

Perspectives on Exchange



Yang Yuanyuan

2017 Cai Guo-Qiang Fellow

Visual Artist

Based in Beijing, Yang Yuanyuan graduated with a BA(Hons) in Photography from London College of Communications, University of the Arts London. Her recent solo exhibitions, such as *Dalian Mirage* (2019) and *Theater of Crossroads* (2018), the latter created by Yang during her fellowship in New York, are laced with historical narratives based on displaced communities. She also challenges the rigid conventions of storytelling through her photobooks, installations, and recently, her experimentation with film. The ACC fellowship enabled the visual artist to further her research on the diasporic histories of Chinese-Americans in the US. Today, Yang's exhilarating journey continues past her fellowship experience: she has been actively filming in Hong Kong and Guangdong in preparation for her first feature-length film and a short documentary. This unprecedented and ambitious direction will be an exciting turn of the chapter in Yang's artistic career...

And the Journey Continues

For the past two days, I have been looking back at the raw materials I gathered from the US. Like a time machine, they whirled me back to California in October, when a 92-year old dancer was prancing through my camera lens in Cuba's Chinatown. I listened to her footsteps as they blend into the streets, racketing with life. I can even recall the smell from that night. I have been saying this to my friends for the past few months, "I am really grateful to ACC. One's journey is always unpredictable but who would have thought it would begin like this....."



Clockwise: Yang Yuanyuan, Carlo Nasisse, Coby Yee, Stephen King

Last April, I arrived in New York and began my 6-month artist-in-residence at Art in General in Brooklyn. Compared to sitting at an office desk, I prefer to start my day at the wide and mighty Hudson River across from Dumbo's balcony. Life was steady in its pace and eventful during the first month in New York: chatting occasionally with people from workshop and studio visits, but mostly shuffling through every library in New York to collect information on the diasporic histories of Asian-Americans. As a young Chinese artist who was incongruous to the US art scene, I embarked on a series of intense exploration steeped in culture: visiting exhibitions, attending panels, watching shows and partaking in performances.



Behind the scenes of Yang Yuanyuan's upcoming short film

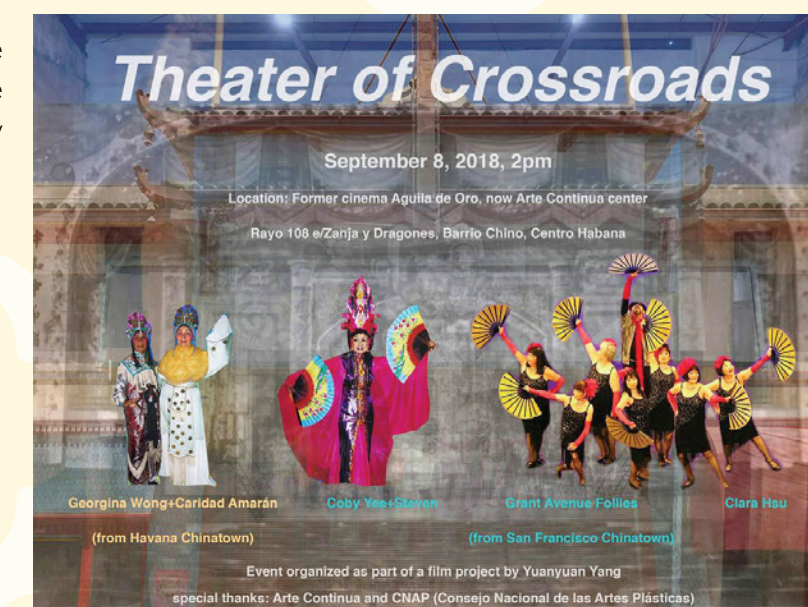
Until one day, I saw a documentary called *Golden Gate Girls* (Producer: Law Kar, Director: S. Louisa Wei). Five minutes into the "encounter" and I was immediately enamoured by Esther Eng (1914–1970), a second generation Chinese-American film director born in San Francisco. Esther Eng produced 11 movies throughout her life, out of which 9 have already become "lost films". Throughout 55 years of Esther's life, there are countless images and hints which have yet to be revealed. Following the trail her life left

behind, I embarked on a journey of time travel. The next 6 months consisted of multiple trips to San Francisco, New York and Havana Chinatown (after the completion of my fellowship, I came to Hong Kong and China's Guangdong province this year). Throughout the journey, "one thing leads to another", everything that has happened—regardless of beautiful encounters and coincidences—made me strongly believe that many things are connected, and connections have the power to trespass cultural barriers and the limitations of time. These experiences grew along the way which eventually lay the groundwork for my first feature film.

It is almost time for me to call my filming partner-in-crime Carlo Nasisse (we met at UnionDocs in New York last August), and I will bury myself back in time with travels, stories, dance, music, friendships, time, space. They all interweave and become one film.

I have to pack my bags soon. At the end of this month I will return to the US for more shooting. The journey continues.

Yang Yuanyuan / May 2019



Theater of Crossroads by Yang Yuanyuan