally deepening the dialogue, people of color can speak with each other as victims (or victors) and living history of surviving white supremacy. If someone silences you in the name of what is appropriate or not, we must ask what is the intention of the silencer and whether the silence oppresses other peoples. Even though the beginning of the conversation is riddled with grammatical errors, incorrectly used words, or awkward silences, we need to let it out to evolve rather than remain isolated and siloed. I learned an

important frame of mind from reading 'Peace in Every Step' by Thich Nhat Hanh. In the chapter, 'Love Letter to Your Congressman,' Hanh shared an investigation about protest letters during the peace movement. He says:

> In the peace movement, there is a lot of anger, frustration, and misunderstanding. People in the peace movement can write very good protest letters, but they are not so skilled at writing love letters. The peace movement often is filled with anger and hatred and does not fulfill the role we expect of it.

He says the way of writing letters to Congress or the President to deliver peace needs to read more like a love letter. After reading this quote, I realized that my thesis writing has been fueled by frustration towards injustice, so that my tone of writing comes across as angry. But as Hanh said, a love letter can reach someone's heart, so that we can begin the real conversation. If I write with an accusatory tone and anger, the recipient's next reaction must be self-defense. Thus, I wish my thesis to read as a love letter. "Our daily lives, the way we drink, what we eat, have to do with the world's political situation. Every day we do things, we are things that have to do with peace." If the way I create art is political, I want to do my art with peace and love.

One of my participants is my friend. She is from Ann Arbor and is biracial. We talked a lot about this project process, how she felt during and after the discussion, and the title of the project. She shared complex feelings about the color yellow, because when she was young she was told by her mother that 'yellow does not fit her skin color.' Afterwards, she chose a different color even though she loved the color yellow. She could not find any positive connection to the color because yellow became associated with yellow fever, or yellow peril, which made it hard for her to embrace yellow for Asianness and for herself. This conversation lingered with me, and I wrote a poem about yellow to celebrate our yellowness as royalty, richness, and beauty.

Mining Yellow

Yes,
It is royal.

Scattered somber warming up the earth.
Sour and bitter taste spread in my mouth.
Sack of it breaks apart
leads you to an unlimited world.
Seizing a peeled roundy fruit--

Toes are immersed in the crying endocarps.
Echoes of absence.
When I was a king back in the day,
I wore a heavy golden crown, a beaming amber yellow dress and golden earrings making clinking sounds.

Grapefruit yellow comes and fills in the entire space you are in.
Honey yellow hugs you tight to energize you.
Tuscany yellow bestows opulence upon you.

You know lemon was born from everlasting gold.
Bumblebees dance like innocence in your childhood
to be spiritual.
to be eternal.

It is, Ra, the Sun--
Melted by the citrus to become a yellow gold carnival.

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