

Charlotte Perreault

Le Lin

我只穿了一条短裤 / *only wore a pair of shorts* 回味 / *Aftertaste*

Land, Body, and Identity: Le Lin's 我只穿了一条短裤 / only wore a pair of shorts 回味 / Aftertaste, and the Ritualistic Artwork.

In 我只穿了一条短裤 / *only wore a pair of shorts* 回味 / *Aftertaste* (2019), Chinese-Canadian artist Le Lin studies relationships between land, body and identity, addressing considerations of self, culture and intersectionality. Every Wednesday for one month, Lin painted texts on themselves in Chinese calligraphy - their body as canvas to ponder and reflect. Their friend and photographer, Peniel Hong, visually recorded the morning ritual each week.

“I gather my thoughts and somatically paint Chinese calligraphy on my body with words that are carefully chosen... after the performance of putting words on my body, I fill my bathtub with water and wash the ink off before dressing and starting my day.”¹

The project consists of two handmade books, displaying the photographs and texts which document the ritualistic performance and process. The books and their contents share Lin's deep considerations of their queer/trans body in relation to their 潮州 / Teochew culture. Each book shares a part of the process based on care, healing and active thought: the first book discusses research and the act of painting; the second shares reflection, free prose, and bathing. The texts are presented on translucent pages which lay over the photographs, further visually entwining the ritual, Lin's body, and their discussion of culture, identity and geography.

The Teochew homeland is located on the southeast coast of China, between Hong Kong and Taiwan.² Dating back to the 19th century, Teochew people have experienced a great diasporic movement, departing for Vietnam, Singapore, Malaysia,

¹ Le Lin, 我只穿了一条短裤 / *I Only Wore a Pair of Shorts - 回味 / Aftertaste*, artist book, 2019.

² “10 Things You Must Know as a Teochew,” The Teochew Store, last modified September 23, 2014, https://www.theteochewstore.org/blogs/latest/37453571-10-things-you-must-know-as-a-teochew?_pos=1&_sid=672267b22&_ss=r.

Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and Hong Kong.³ The history of the Teochew people is one of resilience, perseverance, and community value - existing beyond borders and physical spaces.⁴ With experienced diaspora to land and body, Lin opens the first book with, “家这个字让我很牵挂/the word home makes me anxious.”⁵ Boundaries and rigid classifications are exercised by overriding systems, particularly Western ones, to discuss geography, bodies, gender, and culture. These constricting systems cater to the white, heteronormative person and create unease, barriers and isolation for those existing outside these classifications -- amplifying diasporic experience. In this work, Lin explores alternative considerations of home and belonging with regards to gender and Teochew culture. They write, “There is an old [Teochew] saying that every time you look at the moon, your family is looking at the same moon. So, we drink tea and stare at the moon — we always feel like we are home.”⁶ Lin shows the flexibility of the term “home,” sharing an understanding based on sense, intuition, and memory, rather than physicality. To Lin, home is a feeling existing within.

In documenting and sharing the ritual through the two handmade books, Lin creates an intimate and tactile experience for the reader. The images and range of anecdotal, poetic, and memory-based texts communicate Lin’s queer, Chinese-Canadian story, reinforced by the book medium. To paint is to reenact memory, and incorporating and documenting this aspect into the project further embodies this storytelling.⁷ Within the ritual, Lin brings to life their memories, intuitions and understandings of Teochew, underlining the interconnected nature of land, body, home, and self, and shares this with the reader. Lin says, “I open my palms, take the bamboo brush soft in my hands, dipped in black ink and feel it seep through my melanin-soaked skin. With my ancestors’ voices as music when it’s my turn to lead, my children will hear mine harmonizing.”⁸

³ “Teochew People.” Wikipedia, last modified July 27, 2020,

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Teochew_people, referenced in Le Lin, *我只穿了一条短裤 / I Only Wore a Pair of Shorts - 回味 / Aftertaste*, 2019.

Le Lin, *我只穿了一条短裤 / I Only Wore a Pair of Shorts - 回味 / Aftertaste*, 2019.

⁴ In conversation with Le Lin, 2020.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Works Cited

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