

EDUCATION GUIDE

BEAUTIFUL DIASPORA / YOU ARE NOT THE LESSER PART

March 3 —
June 26, 2022



Farah Salem, *Untitled 1*, from the series *Cornered*, 2016

MoCP Museum of
Contemporary
Photography

Columbia
COLLEGE CHICAGO

This guide serves as a viewer supplement to the exhibition *Beautiful Diaspora/You Are Not the Lesser Part* and can be used for engaging with the exhibition virtually or in person. The guide includes information about the works on view, questions for looking and discussion, classroom activities, and suggested readings. You may learn more about educational programs at the MoCP [here](#). To schedule a virtual tour of the exhibition or print viewing with your class, please visit [here](#). This guide was created with contributions from Giselle Torres, current Columbia College Chicago senior majoring in Art History.



Citlali Fabián, *Primasmaldonado*, 2018

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Beautiful Diaspora/You Are Not the Lesser Part has been generously supported by the Lannan Foundation.



INTRODUCTION

In *Beautiful Diaspora / You Are Not the Lesser Part* there is a desire to encourage deep thinking about parallel experiences and relationships between global artists of color and diverse Black artists. By many conventions, this group of fifteen artists would not be shown together under identity concepts, yet in this exhibition their interrelated visual conversations defy the political distances and **legacies of colonialism** that prefer their ideas neither align nor meet.

As a global forum, *beautiful diaspora* testifies to expansiveness—beyond a single-country lens or compressed, commodified narrative, there's a beautiful vastness of wandering and assertion that can exist beyond assumptions and boundaries. The provocation of *you are not the lesser part* challenges the pervasive social casualness of assigning certain bodies and heritages to the category “minority” (quite a mis-imagining). Neither negligible nor small, this significance of fullness, agency, and dreams is not the lesser part of anything.

The exhibition's two titles invite viewers to become active in thinking about different ways the artists may fit together, or why it might be assumed that they do not fit. In a braveness of further conceptual unraveling, there's also an approach to imagining two shows that have been collapsed and intertwined into one as a means breaking with more frequent traditions of ethnically separated, disconnected spaces in museology and the art world. The exhibition itself asks why we separate and define humans in the ways that we do, both within contemporary art and within our societies. There is a significance to Black and global artists of color prompting these discussions together in a shared space.

Asha Iman Veal, Associate Curator



Abena Appiah, *Eden & Harmonie, Skate Gal Club*—Ghana, 2020

ARTISTS FEATURED

ABENA APPIAH

(b. 1998 United Kingdom)

XYZA CRUZ BACANI

(b. 1987 Philippines)

WIDLINE CADET

(b. 1992 Haiti)

JESSICA CHOU

(b. 1985 Taiwan)

COG•NATE COLLECTIVE

(Amy Sanchez Arteaga
b. 1988 United States; and
Misael Diaz, b. 1987 United States)

IŞİL EĞRIKAVUK

(b. 1980 Turkey)

CITLALI FABIÁN

(b. 1988 Mexico)

SUNIL GUPTA

(b. 1953 India)

KELVIN HAIZEL

(b. 1987 Ghana)

DAVID HEO

(b. 1992 United States)

DAMON LOCKS

(b. 1969 United States)

JOHNY PITTS

(b. United Kingdom)

FARAH SALEM

(b. 1991 Kuwait)

NGADI SMART

(b. 1988 United Kingdom)

TINTIN WULIA

(b. 1972 Indonesia)

BEAUTIFUL / YOU ARE NOT DIASPORA / THE LESSER PART

This exhibition has two titles but the work is meant to be viewed together. The curator of the exhibition states:

“Part of my goal with the two titles is that museum visitors are invited to be active in thinking through different ways of how individual artists/artworks or groupings may fit together, or why it might be assumed that they don’t fit. This group of fifteen artists, by many conventions, isn’t one that would usually be shown together under the title concepts. [This way of] looking is less about a gimmick or lack of clarity, and more a way of encouraging deep thinking about parallel experiences and relationships between Black artists and global artists of color.”

Introductory Questions for Looking and Discussion

Consider the two titles for the exhibition.

- Does the title of an exhibition ever shape the way you look at the artwork?
- What are you expecting to see in this exhibition based on the titles alone?
- What does the phrase *Beautiful Diaspora* mean to you?
- What does the phrase *You Are Not the Lesser Part* mean to you?
- How do these two statements take on new meaning, together?



Citali Fabian, *A Group of Girls Dancing, El Jarabe del Valle*, 2018

DEFINING DIASPORA

Diaspora refers to a population of people who have been uprooted or scattered geographically from their homelands due to a variety of complex political, social, economic, and climate-related reasons, such as war, drought, famine, slavery, genocide, religious oppression, and more. People of diasporic identity can feel distanced from the interconnection of shared traditions, language, rituals, and community of their homeland. However, the concept of diaspora can also more positively be viewed as a move towards shared global expressions, disrupting the status quo of individual national and cultural boundaries and creating more expansive notions of belonging.

Key Theme

Defying the Identity Categorization “Minority”

The term “minority” has become a common term in the English language used to describe non-white populations. Although the term “minor” has its origin in meaning less than a majority, the term can also be understood as meaning “small.” Because of the nuanced meaning of this word, “minority” is perhaps a devaluing word when used to describe human beings. At The 2000 Soul Train Awards, Prince [gave a speech](#) upon accepting an award for Male Artist of the Decade, in which he notably and publicly recognized the disparaging undertones coded in this term and said to fellow Black artists: “There is nothing minor about you.”



Citali Fabian, *Melina monserrat*, from from *Ben'n Yalhalhj / Soy de Yalálag / I'm from Yalalag*, 2018

Exhibition Highlight

Farah Salem

(b. 1991 Kuwait)

In her series, *Cornered* (2016), the artist appears as an anonymous figure. She's repeatedly folded and hidden within an open-faced cardboard box, pushing against the confines of her limited space. Salem describes the distinctive landscape and structural backdrops of each photo as places of **"beautiful nowhere—yet remaining trapped in a box that has been created by either society or ourselves."**³ Deeply concerned with topics of gender and autonomy, Salem reminds us that it is not a position of lesser strength to be a woman.

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- Salem says part of this work is about pushing against confines of gender. What are some other boxes society places on us?
- Both Widline Cadet (see first exhibition highlight) and Farah Salem are photographing themselves as representatives of their stories. Would you consider this work to be performance as well as photography? Why or why not?

3. Cornered. Farah Salem. (n.d.). Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <https://www.farahsalem.com/cornered-1>

Farah Salem, *Cornered*, 2016



Exhibition Highlight

Widline Cadet

(b. 1992 Haiti)

The opening gallery presents Widline Cadet's series, *Seremoni Disparisyon (Ritual [Dis]Appearance)*, which consists of carefully **staged** portraits about memory, cultural identity, and the artist's own sense of home in the United States after emigrating from Haiti as a teenager. Many images in the series, including *Yon Etranje ki pa Sanble Youn #2 (A Stranger Who Doesn't Look Like One# 2)*, depict the artist and a model posed side-by-side, in a gesture that suggest intimacy or a deep knowingness. Yet, Cadet often photographs strangers with whom she feels an immediate sense of closeness. She states: **"It is worth noting that the people I photograph are predominantly Black and that alone is a sense of familiarity in me—a Black woman photographing other Black people. There's a desire of wanting them to be seen and I've been fortunate to encounter people who share and embrace that goal in the process of making an image."**¹ Also in a signal of Black woman's autonomy, many people in her portraits directly meet the gaze of the viewer. Additionally, Cadet at times reveals herself holding the camera shutter-release remote visibly in hand. We are both welcomed and called out in our act of looking, and there is no question as to who the author of the moment is.

Cadet also states in interviews about this work that the series functions as a way for her to fill in missing family photographs and histories. Although the images do not document actual moments or people of her past, they convey scenes of softness and relationship while nodding to nuances of separateness and **intersectionality** within an identity. This is also expressed in the titles, which play on common sayings or expressions both in English and her native language, Creole.



Widline Cadet

Si Ou Ta Dwe Bliye Wout Lakay Ou Lè Tout Limyè Yo Etenn) Bò Dwat
(Should You Forget Your Way Home (When All The Lights Go Off) Right Side, 2021)

1. Q&A: Widline Cadet. Strange Fire. (n.d.). Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <http://www.strangefirecollective.com/qa-widline-cadet>

Cadet states: “I’ve felt and experienced [life] as a person who lives and occupies multiple worlds. And I’m specifically thinking about my relationship with my parents, whose intentions in bringing their kids to the United States was for us to get a better education and better quality of life. But oftentimes it’s that same education and life in America that leads me to be alienated from them. My first language has shifted to English, while theirs is still Creole, so how does that impact how we communicate with each other, or how my father would communicate with his grandchildren, most of whom only speak English? I think that’s the othering that I’m concerned with.”²

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- Consider the title of *Yon Etranje ki pa Sanble Youn #2 (A Stranger Who Doesn’t Look Like One# 2)*. How does the title support the forms presented in the image? For you, what does the title add to the meaning of the image?
- Why might the artist choose to outfit her subjects in matching silk pajamas or gingham uniforms? What do the clothing choices signify to you?
- What do you notice about the location of the portraits? Why might the artist choose to photograph in nature? What does the natural landscape add to the narrative?



Widline Cadet

Yon Etranje ki pa Sanble Youn #2 (A Stranger Who Doesn’t Look Like One# 2), 2019

2. Widline Cadet: Preserving (imagined) worlds. The Studio Museum in Harlem. (2021, December 10). Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <https://studiomuseum.org/article/widline-cadet-preserving-imagined-worlds>

Key Theme

Repercussions of Global Segregations

This exhibition points to global views on segregation, raising questions about imbalances of power structures worldwide and what these forces can mean on a human level. This can be seen in the works of artists who address issues of displacement, human rights abuses, and labor exploitations that happen when people are “minoritized.”



Xyza Cruz Bacani, *Angels*, from the series *We Are Like Air*, 2018

Exhibition Highlight

Xyza Cruz Bacani

(b. 1987 Philippines)

Xyza Cruz Bacani is a street and documentary photographer based in Hong Kong, who chronicles the migration labor experience in Hong Kong. Her images portray the wider conditions for domestic helpers, many of whom are required to live with their employers and work an average of 71 hours per week at a rate of less than half of the minimum wage in Hong Kong. Although many countries benefit from migrant domestic workers, Hong Kong holds an especially high population, comprising approximately 10% of their working population.⁴ Bacani's visual story spans two countries, three generations, and two families—including her own mother and family as a primary subject.

Bacani states: **“During the time that I have lived and worked here in Hong Kong as a domestic servant, I’ve always badly wanted to feel like this is my second home, but tragically I have never felt like I belong, and have recently come face to face with the reality that I’ve spent nearly a decade of my life here, living in complete isolation. I am nothing but a mere observer.”**

Questions for Looking

- Bacani photographs her own life and family as a way to tell larger stories about migrant labor exploitation. What role should photography play in sharing stories of other lived experiences around the world? Does the relationship between the photographer and the story matter?
- How does the artist's choice of working in black and white effect your reading of these images? Would these images read differently in color?



Top to bottom:

Xyza Cruz Bacani

Three Generations, from the series *We Are Like Air*, 2018

We Are Like Air Skyline, from the series *We Are Like Air*, 2018

4. Kang, J. (2017, February 22). Study reveals 95% of Filipino, Indonesian helpers in Hong Kong exploited or Forced Labor. Forbes. Retrieved January 24, 2022, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johnkang/2016/03/18/study-reveals-95-of-filipino-indonesian-helpers-in-hong-kong-exploited-or-forced-labor/?sh=5a0a70337f0d>

Key Theme

Parallels Between Diverse Black Artists and Global Artists of Color

The curator of this exhibition chose to present this selection of fifteen artists together to contrast a common pattern in museum and gallery exhibitions where artists are grouped together simply because of their shared nationality, racial, or gender identity. Instead, the artists here bring together diverse Black artists with global artists of color to highlight the expansiveness of identity, and to disrupt limiting categorizations.



İşil Eğrikavuk
Departure Time,
2015



Johnny Pitts
Student protest, Rome,
from *Afropean:*
Travels in Black Europe,
2013–2018



Jessica Chou
Women Block Sun with
Newspaper, Superco Appliance
Store on Atlantic Blvd, Monterey
Park, from the series Suburban
Chinatown, 2013–ongoing

Exhibition Highlight

Johnny Pitts

(b. United Kingdom)

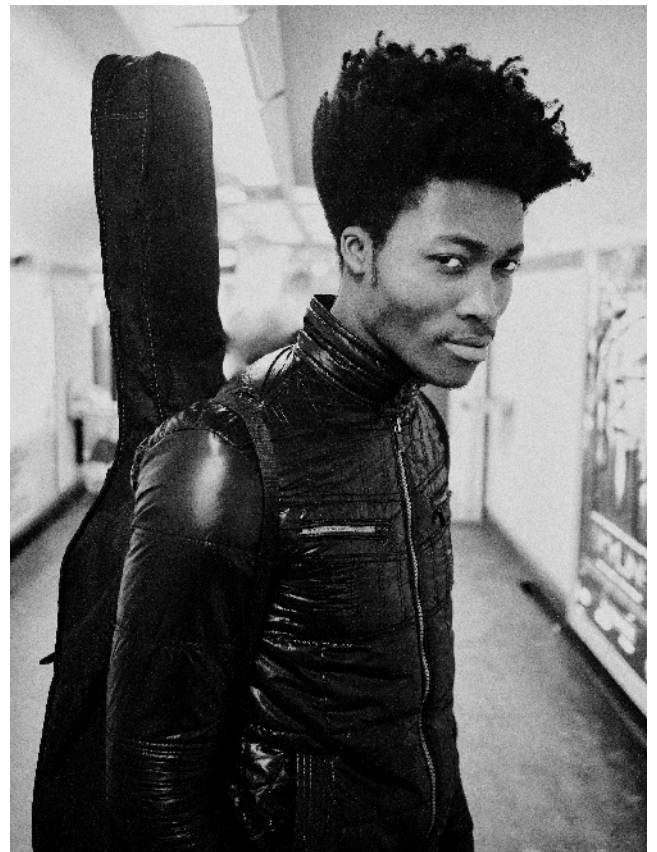
Afropean: Travels in Black Europe (2013–2018) is a collection of black and white, street documentary photography. From London through Brussels, Stockholm to Moscow to Lisbon to Berlin and more—Pitts’ photographic perspective considers trans-local connections and Black European identity. He states: **“I wanted to work on a project that connected and presented Afro-Europeans as lead actors in our own story.”**

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- Ask students to reflect on and discuss the term **diverse Black artists**. In a time where American arts institutions are reckoning with their histories of excluding artists of color, what is the importance of emphasizing diversity amongst Black artists over emphasizing Black artists more broadly, in relationship to whiteness?



Johnny Pitts
Matongé, Brussels, selections from *Afropean*, 2013–2018



Johnny Pitts
Busker Paris, selections from *Afropean*, 2013–2018

Exhibition Highlight

Cog•Nate Collective

(Amy Sanchez Arteaga b. 1988 United States;
and Misael Diaz, b. 1987 United States)

Cog•nate Collective offers the participatory artwork *Something to Do with Crossing* (2012–ongoing) as an installation and memoir based on Arteaga’s former family home. Located a block away from the U.S./Mexico border fence in Calexico, California, the artist’s front-yard clothesline became a source of support for migrant individuals. People would often exchange their worn and soiled garments for the family’s clean clothes put out to dry on the line. Diaz and Arteaga recreate this dynamic in the museum space, pinning small photographs to a reconstructed clothesline that depict examples of the items that the travelers would take. The photographs on the line at the MoCP are available to touch and remove, with the option to take a photograph home as long as an actual, single item of clothing is left behind in place of the artwork. The clothes collected at the close of the exhibition will be donated to a migrant shelter in the bi-national region of California and Mexico.

The artists state: **“We are hoping to rehearse one possible strategy, which is to build inter-cultural networks of solidarity to resist displacement and further marginalization.”**



Cog•Nate Collective

Something to do with crossing..., 2012-ongoing
polaroid photo prints, portable clothes line, miscellaneous clothes

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- How do the colors, patterns and textures of the materials add to your impression of the installation? How does the installation make you feel?
- Can garments function as portraits of the person who wore them?

Creative Writing Response

Choose one image on the clothesline that you feel drawn to. Spend five minutes noticing and recording your emotional reaction to the image.

- What happens when you slow down to look closer?
- Are there any experiences from your personal history that might cause this reaction?
- Do you identify or relate with this object of clothing in any way?
- What do you believe about the person who once owned this garment?
- Where do you think they come from and where are they going?
- Why are they traveling?

Based on your answers to these questions, write a short story about the person. Use as many details from the image as possible in your narrative.



Deeper Reading

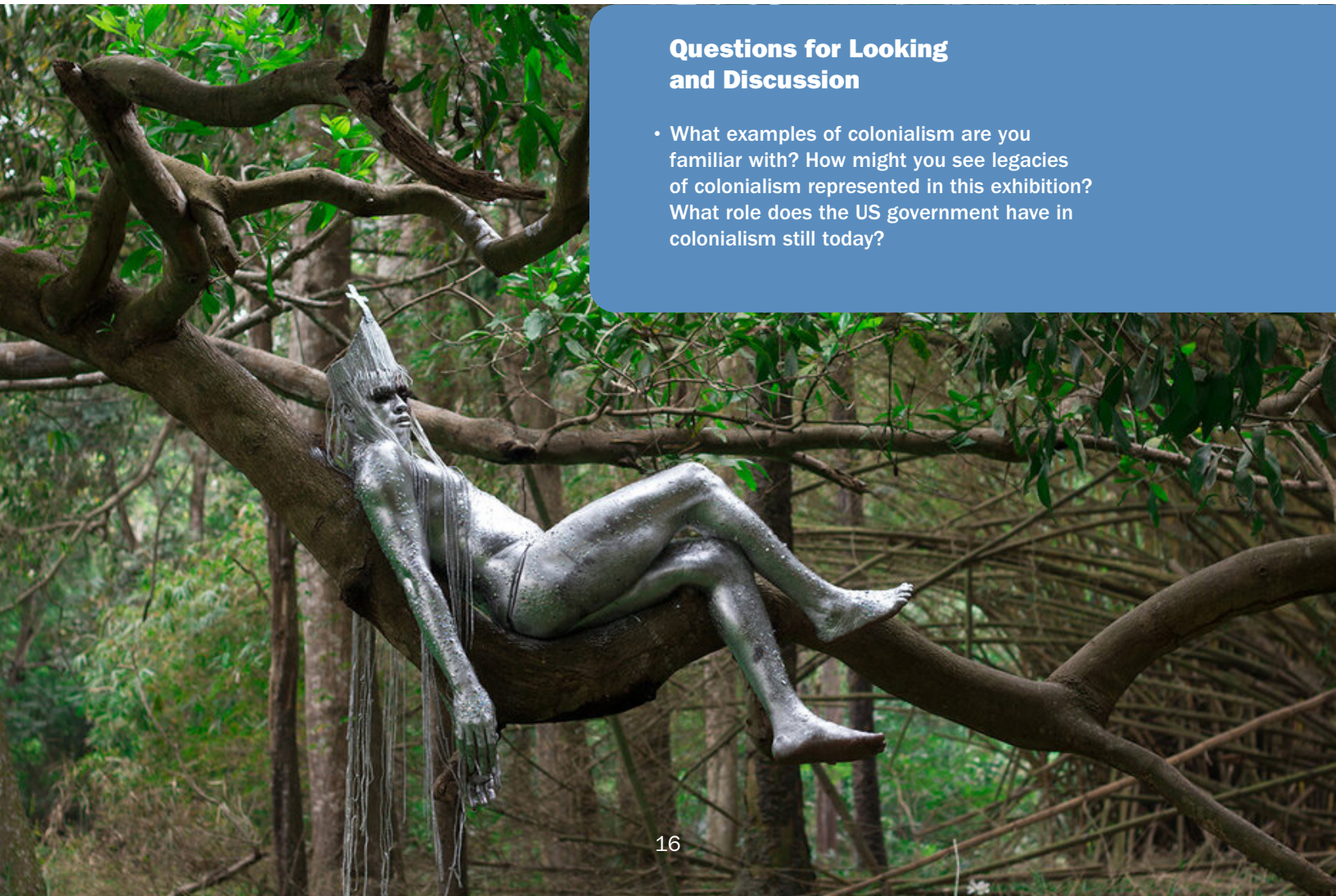
Legacies of Colonialism

The curator of *Beautiful Diaspora/You Are Not the Lesser Part* references “legacies of colonialism” in the introductory text. This refers to the many lingering impacts of Western European expansion during the 15th to 20th centuries. During this era, Europeans exerted dominance over many nations and cultures in Africa, the Americas, and Asia, both for purposes of establishing new territories as well as to claim the wealth and resources of the land. Places under colonialist rule were forced to change and become Westernized and indigenous people were largely enslaved, exploited, or forced to migrate. The results of this oppressive history are impossible to quantify and are still very evident in our world today. Many of the borders created during colonial rule are still in place and most countries still use the language of the oppressor as the official language over indigenous languages. European skin tones and hair styles are still predominantly featured in the media, and so on. This exhibition joins together fifteen artists purposely outside of identity concepts created by the lasting effects of colonialism. The curator states: “Solidarity communities are a choice. *Beautiful Diaspora/You Are Not the Lesser Part* strives to demonstrate the myriad of options.”

Ngadi Smart, *Untitled 6*, selections
from *The Queens of Babi*, 2020

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- What examples of colonialism are you familiar with? How might you see legacies of colonialism represented in this exhibition? What role does the US government have in colonialism still today?



Exhibition Highlight

Jessica Chou

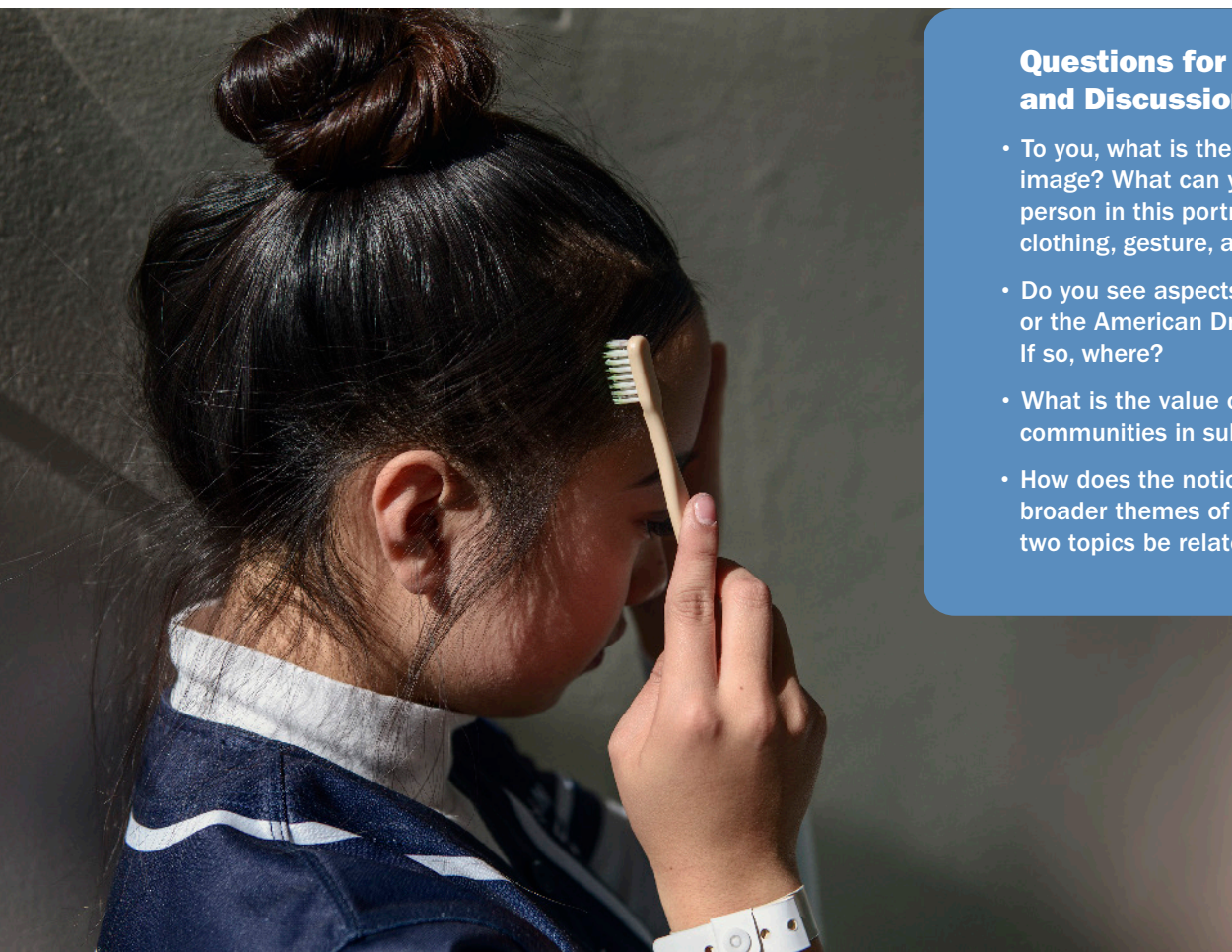
(b. 1985 Taiwan)

For her *Suburban Chinatown* (2013–ongoing) project, Jessica Chou documents the San Gabriel Valley in the Californian suburb of Monterey Park where she grew up. Monterey Park is the first continental US city to hold a majority Asian American population. The city also historically elected Chinese American Mayor Lily Lee Chen. Thus, Chou’s images include a Sunday morning church choir and its bilingual signage for hymns; and a high school dance team whose jerseys display surnames Louie, Wong, Cheung, Jianrungsang, and To. Yet there are also images of teen boys hanging out afterschool on a corner, wearing a

signature So-Cal style of long shorts, high socks, and ankle sneakers; and a single dancer alone in a hallway pre-performance, raising a clean toothbrush to her forehead to shape her baby hair. Chou’s eye compellingly captures the generational experiences and cultural configurations of contemporary America. The artist states: **“There are many interpretations of the American dream. I hope this work updates both the immigrant and suburban story.”**

Questions for Looking and Discussion

- To you, what is the story presented in this image? What can you imagine about the person in this portrait based solely on the clothing, gesture, and body language pictured?
- Do you see aspects of American stereotypes or the American Dream in this image? If so, where?
- What is the value of documenting immigrant communities in suburban environments?
- How does the notion of ‘suburban’ connect to broader themes of diaspora? How might the two topics be related?



Jessica Chou
Baby Hair, selections from
Suburban Chinatown,
2013–ongoing

Glossary of Terms

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a term coined by feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989. It asks us to understand how the combination of social identities (like gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and more) shapes a person's life, rather than considering each of them separately. For example, the way someone who identifies as a queer, Latinx woman is seen by society may be different than the way someone who identifies as a heterosexual, Latinx man is seen by society.

Staged photography: When artists create narratives by carefully composing their settings, altering photographs, or going to more elaborate ends to construct images based in imagination rather than a record of “real” events.

Extended Resources

Books by artists in the exhibition

- Bacani, Xyza Cruz (2019). *We are like air*. Ada Wang.
- Gupta, Sunil. (2011). *Queer*. Prestel.
- Gupta, Sunil., & Ajamu. (1999). *Sunil Gupta: From here to eternity: New work by Sunil Gupta*. Standpoint Gallery.
- Gupta, Sunil. (2003). *Pictures from here*. Autograph.
- Pitts, Johnny. 2019. *Afropean: Notes from Black Europe, 2019*, Allen Lane.

Books about TinTin Wulia's piece

- Roosa, J. (2006). *Pretext for mass murder: The September 30th movement and Suharto's coup d'état in Indonesia (new perspectives in southeast asian studies)*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bevins, V. (2020). *The Jakarta Method: Washington's Anticommunist Crusade and the mass murder program that Shaped Our World*. PublicAffairs.

Podcasts

- “Episode 10: Cog•nate Collective and Işıl Eğrikavuk”. Focal Point. July 22, 2021. 42:10.

Illinois Learning Standards Addressed in this Guide

VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

VA:Re7.2.K–12 Perceive and analyze artistic work. Visual imagery influences understanding of, and responses to, the world.

VA:Re8.K–12 Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. People gain insights into meanings of artworks by engaging in the process of art criticism.

VA:Re9.K–12 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. People evaluate art based on various criteria.

VA:Cn11.K–12 Relate artistic ideas and works with social, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding. People develop ideas and understandings of society, culture, and history through their interactions with and analysis of art.

Media Arts Standards

MA:Re7.1.PK-12 Anchor Standard 7 Perceive and analyze artistic work. Media artworks can be appreciated and interpreted through analyzing their components.

MA:Re8.1.PK-12 Anchor Standard 8 Construct meaningful interpretations of artistic work. Interpretation and appreciation require engagement with the content, form, and context of media artworks.

MA:Re9.1.PK-12 Anchor Standard 9 Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. Skillful evaluation and critique are critical components of experiencing, appreciating, and producing media artworks.

Social Sciences Standards

SS.H.8.9-12 Analyze key historical events and contributions of individuals through a variety of perspectives, including those of historically under-represented groups.

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