

EMERGE



ART ON DEMAND 9.4
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DEON
FENG



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The Merriam-Webster Dictionary has two definitions for nostalgia. The first is “a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for a return to, or of some, past period, or irrecoverable condition.” The second is “a state of being homesick.” While the themes of this show are more complex and personal than such a simplification of the human experience, these two definitions are nonetheless a useful and productive starting point. Who has not felt nostalgic for our childhood home, or homesick after some time somewhere far away? But what if that homesickness doesn’t lead back to one place? What if every “home” was only one part of a larger constellation of sites, separated by time

and vast distances? When someone’s heritage and sense of identity are drawn from places so far from each other that the home being yearned for is really an imagined whole made of distant pieces that, to the heart, are always somewhere else, the longing never truly ceases.

For Deon Feng, an interdisciplinary artist based in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, feelings of alienation—of being a stranger in a strange land, where one cannot shake the feeling that the place to which they belong is always somewhere else—become an inspiration that fuels their artistic expression.

Finding language inadequate to describe

INFORMED BY THEIR OWN EXPERIENCES AS A SECOND-GENERATION IMMIGRANT, FENG EXPLORES THEMES OF CULTURAL ALTERITY, FRACTURED GLOBALIZED IDENTITIES, AND DIASPORIC CHINESE MELANCHOLIA IN THEIR ARTWORK.

the experience of their everyday being as a person whose identity cannot simply be associated with one nation or culture, but is instead scattered amongst deterritorialized notions of heritage and individuality, Feng has turned to visual art to understand and express the complexity of their turmoil. This body of work is a personal exploration themed around the feelings of displacement and fragmentation that they experienced during their time studying in Europe. Reflecting on the artwork they made while studying abroad, Feng observed that “a yearning for somewhere else” kept appearing. They credit this feeling as stemming from their sense of selfhood being scattered across different localities.

During their stay in France, the feelings of alienation and otherness from the local milieu inspired *The Gap in the Year*, an exploration of Feng’s Chinese upbringing and memories of a Chinese ontology of time. After their return, Feng realized that they had explored and expressed these feelings in many of their works. The feeling of being an “other” is felt throughout their series; the artist’s presence in their works situates the viewer as a stranger looking in on the life of somewhere else, or existing in a liminal space disconnected from familiar stability. The photographs peer into these mundane locales; and yet are transformed into curiosity and novelty once removed from their

original contexts and brought to the “West.” The simple act of removing an image from the location in which it was captured is enough to transform its very nature. It becomes a foreign thing, understood and described by its perceived belonging to “elsewhere” and, more saliently, “not here.” This phenomenon can be applied to and felt by people as well as objects. When surrounded by a culture that is foreign to you, there is a sense that this place is not *your* place, these people and their ways do not align with *your own*, that you and your experiences are perceived as *strange*. It is possible that this uncomfortable position is what leads to homesickness, a yearning for the comfort of returning. But return to where?

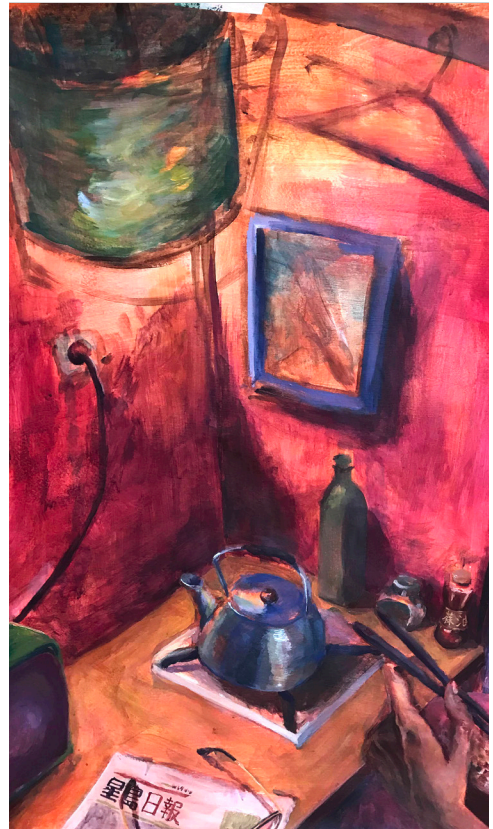
Alas, not everyone has a place or community, real or imagined, that is easily locatable on a map. Growing up in Canada, with an upbringing rooted in Chinese culture, where do you go to be understood, to fit? Feng refers to this experience as fragmentation: their sense of identity being scattered across the distinct cultures of far-flung countries. Each place has been lived in for a time, but at some level, the feeling of otherness persists, as, no matter where they go, nowhere do they feel like they belong fully. Travelling even further away, to live immersed in the unique culture of yet another country, this disorienting reality intensifies. Intense reality demands a reaction, and for an artist that reaction is naturally to

pour themselves into creativity. Reflected in this series is Feng's sense of displacement and fragmentation, the turmoil of the artists' scattered nostalgias. Ever the stranger, the photographs watch from an uncomfortable distance. Ever the visitor, paintings ooze with the sensation that the place you are in is a temporary one, and the calendar counts the days that you have been away from "home."

Braeden Riggins
Emerge Curator

DEON FENG

Deon Feng is an interdisciplinary artist, student, and writer. They have not yet received BA degrees from SciencesPo or the University of British Columbia, and are educated first and foremost by their own lived experience. Their practice includes drawing-painting, printmaking, poetry, radio production, performance art intervention, and various indescribable hybrids.



Front Cover
农贸市场, 2023, 35mm film photograph,
dimensions variable

Inside
上海滩 (*The Bund*), 2023, 35mm film photograph,
dimensions variable

Back Cover
星島日報 (*Rest In Peace*), 2023, acrylic on paper,
25.6 x 19.7 in.

Citations:
1. "Nostalgia," Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, accessed November 19, 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nostalgia#:~:text=1,state%20of%20being%20homesick%20%3A%20homesickness.>



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GRAPHIC DESIGN BY TY MARTENS