

MAKE ROOM

Xin Liu

Self Devourer

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To create a being out of oneself is very serious. I am creating myself. And walking in complete darkness in search of ourselves is what we do.

- Clarice Lispector, *Agua Viva*

In the sum of the parts, there are only the parts.

- Wallace Stevens, *Parts of the world*

The collection of works on view in *Self Devourer* at Make Room was conceived during various points of the past two years. A scattering of moments and thoughts as I, along with the world itself, entered an unfamiliar, everything-doing-just-fine mode of being and living. I sensed a hint of repression. Every moment, every tiniest decision, every bit, byte and atom, can cause the most dramatic change. Yet, we glide through life.

All humans share 99.9% of their genetic makeup and are within 50th cousins of each other.

"Am I Asian American to you?" I once asked a friend of mine, a second generation Asian American himself. "No." He explained that I was not because I did not share the same kind of upbringing which formed a crucial part of his identity. Then I asked "How about your mother?" He paused for a few seconds, then looked directly into my eyes and said, "No, I guess she is not."

When I sequenced my genome in 2019, I was overwhelmed by the amount of data produced from a tiny droplet of saliva: 3,117,275,501 base pairs. How can one decipher something that large?

There comes a point in life where one confronts their own triviality. A common story shared here: students studying abroad till their immigration, marriage and, perhaps, parenthood. I desperately, secretly, hoping to find something special, in the most literal sense, from within myself. Having my DNA tested was thrilling—a revelation of the most forbidden of secrets. I

Sometimes I feel myself falling: a drop of water falls into the ocean. The sensation of disappearing gave me a peculiar sense of calmness. I was part of it.

To grasp this idea, I made an accordion book that could extend however long needed while allowing me to meditate in the process of printing, gluing, rubbing, and folding. It ended up being a book of about one thousand pages of the tiniest letters that I could read with bare eyes. The volume and weight of these papers were my access to the spells contained in every cell of mine.

Several years later, when I traveled back to the US after a long trip home, I felt this unshakable disconnect with myself. I struggled to recognize and locate myself among the various identities I am constantly obtaining and losing, and often wondered in my thoughts alone in the studio: an artist, a woman, an engineer, a Chinese immigrant, an Asian American, a daughter...

Being an artist is quite consuming. The artist has an insatiable appetite. I realized I had become this relentless creature consuming herself. I had to cut her open for examination, for reassembly, for display. She is my only material. The only thing that is mine.

That was when I dug out those papers I had made, the extra duplicates from the book of mine. Somehow, as I flipped through the pages, those unreadable bytes and bits were no longer confusing. These mysterious letters presented me with an opening: a slate of meaninglessness, of intuition, of plausible translation without understanding. And so I began to sew.

-Xin Liu, May 2023

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Xin Liu is an artist and engineer. She creates experiences/experiments to take measurements in our personal, social, and technological spaces in a postmetaphysical world: between gravity and homeland, sorrow and the composition of tears, gene sequencing, and astrology. Her work resides in between the measurable and ineffable, seeking tensions and reconciliations at macro- and micro-scales that are beyond our daily experiences. Her recent research and interest center around the verticality of space, extraterrestrial explorations, and cosmic metabolism: the metabolism of our planet and how it is affected by technological infrastructures in the past few decades. She has been commissioned and included in by permanent public collections and institutions including M+ Museum (Hong Kong), KADIST Foundation (US & France), Ars Electronica (Austria), Rhizome (USA), Media Art Xploration Festival (USA), Onassis Foundation (US & Europe) X Museum (China), and Abandon Normal Devices Festival (UK). She has joined several residency programs including Queens Museum Artist Studio program, New INC, Watermill Center and Pioneer Works. She is an advisor for LACMA Art+Tech Lab and a faculty member at The Terraforming, a new research program at Strelka Institute in 2020-2021. Xin graduated from MIT Media Lab with a master's degree in Media Arts and Sciences after her M.F.A from Rhode Island School of Design and B.E from Tsinghua University in Beijing (Measurement, Control Technology, and Instrument). Her first US institution solo exhibition, Seedlings and Offsprings opens at Pioneer Works, New York in July 2023. Additionally, she is the Arts Curator in the Space Exploration Initiative in MIT Media Lab, a member of the inaugural ONX studio program founded by New Museum and Onassis NY and Silver Arts Project in the World Trade Center. She is also an artist-in-residence in SETI Institute. She is the recipient of numerous awards and residencies, including Porches Chinese Young Artist of the Year 2021, Forbes 30 under 30 Asia, X Museum Triennial Award, the Van Lier Fellowship from Museum of Arts and Design, Sundance New Frontier Story Lab, inaugural Europe ARTificial Intelligence Lab residency with Ars Electronica, SXSW Interactive Innovation Award, Core 77 Interaction Design Award, Fast Company Innovation by Design Award, Huayu Youth Award Finalist and Creative Capital On

Established in 2018, **Make Room** is a contemporary art gallery owned and directed by Emilia Yin. The newly relocated 4500 square foot gallery is situated at the heart of Hollywood, made up of multiple exhibition spaces with an outdoor courtyard and garden. With its dynamic program—which includes both on-site solo and group exhibitions as well as ambitious off-site projects with international collaborators—and a particular focus championing female, emerging, and artists of color, Make Room has positioned itself as a cutting edge incubator for emerging artists engaging with cultural identity, conceptual practices and global perspectives. Not limited to a physical gallery, Make Room works to generate new possibilities and support its artists' visionary projects and the development of new bodies of work.