

# Queer Chinese Feminist Archipelagos

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Shanghai, San Francisco, and Miami

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**Abstract:** Martinican-born poet and theoretician Édouard Glissant suggests that a shift to “archipelagic thinking” can allow one to see the world metaphorically as a collection of islands connected to each other. Foregrounding the body and affect, I will consider the exhibition *WOMEN*我們, organized by Abby Chen, that traveled from Shanghai (2011) to San Francisco (2012) and Miami (2013) through what I refer to as “archipelagic feeling.” *WOMEN* 我們 explored queer Chinese feminism, and in a nod to cities in which the venues were located, the curators expanded the checklist at each leg of the tour. In this way, the curators aimed not to essentialize or center queer Chinese feminism but productively connect it to (for example) Latinx subjectivities and Asian-American feminist concerns. In so doing, I suggest this exhibition offers a new framework for thinking about the transnational through both queerness and creolization.

**Keywords:** creolization, archipelago, feminism, queer theory, curatorial studies, affect, LGBT, diaspora

Through the lens of Martinican-born poet and theoretician Édouard Glissant’s writings on the “archipelago,” I explore the exhibition *WOMEN*我們, which toured from Shanghai (2011) to San Francisco (2012) and Miami Beach (2013). The archipelago refers to a specific geological formation: a chain or series of

islands scattered in a body of water with no clear center. Much of Glissant's thinking about creolization is linked to the physical geography of the Caribbean archipelago. Creolization refers to the incessant flux of entanglements that Glissant believed could create a broader set of sociocultural processes, not only in the Caribbean but also in *tout-monde*, or "all the world." Of interest to him was the idea that each island of the Caribbean maintains its autonomy while still being a part of the whole. Glissant believed creolization and the archipelago went hand in hand. For instance, in a grand and poetic gesture, he applied what he refers to as "archipelagic thinking" to the world, which he writes is "becoming an archipelago and creolizing" (1997, 193–194).

This essay will explore how each of the different iterations of *WOMEN* 我們 instantiates the archipelagic *feeling* necessary to engender queer Chinese feminist archipelagos that connect various combinations of seemingly disparate regions, such as the Bay Area in the United States, parts of China, and south Florida. The rationale for replacing "thinking" with "feeling" is to underscore that the sensation need not be abstract but instead embodied. The connections I describe are at the level of the corporeal body in the space of the gallery. Objects in the gallery are arranged so that what might be familiar and unfamiliar is blurred. That is, at first glance, they might not seem to fit. As queer theorist Sarah Ahmed writes in her essay "Queer Feelings," there is a generative potential of discomfiting (2013). She notes that "it is not so much that discomfort becomes 'radically' transformative by breaking away from norms completely but rather that discomfort shows us how to abide differently within those norms" (2013, 425). Ahmed has also written about how bodies produce meanings by orienting toward and around objects in particular spaces (2006). This process creates a sense of belonging in the space of the familial, delineating a kinship structure, which is seemingly natural and biological but is in actuality constructed. The curatorial strategies I describe re-think belongingness outside of the biological.

Queer archipelagic feeling, I contend, is much more powerful in creating an ethical creolized world. I will first describe the remit of the exhibition in more detail followed by a discussion of a few artworks (usually two) that were installed in each venue of the exhibition. I will focus on how an archipelagic feeling brings into being a cross-regional discussion of intergenerational trauma, as explored in the inaugural exhibition in Shanghai; sex work, as explored in the San Francisco venue; and the lives of queer subjects, as explored in the Miami venue, the final stop of the exhibition's tour.

## *WOMEN* 我們

Curator Abby Chen's rationale for *WOMEN* 我們 began to take shape in 2009 when she was invited by Ai Xiaoming and her colleague Ke Qianting to serve on a panel discussing documentary film in China. While there, she

was introduced to a few scholars, feminists, and artists in Guangdong. She was inspired by the artwork she saw and the women artists she met but was startled to learn that neither had enjoyed any visibility. Indeed, the exploration of feminism in contemporary Chinese art and visual culture remains woefully unexamined.<sup>1</sup> Chen put together an exhibition that focused in earnest on the exploration and expression of feminism in Chinese visual culture. It opened as part of the 2011 International Conference on Chinese Women and Visual Representation in Shanghai, organized jointly by the University of Michigan and the Journalism School of Fudan University.<sup>2</sup> In the foreword of the catalogue accompanying the exhibition, Wang Zhang, the director of the University of Michigan-Fudan Joint Institute for Gender Studies, underscored the exhibition's importance when she wrote that "Chinese society is saturated with sexist visual representation[s] of women . . . [but] . . . feminist critical studies of visual culture [have] yet to enter the academic field let alone intervene in [the] representation of women."<sup>3</sup>

*WOMEN*我們 was initially an exploration of feminism by women artists of Chinese descent based in China. However, as Chen did more research, it grew to include artists based outside of China as well as activist paraphernalia—both feminist and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) related. Indeed, one of the artists whose work made it onto the final exhibition schedule of each venue was not biologically female. It is instructive to note that the exhibition title is a play on the English-Mandarin homophone meaning "women" and "we," and this title succinctly reveals the crux of the exhibition's curatorial conceit: to examine issues relating to women in China while shifting and stretching the very terms of what the categories of "women" and "China" signify. While all three archipelagos "queer" (or destabilize) dominant understandings of Chinese feminism, only the final archipelagic formation I describe deals explicitly with LGBTQ subjects. Nonetheless, these archipelagos are not meant to be discrete.

#### ARCHIPELAGO: ASIAN AMERICA AND SHUNDE AND SICHUAN, CHINA

Overall, works by ten artists and three groups—both established and emerging—as well as by a nongovernmental organization (NGO) were part of the inaugural exhibition in Shanghai.<sup>4</sup> In this section, I will focus on Man Yee Lam's installation *Cocooning—Self-Combing Woman* (2011) and several of He Chengyao's photographs. The works of both artists deal with intergenerational trauma. To begin with, Lam's work is concerned with her ancestral hometown of Shunde, where silk production is the chief industry and where the workforce was dominated by women for hundreds of years. The women who tended these silkworms not only wielded significant economic power but also reshaped the prevailing feudal social structure. Instead of marriage, a woman in Shunde

could choose to become a “self-combed woman” (Branigan 2014). Traditionally, families hired women who were married with many children to comb a bride’s hair into a matronly bun before her wedding; this was meant to signify her transition from girl to woman and from daughter to wife. On the other hand, a self-combed woman would comb her own hair; this signified her commitment to a life of self-reliance. Man Yee Lam’s performance, however, involves her literally weaving herself into a cocoon with white pigtail yarn to foreground the sobering truth that although the women of Shunde could choose a role other than that of a housewife, this choice came with a lifelong vow of chastity (figure 1).

Lam’s performance is metaphorically autobiographical, too. Indeed, one of the two video monitors accompanying the installation depicts Lam in high-heel shoes and a business suit with her hair pulled up into a bun; this outfit seems to imply her own ability to be self-reliant.<sup>5</sup> However, the juxtaposition of this video alongside another one featuring interviews with some of the remaining women of Shunde suggests that she finds herself in a similar predicament to that of the self-combing women, who all but disappeared after China’s republic era.

In an artist’s statement on the wall of the exhibition, Lam explains that, although she has a greater range of choices than her ancestors did, she considers herself to be emblematic of a contemporary variant of the predicament of the self-combing woman; in the context of both Chinese and Chinese American culture, the fact that she is unmarried at her age effectively renders moot her

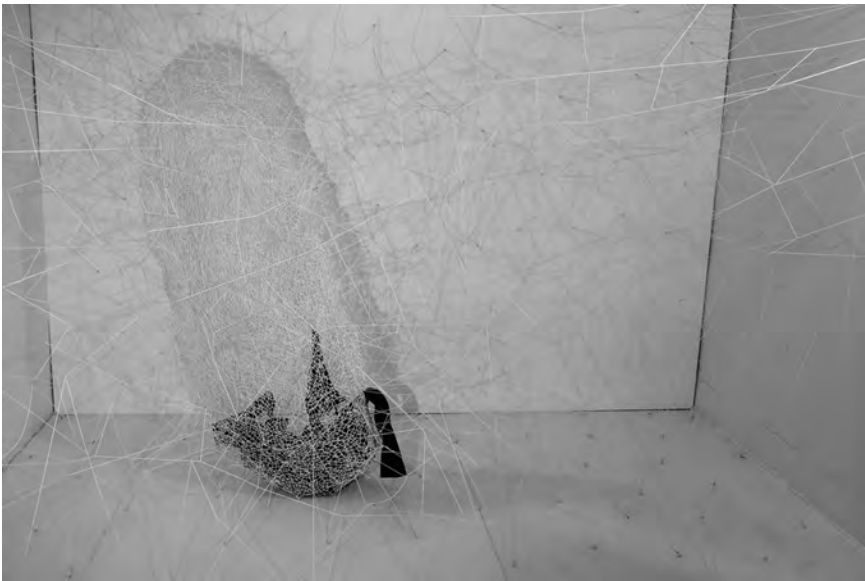


Figure 1. Man Yee Lam 林敏儀, *Cocooning–Self-Combing Woman*, 2011, post-performance sculpture, part of installation with video.

professional accomplishments. In 2014, CNN Hong Kong featured an article that referred to unmarried wealthy women as “golden spinsters” (Li and Wong 2014). The subtitle of the article reads: “Look at all these gorgeous, successful Chinese women: Somebody marry them already.” This subtitle implies that the article is not necessarily mean spirited, but the use of the word “spinster” to refer to women in their mid-thirties suggests that Lam is not entirely misguided when she connects the predicament of the Shunde “spinsters” to her contemporary life.

He Chengyao’s photographs explore memory and mother–daughter relationships, as well as mental illness, which runs in her family. The artist was born out of wedlock in Sichuan, China, and because of this her mother endured years of taunting. During the Cultural Revolution, this situation was exacerbated when her father was imprisoned for his political views. Being a single mother to He and her two siblings, along with the resulting social ostracism, eventually took its toll and He’s mother was institutionalized when the artist was a young girl (Tatlow 2014). One of He’s vivid memories is of her mother running through the streets naked. She has said, “I’m always having flashbacks. I could never get away from it. When I grew up, I used to think it was me, not my mum” (Wood 2012).

The blurred boundaries between mother and daughter are poignantly revealed in *Mama and Me*, a series of time-lapse color photographs that show her mother seated in a chair; she is slouched, vulnerable, and childlike, and nude except for a pair of white pants (figure 2). He stands behind her, initially clothed and then half-naked in solidarity with her mother, suggesting empathy as well as an inescapable legacy of pain passed down through the generations. The artist also believes this was the first time she had hugged her mother since she was a child. He has said, “That was the first time my mother and I ever had our picture taken together. The photo allowed me to squarely face my family’s history of insanity that I had carefully hidden and avoided for so long, to reaffirm the family line that connects me and my mother, and to partially satisfy a yearning of more than thirty years to support, touch, and embrace her.”<sup>6</sup>

Affects of compassion and empathy emerge both from He’s poignant mother–daughter portrait *Mama and Me* as well as Lam’s installation *Cocooning—Self-combing Woman*, which connects the artist to her Shunde



Figure 2. He Chengyao 何成瑤, *Mama and Me* 媽媽和我, 2001-2, photograph.

ancestors. Another affect brought to the fore by both artworks is that of melancholy in connection to the toll a patriarchal society has had on He and her mother's relationship as well as both the compromised freedom of Lam's Shunde ancestors and that of Lam in contemporary Asian America. In Shanghai and in San Francisco, Lam performed live. This undoubtedly deepened the melancholic feeling for viewers. In the end, I argue that the compassion, empathy, and melancholy of these works bring together Asian America and parts of China—Sichuan and Shunde—into a singular archipelago that queers Chinese feminism along the lines of the intergenerational and transnational.

In both San Francisco and Miami, two other works of He Chengyao were installed along with Lam's *Cocooning—Self-combing Woman*. This inevitably reshaped the affective texture of the archipelago I have described. One artwork is the photograph *99 needles* (2002). It depicts the artist pierced by multiple needles (figure 3). She stands against a gray-brick wall with a blank expression. Blood appears to be trickling down from her right wrist, and the crotch area of her underwear, the only piece of clothing she is wearing, is stained with blood. He's acupuncture treatment mirrors one that the artist's mother was once forcibly given. At the age of five, the artist witnessed her mother screaming and struggling in vain as she was tied to a door by the People's Liberation Army. He has said that her mother's screams were like those of a pig being slaughtered (Wood 2012). She then witnessed her mother's red and swollen body after this traumatic event, during which needles were forcibly inserted inside her mother as a "treatment" (Man 2011). When He was given acupuncture, one of the needles was not inserted correctly, resulting in blood loss. She was also menstruating and so, eventually, she fainted (Welland 2018). Through her work, the artist begins to process both the helplessness she felt as a child witnessing the event and the pain her mother must have felt at the time. The second artwork is the photograph *Opening the Great Wall* that documents He, topless, proudly walking on the Great Wall of China. Through the work, He recasts her memory of shame as one of feminist pride.<sup>7</sup>

When the viewer considers the works of Lam and He together, the pain and anguish He's mother must have felt in Sichuan, which is evoked by *99 Needles*, deepen the melancholic condition of Lam's predicament in Asian America as a modern-day Shunde spinster. At the same time, the self-sufficiency of both the women of Shunde who tended the silkworms and Lam of *Self-Combing Women* evoke a sense of pride. This pride is matched by that evoked by He's *Opening the Great Wall*. Overall, I posit that the works of Lam and He bring to the fore the shared effects of melancholy, pain, and anguish as well as compassion, empathy, and pride through which Asian America and various parts of China—Sichuan,



Figure 3. He Chengyao 何成瑤, 99 Needles 99針, 2002, photograph.



Shunde, and even Beijing—begin to cohere into an affective topography that is a variant of the aforementioned archipelago that queers Chinese feminism.

### OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA, AND CHINA: SEX WORK

In 2012, *WOMEN*我們 traveled to the Chinese Culture Center in San Francisco, California.<sup>8</sup> In a nod to this city, curator Abby Chen expanded the list of works to include a video by Ana Teresa Fernandez, a Mexican-born artist based in the nearby city of Oakland. That is, she is not of Chinese descent. Fernandez's work consisted of a looped, five-minute video in which she depicts herself standing on a grate wearing stilettos made of ice. Only her legs are visible from the knees down. It is impossible to racialize or locate the body. In the video, Fernandez is standing on International Boulevard, a seven-and-a-half-mile strip in West Oakland. It is notorious for being "an open-air sex market for young children," especially Asian American girls, who are in high demand (Brownin 2011; Grady 2010).<sup>9</sup>

The pain involved in wearing high heels formed out of ice is evident; the artist's legs shiver and she occasionally pours water down them to speed up the process of the ice melting (figure 4).<sup>10</sup> Fernandez's icy shoes look perversely like fairy tale glass slippers. As they become pools of water, any economic value the shoes signified literally goes down the drain, and the wearer is metaphorically and literally freed from the seemingly interminable labor of waiting—one with no necessarily inherent economic value—for a morally dubious "prince."

Next to Fernandez's work, Chen installed a poster produced by the NGO China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum and drawn by an unknown artist. The poster depicts a chain-link fence dramatically broken in the center by a ruby-red stiletto, which dominates the poster (figure 5). There are flourishes of red behind the shoe that look as much like lipstick as they do blood. This poster had been banned and was shown for the first time in the Shanghai exhibition.

The forum partially emerged out of a sex worker support organization for male, female, and transvestite sex workers in Shanghai. It was established in February 2009 by seventeen grassroots sex worker organizations, including one from Hong Kong and one from Taiwan. As the text above the shoe indicates, the forum is committed to supporting the development of member institutions and improving the health and working environment of sex workers. The forum's work is especially important in China, where in 2010, 90 percent of all Chinese provinces and cities launched strict crackdowns on sex workers





Figure 4. Ana Teresa Fernandez, *Ice Queen*, 2011, video.

and pornography under a “strike hard” campaign. Since condoms were seen as evidence of illegal sex work, many sex workers opted to work underground, resulting in less access to HIV prevention.

When considering the forum’s poster alongside Fernandez’s work, viewers might bring the feeling of pain, which they internalize when watching Fernandez standing in iced stilettos, over to the experience of viewing the poster; thereby, the plight of China’s sex workers is more strongly felt. At the same time, the text placed above the red stiletto could serve to nudge the viewer to learn more about the situation in Oakland. The twin images of the stilettos mobilize an archipelagic feeling of pain that produces a singular archipelago comprised of China and Oakland and begins a conversation about sex work issues across both locations.

#### **SOUTH FLORIDA AND CHINA: LGBTQ SUBJECTIVITIES**

*WOMEN*我們 came to Miami Beach Urban Studios in the fall of 2013.<sup>11</sup> I organized this iteration of the exhibition and was given much leeway by Chen when doing so.<sup>12</sup> Emboldened by her inclusion of Fernandez’s work at the venue in San Francisco, I thought it was reasonable to similarly incorporate Miami in some productive way without losing the core theme of Chen’s exhibition. Significantly, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, in 2013 just

# 拒绝暴力！拒绝严打！ Chinese Sex Workers say no to Violence & Crackdown！

In 2010, 90% of all Chinese provinces and cities launched strict crackdowns against pornography and sex workers under a "strike hard campaign". The China Sex Worker Organization Network (CSWON) conducted a survey among 299 sex workers (105 men, 194 women) about the impacts of the crackdowns on HIV prevention. We found that 135 of participants had been subject to violence by the police. 133 were fined and detained. Another 53 suffered from police beatings and extortion. As a result of the strike hard campaign, condom use declined because police considered possession of condoms as evidence for illegal sex work. Many sex workers opted to work underground resulting in less access to HIV prevention and intervention organizations. Media coverage has only exacerbated discrimination against sex workers. Police crackdowns on sex workers related to anti-prostitution campaigns intensified challenges in ensuring the health and safety of sex workers.



中国性工作机构网络平台

China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum

[www.cswcn.org](http://www.cswcn.org)

Figure 5. China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum 中國性工作機構網絡平台, Say NO to Violence & Crackdown! 拒絕暴力！拒絕嚴打!, 2011, poster.

1.67 percent of the residents of Miami-Dade County were of Asian descent; this is lower than the percentage of residents of Asian descent in the entire state of Florida (Miami-Dade County Planning Research 2013; Chen 2014).<sup>13</sup> By comparison, in San Francisco people of Asian descent comprise 33 percent of the population (Bay Area Census 2014). In other words, it seemed even more important than in San Francisco to include an element that referenced Miami. Therefore, I settled on bringing in the work of Miami-based documentary filmmaker and artist Daniela Montoya, specifically her multimedia project exploring the underground Miami ball scene and the dance style of voguing.

Voguing is an identity-affirming practice for queer people of color and can be traced back to Harlem in New York City.<sup>14</sup> In her 1990 documentary *Paris is Burning*, director Jennie Livingston brought mainstream attention to the largely disenfranchised community of queer people of color in Harlem. She focused on the ballroom competitions that had become a way for the community members to re-imagine their identities. During these competitions, they could become everything from Wall Street executives to the fashion models typically found on the pages of *Vogue* magazine; more to the point, these are subject positions predominately held by those who are white, upper class, and heteronormative, and thereby largely unattainable for queers of color.<sup>15</sup>

Montoya spent several months getting to know the various individuals associated with the voguing scene of Miami. She ultimately produced an artist's book that interwove theory, sound, and image, as a portrait embodying the kinship system of the Miami ball scene.<sup>16</sup> In addition to the book, she took a number of photographs of some of the scene's major figures (figure 6). In the exhibition, these photographs were installed between various queer activist materials from China and a monitor of a work by Shanghai-based artist Mu Xi, titled *Moth* (2011). As I alluded to earlier, Chen did not showcase a group of female artists as a category or a theme but rather focused on the exploration of gender identity in Chinese visual culture. Mu Xi is not biologically female and prefers not to be identified by any label.<sup>17</sup>

The video depicts a graceful, semi-naked, androgynous dancer; digital drawings of a caterpillar becoming the titular moth are superimposed on the dancer's back (figure 7). While caterpillars do not have morphological characteristics that distinguish males from females, moths do; usually, female moths are larger than their male counterparts, even though the genetic blueprints dictating development and growth are the same for both.<sup>18</sup> However, by juxtaposing the equally ambiguously gendered caterpillar and dancer with the supposedly mature and gendered moth—whether male or female is beside the point—the work suggests that sexual dimorphism is as natural as the fluidity of gender.<sup>19</sup> Voguing involves producing clean lines with the body. Many of



Figure 6. Daniela Montoya, *Miami Vogue*, 2013, photographs.



Figure 7. Mu Xi 木西, *Moth 蛾*, 2011, production still, video.

the angular movements of the androgynous subject in Mu Xi's video seem to be in sync with the voguing movements captured in Montoya's photography. The confidence depicted in one artwork serves to reinforce that in the other. In fact, this curatorial decision to place the works next to each other materializes as an archipelagic feeling of *super*-confidence (if you will) that brings into being one singular formation—an archipelago comprised of the Bay area of

San Francisco and China. This curatorial decision works to create an archipelagic feeling that connects sexual subjectivities across cultures; and it queers Chinese feminism through a discussion of LGBTQ lives across ethnic, racial, and national lines.

For Glissant, archipelagic thought is aligned with particularities that are both one and multiple. That is to say, the site of Miami and the inclusion of Montoya's work in this iteration of the exhibition is not only an expression of the specificity of the local but also where the local, global, and national collide. This became clear during the final public programming event of the exhibition in Miami, which I will describe in these closing paragraphs.

A series of presentations were delivered in Pecha Kucha style, meaning that each person was given the opportunity to present a topic by showing twenty slides, with each slide being shown for twenty seconds.<sup>20</sup> Carl Hildebrand, who organizes Pecha Kucha events in Miami, put together the event.<sup>21</sup> There was not a budget to fly in any of the artists in the exhibition or Abby Chen. Partially because of this, Hildebrand invited several local speakers, whose topics overlapped with the concerns of the exhibition, and this dovetailed with the expansive approach to Chinese feminism that Chen had for the exhibition.

I gave the first presentation, which focused on the themes within the *WOMEN*我們 exhibitions in Shanghai, San Francisco, and Miami. I also discussed the drag king workshops that took place in Shanghai. They introduced a brief history of drag king culture as well as the opportunity to get tips on costume styling and gestures from the Italian drag king Sabrina and her girlfriend Palmina. One session was for "ladies only" and involved the opportunity for participation. At the event, fifteen vertical glass containers sat on a table: each one was lined with black-and-white images of various well-known drag kings and filled with water, a symbol of femininity as well as gender fluidity.

Montoya, the only artist in the exhibition able to attend the event, was to give the final presentation, which was about her voguing project. Emery Grant, director of community engagement for the Stonewall National Museum & Archives in nearby Fort Lauderdale, discussed the origins of this institution and its ambitious plans to become the largest lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender museum in the United States. Houston Cypress, a Miccosukee Native American, gave an emotionally charged presentation on the complex genealogy of "two-spirit," which in its contemporary usage has become associated with LGBTQ members of the Native American community.<sup>22</sup> He discussed examples of historical "transgender" figures serving a variety of roles within their communities and also described his own experiences coming out. Another speaker was Sarah Michelle Rupert, the director of Girls' Club, a nonprofit

private foundation in Fort Lauderdale created to support contemporary women artists; her presentation focused on the work of one of the artists represented in its collection, Shanghai-born, U.S.-based Su-en Wong. Her paintings, which were not in the exhibition but certainly could have been, explore feminism and homoeroticism through the lens of the often-fetishized demure Asian woman. She frequently uses herself as a model.

The final presentation circled back to *WOMEN*我們. Montoya spoke of her project and ended her presentation—and thereby the entire event—by having representatives from the various houses of the Miami ball scene vogue in the gallery space. One especially powerful moment for me was witnessing Ruby Ninja, who was transitioning from male to female, voguing in front of the installation of the forum's sex worker poster and Fernandez's video, both of which were placed together as they were in San Francisco. Ruby's stilettos mirrored those on the forum's poster, and occasionally the video of the melting ice stilettos of Fernandez's work would project onto her body, which was bare from the waist up. Ruby was proud to show off her newly grown breasts.

The joining of the stilettos, of course, was not intentional. However, if it is the misfire or the accident that redirects performatives, then for a moment the corporeal and representational bodies from Shanghai, San Francisco, and Miami aligned to engender a queer Chinese feminist archipelago capacious enough to accommodate them all. Indeed, as Glissant notes, the creolization of the world into an archipelago is inevitable. For Glissant, archipelagoes represent motion, mutability, change, and openness to difference. In this way, it is best to think of the archipelagoes I have described as vectors with motion and speed rather than as known, fixed, static landscapes.

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## NOTES

1. Prior to Chen's exhibition, there is one exception worth noting: Sasha Su-ling Welland's 2004 exhibition "Cruel/Loving Bodies" of work by Chinese, Hong Kong, and Chinese British feminist artists that traveled to Shanghai, Hong Kong, and Beijing (2004). Apart from my own scholarly article of the *WOMEN 我們*' exhibition (2016), scholarship on Chinese feminism did not appear until 2018 when Welland's important book *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalization in Chinese Contemporary Art* was published. More recently, Shuqin Cui edited a special issue titled "(En)gendering: Chinese Women's Art in the Making" of *positions: east asia culture critique* (2020). In an interview with Abby Chen on January 28, 2013, curator Hou Hanru mobilized the metaphor of a contagion to explain the dearth of exhibitions on gender identity. He said that the contemporary Chinese art world is "contaminated and driven by commercial success" and that its "disengagement of political and social issues" is tantamount to a "generalized disease."
2. Exhibition was held at EMG Shanghai and on view from December 16, 2011, to January 10, 2012.
3. Wang Zhang, foreword of exhibition catalogue *WOMEN 我們* (Shanghai EMG & Gender Identity Forum, 2011), 13. She also writes, "The conference intends to promote visual culture studies as a new field of feminist engagement with the contemporary Chinese mainstream culture as well as a new field of intellectual inquiry of gender and sexuality in the history of visual culture."
4. A full list of the artists whose works were in the show includes Eagle Ho/Li Zhe, Gao Ling/Comma, Gao Zhan, He Chengyao, Liang Liting, Luo Le, Man Yee Lam, Mu Xi, Yang Meiyang, Yang Qing, Stella Zhang, Zhang Xiaojing, and 10 Feminists' Voice-Shout Group.
5. Indeed, Lam had held a variety of international advertising jobs in the financial sector for fourteen years.
6. "He Chengyao," Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, *Brooklyn Museum*. [www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/feminist\\_art\\_base/chengyao-he](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/about/feminist_art_base/chengyao-he)
7. Initially, the art world and the general public interpreted this work as He's attempt at getting attention for herself and/or a commentary on gender inequality in China. However, I agree with British feminist philosopher Alison Stone, quoted in the following article, that the underpinning of this work is much more personal (Tatlow).
8. Exhibition was on view from September 15 to November 30, 2012. Works of several artists not shown in Shanghai were included. These artists were Bay area-based husband and wife team Rae Chang and Adam Tow and U.S.-based Ana Teresa Fernandez. These artist's works were not included in the San Francisco exhibition: Luo Le, Yang Qing, Zhang Xiaojing, and 10 Feminists' Voice-Shout Group.



9. This is a quote from Sharmin Bock, assistant in charge of special operations for the district attorney's office in Alameda County of which the city of Oakland is a part. February 7, 2020.
10. In preparation for her video performance, Fernandez constructed molds of stilettos, which would fit her feet; she then filled the molds with water and put them in the freezer.
11. The exhibition was on display from November 15 to December 20, 2013. It included a mixture of works shown in both Shanghai and San Francisco. Full list of artists: Gao Ling/Comma, He Chengyao, Man Yee Lam, Mu Xi, Yang Meiyan, Stella Zhang, Rae Chang + Adam Tow, Daniela Montoya, and Ana Teresa Fernandez. Activist material from China Sex Worker Organization Network Forum and NGOs focused on feminism and LGBTQ issues in China, such as Shanghai Nvái LBT were also included.
12. I met Abby Chen during the summer of 2012 when we both participated in a National Endowment of Humanities (NEH) Summer Institute titled "Re-envisioning American Art History: Asian American Art, Research, and Teaching" at New York University's Asian/Pacific/American (A/P/A) Institute. Art historians Alexandra Munroe and Margo Machida organized the three-week intensive seminar that brought together art historians, ethnic and cultural studies scholars, curators, and artists. For a brief description of the summer institute, please see NEH's website: [www.neh.gov/divisions/education/other-opportunities/2012/re-envisioning-asian-american-art-history](http://www.neh.gov/divisions/education/other-opportunities/2012/re-envisioning-asian-american-art-history). Chen informed me about the *WOMEN* 我們 exhibition that she had organized. I was so interested in the subject matter given the overlaps with my own interests in gender, sexuality, and Asia (broadly) that I went to San Francisco to see the exhibition and wrote a review of it for *Yishu: Journal of Contemporary Chinese* (2013). Finally, after further discussions with Chen, we decided to tour the exhibition to Miami.
13. To be clear, data indicating what percentage of these numbers was comprised of East Asians, etc. was not available.
14. I want to thank Brittni Winkler for introducing me to Montoya's work. Winkler is Florida International University's first MFA In Curatorial Practice student and as part of her coursework installed the *WOMEN* 我們 exhibition in Miami.
15. bell hooks critiques Livingston's documentary from several angles in her important essay "Is Paris burning?" in *Black looks: race and representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 145–156. hooks is skeptical that the desire to become a "ruling class white women" is progressive (148). I partially agree with Hooks, however, this line of thinking seems to lead to one unsettling conclusion: that one should foreclose the possibility for this disenfranchised black and Latino queer community to become that which is already out of their reach.

16. Montoya's project was part of her master's thesis in visual anthropology at the University of Manchester in England, where coincidentally I was enrolled in the PhD program in art history and visual studies from 2005 to 2008. Our programs did not overlap, and I was not aware of Montoya's affiliation with the university until after we selected her work to be a part of the exhibition.
17. Queer Chinese studies is burgeoning (Chiang, 2014; Welker, 2014; Liu, 2010).
18. University of Arizona, "Why female moths are big and beautiful," *Science Daily*, March 12, 2010. [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/03/100311141218.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/03/100311141218.htm)
19. Juxtaposed with the artwork was a broad range of activist materials, the specific inclusion of which I argue keeps the exhibition from drowning out the embodied politics and sited-ness of the project. Posters were included from NGOs such as Shanghai Nvni, which promotes rights for lesbians, bisexual women, and transgender subjects; Aishang LGBT, a Shanghai-based group that promotes the advocacy and visibility of gay men; and PFLAG Guangzhou, an organization founded in 2008 that works in eight regions across China and connects parents, friends, and supporters of lesbians and gays. All of these NGOs operate under the radar to avoid scrutiny and are creative about getting their messages across—often through what Abby Chen refers to as "guerrilla tactics" more synonymous with performance art. Overall, the posters connect to specific locales and ensures that the artworks and the queer and feminist bodies to which they are attached do not become too abstracted.
20. This mode of presenting was conceived in Japan where many architects were finding that presenters would not get to the point fast enough. See [www.pechakucha.org/faq](http://www.pechakucha.org/faq).
21. *WOMEN* 我們 Pecha Kucha event is archived here: [www.pechakucha.org/cities/miami/events/5255a59f4f5c2978fe000001](http://www.pechakucha.org/cities/miami/events/5255a59f4f5c2978fe000001).
22. The genealogy of "two-spirit" is complex and tribe-specific. Listen to Cypress's presentation and watch the accompanying slide show, available through the link in the previous note.

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