

Angela Yuen Teaching the World How to See Reality Through Rose Coloured Lens

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Using nostalgia and childhood memories as building blocks, Angela Yuen weaves light and shadows to create a visual love letter to Hong Kong's Golden Years.

TEXT: Camilla Russell

IMAGES: Courtesy of Contemporary by Angela Li

An artist who is both young in age and career, Angela Yuen began her professional artistic practice in 2014, however she is already amassing a growing collector base in Hong Kong, Australia, and Japan. Born in 1991, she is part of the young generation of Hong Kong artists who are injecting new life into the city's artistic identity. She began making chandeliers with found objects, then progressed to standing sculptures using similar motifs and aesthetics. Her creative practice is finding vintage collectibles and repurposing them into kinetic and static sculptures. Collecting can be said to be in her blood; as a child, Yuen watched as her father collected vintage stamps. There is a quiet beauty in celebrating the days of wine and roses, and her oeuvre is filled with those bittersweet and wonderful moments.

"Growing up watching classic Hong Kong movies from the 1970s and 80s with my Dad, I gradually developed a strong interest in the city's golden years. Hong Kong's golden era of growth was the fruit of industrialization in the post-war period, and the local plastic toy manufacturing industry played an important role in the growth of Hong Kong," Yuen explained.



Angela Yuen, *The Lost Time Travel Machine*, 2019, plastic toys, perspex, resin, LED lights, motor, 45 x 45 x 73 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Contemporary by Angela Li.



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In her sculptures, Disney figurines, toys from McDonald's Happy Meal, and other childhood tokens are gifted a new life. However, it is when the lights go out that the real magic happens—shadows made from the pivoting sculptures recreate the silhouette of Hong Kong's skyline on the walls. "Hong Kong is ever changing and progressing, and the rotating element in my kinetic works signifies the city as a place in constant evolution, from a manufacturing hub to an international financial and service center," she said.

In her recent solo exhibition at Contemporary by Angela Li entitled "The Lost Time Travel Machine" previous works from over the past six years were presented together bringing a survey of Yuen's emerging practice. The title "The Lost Time Travel Machine" was inspired by parallel universes and dystopian planets. This desire to escape to another place was influenced by the recent protests which began in June 2019, that saw familiar neighbourhoods transform into unrecognizable battle zones. "Hong Kong is [in] a very strange time now, because I feel that everyone is becoming more individualistic. While in the past we were like one big family where everyone cared about each other and was friendly with [one] another. However, as time goes by I see that everyone just cares more about their own individual needs and businesses," she said.



Angela Yuen, *Parallel Universe – Queen’s Pier*, 2019, plastic toys, perspex, resin, LED lights, 65 x 65 x 20 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Contemporary by Angela Li.

She seeks out discarded and forgotten pieces—what was once trash is now treasure in her eyes. Yuen’s memories growing up in Hong Kong, are filled with an era where the city became abundant with “made in China” plastic paraphernalia that was sold locally and overseas. Serendipitously, these toys are now finding their way back through her artworks. There may admittedly be a sense of melancholy that cast the works with a rose coloured hue. Yet it is this same yearning that makes seeing her art a poignant experience as the works transport people back to the nostalgia of their childhood.

Other recent highlights in her rising career include nomination as a finalist for the 2019 Sovereign Asian Art Prize, and subsequent with the organizers, Sovereign Art Foundation, partaking in their “Year of the Pig” public art project and fundraising initiative. Her tongue-in-cheek homage to that astrological year was a sculpture of an orange pig titled *Fortune Piggy Bank* (2019) decorated with lost toys and vintage collectibles.

“I choose plastic toys and manufactured objects as a my medium, because the material is imbued with symbolic meaning that is associated with the spirit, sweat and hardship of the local labor and plastic manufactured objects serve as an iconic representation of Hong Kong’s manufacturing boom that shaped the early stages of the city’s modernization,” she said.

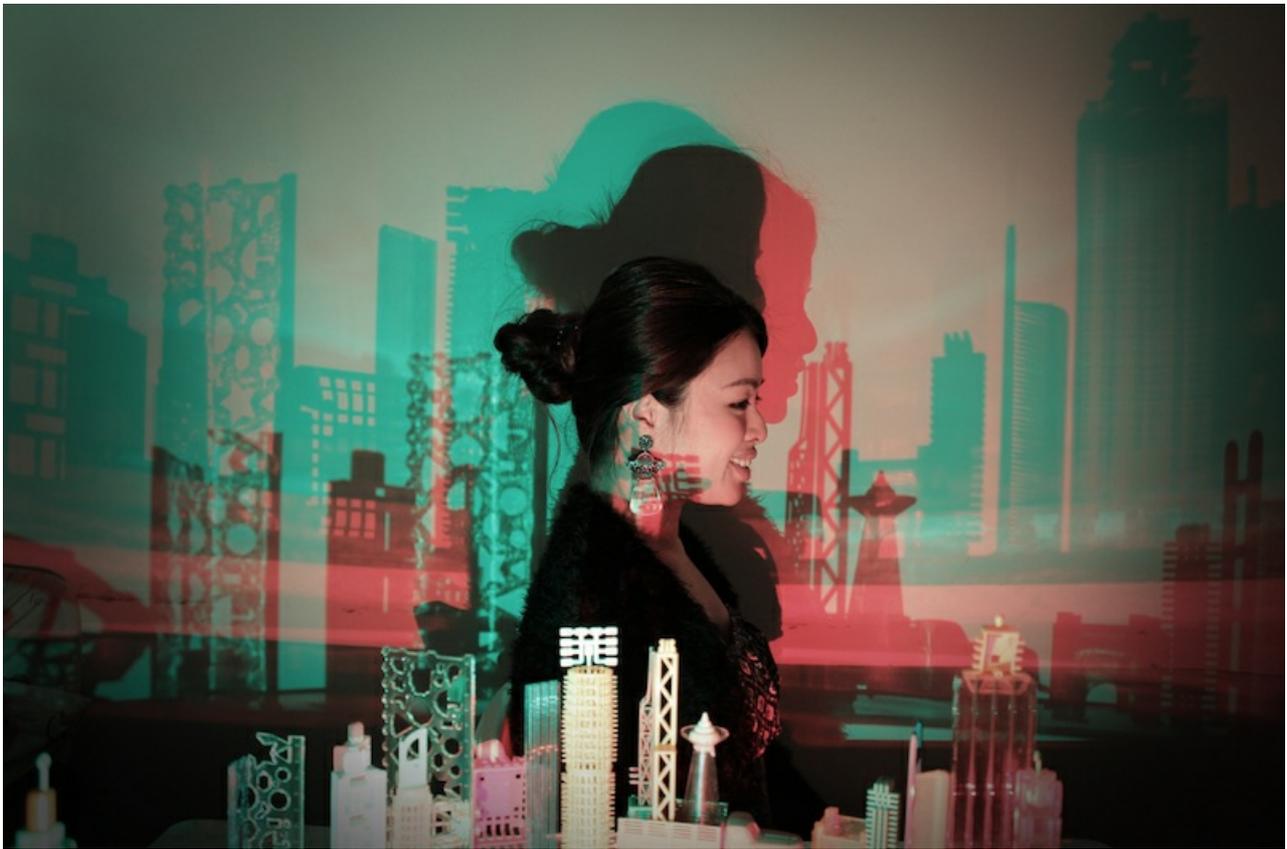


Angela Yuen, Chrono Cross IV (detail), 2019, plastic toys, perspex, resin, LED lights, gears, motor, 50 x 33 cm. Image courtesy of the artist and Contemporary by Angela Li.

“The whole collection process is like time travel, or like a treasure hunt, because I hunt for found objects and manufactured goods. After six years I still feel the warmth from Hong Kong people. I visit Sham Shui Po often to find various tools. This is a unique journey that creates a bond with each neighbourhood I visit. People who once seemed indifferent now teach me their knowledge on light sourcing and acrylic sanding for example,” she said.

“To me it is not just about the art, but it is about the creative process too. I am creating worlds that people reminisce about. These places may have been lost or simply vanished from our collective memories.”

About the artist



Portrait of Angela Yuen. Image courtesy of the artist and Contemporary by Angela Li.

Angela Yuen was born in Hong Kong in 1991. She graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University in 2014 and participated in a Beijing artist residency program in 2016 and Hong Kong Hart Haus residency in 2019. The Lost Time Travel Machine is Yuen's first major solo exhibition, and she has participated in many joint exhibitions in Hong Kong, Beijing and Australia since 2013. Yuen is the finalist of The 2019 Sovereign Asian Art Prize. Her works are parts of public and private collections in Hong Kong, China and Australia.

Camilla Russell

Camilla Russell is a Chinese-American who calls New York, Bangkok, and Hong Kong home. She started as a lifestyle journalist at The Bangkok Post Newspaper, then was invited to join the PR team at Mandarin Oriental, Bangkok where she managed international media relations for three years. Fate brought her to Hong Kong to be a specialist in Southeast Asian Art at Sotheby's and here she learnt her "ABC's (Always Be Closing)". She now helps to oversee the education and outreach programs at Loupe, a jewellery residency under Chow Tai Fook mentorship located at PMQ. Throughout it all art and writing are her first loves, and what makes her happiest at the end of the day.