

apexart

2021-22 INTL Proposal

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Ctrl+Alt+Yellow

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Franchise location: Oakland, California, USA

California remains home to the largest population of individuals of Asian descent in the United States, a population that has endured policies of exclusion, indentured servitude, racist policies and negative stereotyping, and, on a more philosophical level, obstacles to a hopeful future. Galleon ships from the Philippines brought scores of sailors from the continent to the Americas as early as the 16th century. In the 1850s, young men came to the U.S. as contract laborers from southern China, growing to represent 20% of California's labor force that helped build the very infrastructure that connects the country today. The beginnings of Asians in the Americas were limited. In 1834, Afong Moy, the first recorded woman in the United States, arrived from China, only to be put on display all day as exotic spectacle. Efforts of these early Asian Americans were thwarted for many generations to come.

Following these initial journeys, many groups from Asia came to the U.S. to escape hardship, war, or colonization, only to be declared a threat to the country. By 1924, with the exception of Filipino nationals, Asian immigrants were excluded by law, denied citizenship or naturalization, and barred from owning land. Today, violence and prejudice continues in the form of scapegoating around the COVID-19 pandemic. Though not linked linguistically, many Asians have come to share a history of American limitation and exemption.

The exhibition *Alt Yellow* convenes Bay Area artists with lineage in Asia who have imagined alternative modes of existence. How would Afong Moy and her descendants take charge of their own stories? What does a radical mode of narration look like? And how can we reach beyond our own cultures, physical and legal constraints, and ways of thinking to overcome historical and present-day hardships?

In the video installation and performance by the first artist, she conceptualizes Asian American identity through a science fiction narrative, picturing her experience as an "interplanetary migration." She intermingles text, traditional Asian clothing and objects, Morse code, scuba hand signals, and sounds to communicate into an expansive universe.

The second artist engages the senses--such as smell--to focus on migration and decolonization in her work, connecting memory and history to the present.

The third artist's work broadens the question of how to re-envision ways of co-existing. His life-sized space invites people to share their stories and experiences, foster understanding, and face conflict in an increasingly angsty nation and world.

In her tragically short life, New York-to-Bay Area artist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha used language and mythology to conjure a portrait of both Asian and non-Asian women throughout history and her personal life. Her work takes the discomfort of one's foreign language(s) to find something entirely new in between.

As a whole, these artists hailing from different geographies and histories in Asia and the U.S. transcend the limitations placed on them historically to re-construct their own understanding of the past, the realities of the present, and future possibilities.

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