

8 Aug – 15 Nov

2020

# Candice Lin: Pigs and Poison



# Public Programmes

## Curator walk and talk

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Sat 8 Aug | 2 pm

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## Exhibition opening

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Sat 8 Aug | 6 pm

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## Candice Lin studio visit and exhibition short films

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Sat 29 Aug | 2 pm

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Len Lye Cinema

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## Dye-making workshop

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TBC

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Date to be confirmed, please check our website

## Exhibition panel and community conversation

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TBC

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Date to be confirmed, please check our website

For more information please visit [govettbrewster.com](http://govettbrewster.com) or  
contact [elaine.rollins@govettbrewster.com](mailto:elaine.rollins@govettbrewster.com)

# Introduction

*Pigs and Poison* is a survey exhibition bringing together newly commissioned and existing works by LA-based artist Candice Lin. Through her art practice, Lin explores legacies of Chinese migration and the interconnected cultivation of crops like tobacco, sugar cane, poppy, and fungi. She has spent a decade working through the material linkages between the human histories of colonisation and non-human life in many forms. Her work also expands outward to look at the role language plays in racialising our understanding of contagions, vitality, and cognition.

The stories unearthed by Lin weave together specificities of British and American colonialism and imperialism in China to deliver a complex view of lesser-known histories with a focus on Chinese migration. The works delve into colonial processes that are familiar to New Zealand and have uncanny relevance today. In particular, stories of migration and borders; racial profiling and detainment; bodies and remedies; viruses and war give unsettling historical context for current conditions.

Lin's approach to conveying marginalised histories is as varied as the stories themselves, encompassing: virtual reality, sculpture, textiles, drawing, painting, and large-scale kinetic installation.

*Pigs and Poison* premieres at the Govett-Brewster before travelling to partner institutions the Times Museum, Guangzhou, and Spike Island, Bristol.

Aileen Burns & Johan Lundh  
Exhibition Curators

时代美术馆  
TIMES MUSEUM

**Spike Island**

Cover: Candice Lin *A Robot Spoke What My Father Wrote*, 2019  
Courtesy the Artist and François Ghebaly, Los Angeles.  
Photo Ian Byers-Gamber

# Gallery 1

1. *A Robot Spoke What My Father Wrote*, 2019  
iron, barbed wire, drywall, bone black pigment

Setting the stage for the exhibition, the installation *A Robot Spoke What My Father Wrote* introduces many of the key themes for the exhibition *Pigs and Poison*: detainment, the use of racialised language to dehumanise and vilify, and histories of Chinese migration and labour.

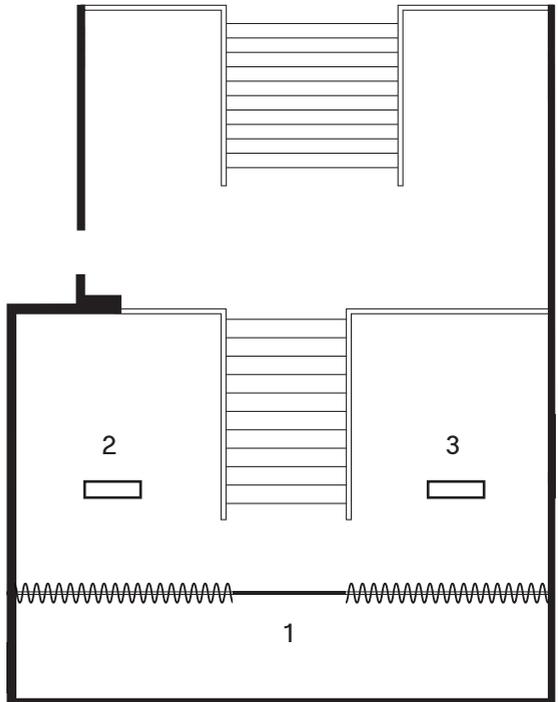
The cut-outs in the Gyprock (dry wall) that lines the barrier is a quote from American philosopher John Searle. In his 1980 text 'Minds, Brains, and Programs', he asks how a person can know if they are communicating with another person or artificial intelligence when separated physically. He proposes using Chinese text, which he calls 'meaningless squiggles', to determine the humanity of the unknown conversation partner.

Lin questions Searle's metaphor by putting the term 'meaningless squiggles' through an online translator to change it from English to Mandarin. She then asked her father to write it out in characters, which form the template for the cutouts in the wall. In its first iteration, the cuts were made by the artist herself, performing an act of her own negotiation between cultural loss and assimilation, as the child of immigrant parents, who has lost the ability to speak her parents' native language.

The work acts as a barricade in the gallery, physically limiting visitors' movement through the galleries.

Finally, the walls are stained with a pigment called bone-black, which is a blue-black colour made from charring bones. The resulting coal is used both as a pigment and as a filter for purification of commodities such as sugar. In a document from 1873 on working conditions for Chinese sugar cane workers in Cuba, there are reports of deceased workers' bones being added to the mix. The relationship between the body, pigments, and labour is a central concern for the artist.

2. *Witness (Blue Version)*, 2019  
ceramic, fabric, metal, papier-mâché,  
synthetic hair, plant material
3. *Witness (Yellow Version)*, 2019  
ceramic, fabric, metal, synthetic hair



Mezzanine

Gallery 1

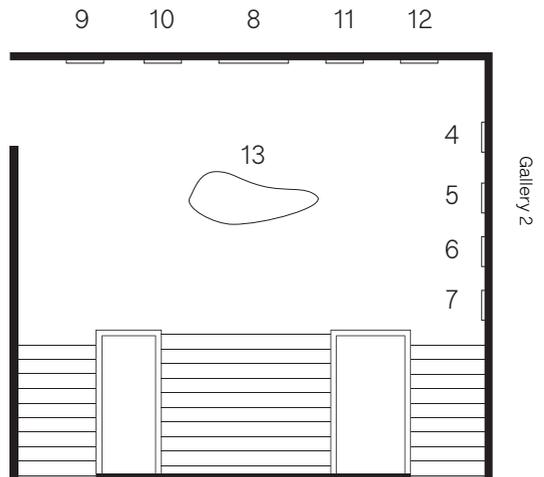
## Gallery 2

4. *Eschscholzia californica*, 2019  
parasitic wasp and oak gall ink on blotting  
paper with plant remnants
5. *Papaver rhoeas*, 2020  
parasitic wasp and oak gall ink  
on blotting paper with clay
6. *Papaver somniferum*, 2020  
parasitic wasp and oak gall ink  
on blotting paper with clay
7. *Nicotiana tabacum*, 2020  
parasitic wasp and oak gall ink on blotting  
paper with plant remnants
8. *Map to an Unknown Sea*, 2018  
indigo, sugarcane fibers, opium poppy stems,  
yucca, cotton rag pulp, adhesive, resin

This series of drawings connect with material histories of colonial commodities such as opium, tobacco, and tea. The process of making the works in this series involves the artist first creating a tincture. This is a medicine created by steeping plant material in alcohol, glycerin, or vinegar and honey for six weeks. She then drinks a dose of the tincture and creates drawings under the influence of the plant material whose history she is seeking a deeper understanding of. Lin takes an experimental approach to research in an attempt to access untold histories related to colonial trade. The drawing inks are also created by the artist using oak galls – swollen growths created on oak trees by nesting wasps. The material of the artwork and the human and natural histories that they refer to are metabolised into these drawings.

9. *Chinatown, Honolulu, 1900, 2020*  
oil paint, encaustic wax, lard on wood panel
10. *Chinatown, San Francisco, 1907, 2020*  
oil paint, encaustic wax, lard on wood panel
11. *Bureau of Rats, 2020*  
oil paint, encaustic wax, lard on wood panel
12. *Sorting the Rats, 2020*  
oil paint, encaustic wax, lard on wood panel
13. *Vermin Visionary [part 1], 2020*  
wire, fibreglass, resin, encaustic wax, paint

The paintings in Gallery 2 reference the outbreak of plagues in San Francisco and Honolulu at the turn of the twentieth century, which were blamed on their Chinese citizens, who were victims of violence and control, and whose neighborhoods were burned.



## Gallery 3

Candice Lin's artwork reveals systems and creates new ones. Lin traces the flow of goods, like the circulation of blood, through bodies both metaphorical and physical. With *In my memory it is raining inside my father's house (Solaris)*, she presents a self-contained circulation of water that relentlessly rains down upon decaying history books.

14. *In my memory it is raining inside my father's house (Solaris)*, 2020  
books, timber, marine epoxy, pump, water,  
aluminum grid, plant material,  
oil paint on paper and photographs

The installation takes its inspiration from an iconic scene in the 1972 science fiction film *Solaris*, in which the protagonist finds a version of his childhood home recreated on another (sentient) planet, and looks in through the window to see his father bent over a table looking through a chaotic heap of books. In Lin's installation, the books are culled from her research into nineteenth-century Chinese migration and indentured labour around the globe. Like the 1972 film it references, the sculpture returns to us the rotting specter of our repressed memories and global histories. The piece challenges us to search for and look closely at that which we have not reckoned with.

15. *Vermin Visionary*, 2020  
VR set, leather, fabric, wire

The mask in this installation is inspired by those worn by doctors in Europe during the Black Plague pandemic of the fourteenth century. The textile pattern is designed by the artist from her drawing of the plague virus. In the virtual reality environment on view through the mask, lumps of infected flesh are catapulted by a monumental trebuchet within a desolate, sci-fi scene reminiscent of the spaceship in *Solaris* (1972). Sculptural versions of the infected lumps of flesh can be found throughout the gallery spaces.

16. *Vermin Visionary [part 2]*, 2020  
wire, fibreglass, resin, encaustic wax, paint

17. *Pig Carcass in the Arizona Desert, 2020*  
oil paint, encaustic wax, lard on wood panel
18. *Coyote House (Red Room), 2020*  
encaustic wax and lard on linen
19. *Measuring pigs in Desert, 2020*  
oil paint, encaustic wax, lard on wood panel

Nineteenth-century Chinese indentured laborers known as ‘coolies’ were often disparagingly referred to as pigs. In the U.S., these workers were subject to increasingly strict immigration laws that eventually led to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, the first law excluding immigration on the basis of race, regardless of nationality. Much of the U.S. / Mexico border control was built up during this time.

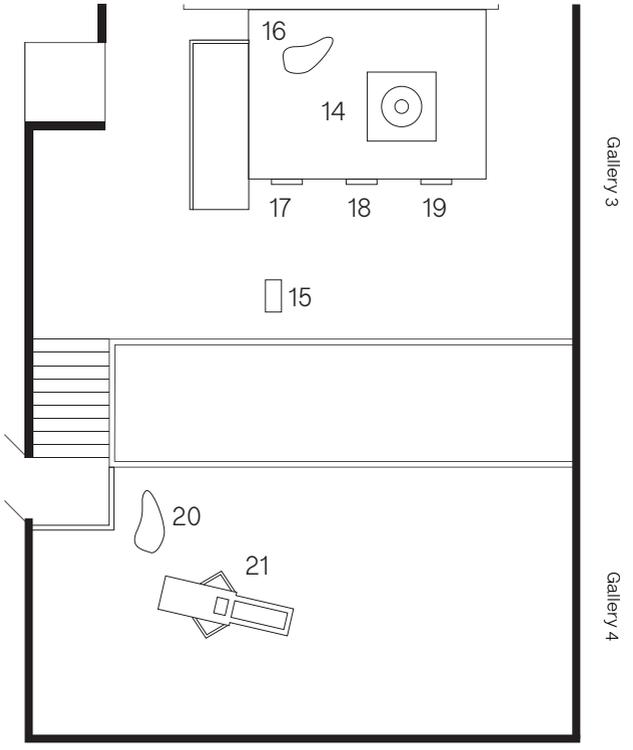
The images of pigs decomposing in the desert come from the Undocumented Migration Project, a long-term anthropological study of undocumented migration between Mexico and the United States, which has sought to track how bodies decompose in the desert by using pigs as surrogate bodies for humans. By relating images from these two different immigration issues, the artist relates the current times to a longer history.

## Gallery 4

The spread of the Black Plague throughout Europe is often attributed to an early instance of biological warfare. Some European historians have claimed that in Caffa (now Feodosia, Crimea) in 1346, Mongols used a trebuchet (catapult) to launch dead bodies infected with plague over the walls of the city. From there, it is supposed to have spread along trade routes on land and water, decimating populations across Europe as it had already in Asia. This history shows one early example of the racialisation of disease, which obviously continues to this day with COVID-19 being dubbed by U.S. President Trump as the 'Chinese virus' or the 'Kung Flu'.

The trebuchet in Gallery 4 fires projectiles made of oil, lard, wax, and bone-black pigment, re-performing the infectious acts of war and creating a violent painting on our back wall. The pigment refers back to the process of making black carbon by burning bones, to create filters for goods such as alcohol or sugar, as well as to create exceptionally black pigment.

20. *Vermin Visionary [part 3]*, 2020  
wire, fibreglass, resin, encaustic wax, paint
21. *A History of Future Contagion*, 2020  
timber, steel, leather, rope, lard  
bone black pigment, oil, beeswax



# Biography

Candice Lin (b. 1979, Concord, Massachusetts) works in Altadena, California. She received her BA in Visual Arts and Art Semiotics from Brown University, in 2001, and MFA in New Genres from San Francisco Art Institute, in 2004. Her work has been exhibited at Pitzer College, California, USA (2020); Banff Centre, Canada (2019); Portikus, Frankfurt (2018); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (2017); Bétonsalon – Center for Art and Research, Paris (2017); Human Resources, Los Angeles (2017); New Museum, New York (2017); SculptureCenter, Long Island City, New York (2017); Los Angeles Contemporary Exhibitions (2016); and Vincent Price Art Museum, Los Angeles (2013), among others. She is the recipient of several residencies, grants, and fellowships, including a Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptors Grant (2019), Davidoff Artist Residency (2018), Louis Tiffany Comfort Foundation Award (2017), Delfina Foundation Artist in Residence (2014), Fine Arts Work Center Residency (2012), and Smithsonian Artist Research Fellowship (2009).

Special thanks to Clifford Sage (VR), Joel Freeman (fabrication assistance) and Nikii Henry (textile assistance)

Candice would like to thank the staff of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

Exhibitions: Jon Geehan, Kelly McCosh, Carmela Snooks, Murray Hewitt, Sarah Pye, Amy Blinkhorne, Simone Burbridge, Bryan James, Sarah Buist

Curatorial: Aileen Burns, Johan Lundh, Hanahiva Rose, Elaine S Rollins

ISBN: 978-1-98-854310-9

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