

CHINESE ARTS NOW ANNOUNCES WINNERS OF ITS INAUGURAL DIGITAL COMMISSIONS
in Partnership with HOME Manchester, Yellow Earth Theatre and Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art



Image: Jasmin Kent Rodgman, *nineteen ways of looking* (2020). Image courtesy of the artist.

Chinese Arts Now (CAN) today announces the two winners of their inaugural Digital Commissions – **Seph Li** and **Eelyn Lee**, with a further one in partnership with HOME Manchester for **Naomi Sumner Chan**, two with Yellow Earth Theatre (YET) for **Pamela Carter** and **Tobi Poster-Su**, and one with Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (CFCCA) for **Jasmin Kent Rodgman**.

The six commissions have been offered to artists who identify as having Chinese cultural heritage and/or who make work that incorporates contemporary Chinese perspectives. Artists were invited to propose ideas to mount their work digitally as part of CAN Festival 2021, a festival that explores Chinese themes, stories and art forms. This commission was launched in response to the Covid-19 Coronavirus outbreak and as a result their work will be shared digitally via online platforms and audiences will be able to watch, listen and participate remotely.

For CAN, **Eelyn Lee's** proposed artist's film project *Casting Fu Manchu*, is an exploration of Yellow Peril in light of the coronavirus. In 1912, when Sax Rohmer invented his character Dr. Fu Manchu - the evil Chinese doctor set on world domination - Yellow Peril was rife. Often painted as a faceless existential threat to the 'Western world', East Asians were seen as a force that needed to be suppressed. With successive white actors 'yellow-ing up' to play the fictional villain, including Boris Karloff and Christopher Lee, Eelyn's film will subvert these racist tropes through re-imagining Fu Manchu in 2021.

For CAN, **Seph Li's** project is an interactive art experiment connecting modern science and ancient Daoism on the origin of the cosmos, in digital media form inspired by Chinese ink paintings. Seph will use the opportunity offered by CAN to find a digital presentation which offers each audience member a unique online experience.

With HOME Manchester, the commission has been awarded through its Homemakers scheme to **Naomi Sumner Chan**. *Wait I'm From Wuhan* is the story of a Chinese adoptee struggling to decide whether or not to search for her birth family told via social media. Adopted as a baby from Hubei province into a White British family, to Jasmine, Wuhan was just a word on her birth certificate - until now. Bombarded with images of masked faces and deserted streets, Jasmine's head fills with questions about the family she left behind.

With YET, it was decided that two commissions would be awarded, to **Pamela Carter** for *Monologue* (working title), and also to **Tobi Poster-Su** for *Chang and Eng and Me (and Me)*.

Pamela Carter's *Monologue* (working title) is a visual journey into a woman's life, which takes the audience on an impossible story spanning time and real historical events. It is a piece about heredity, hybridity, historiography and representing 'mixed-race', touching on the subjects of war, cultural identity, gender, and colonialism.

Tobi Poster Su's commission, *Chang and Eng and Me (and Me)*, is a digital theatre performance incorporating puppetry and split-screen to tell the story of Chang and Eng Bunker, Thai conjoined twins of Chinese descent who immigrated to the US and over the course of their lifetimes were both servants and slave owners. Weaved in with reflections of Poster-Su's own life, *Chang and Eng and Me (and Me)* explores the ideas of identity and privilege.

With CFCCA, **Jasmin Kent Rodgman** will develop *nineteen ways of looking*, with collaborators writer Chen Si'an (Royal Court Theatre, Shanghai Dramatic Arts Centre) along with choreographer and dance artist Si Rawlinson (Wayward Thread). They will be looking to how their various practices - from theatre, contemporary classical, electronic and hip hop backgrounds - meet, compliment and rebound off each other, as well as their personal perspectives as artists who between them share Chinese, Hong Kongese, Malaysian and diasporic heritages.

Artist and Organisation quotes

CAN Commissions

Eelyn Lee

".. With a spike in racist attacks towards east and south-east Asian people, and Donald Trump calling COVID-19 the 'Chinese Virus', Casting Fu Manchu will speak to that racism. It's a racism that's entrenched - just ask any east or S.E. Asian actor working in the 'west' how many roles they don't get offered. So, I'm looking forward to working with actors of east and S.E. Asian heritage - young, old, male, female or non-binary - to reinvent the character of Fu Manchu.." - Eelyn Lee

".. It's great that Chinese Art Now [CAN] has acknowledged this as important work to be making right now. I am grateful for receiving the commission and am excited to be working with an arts organisation who prioritises innovative and contemporary performing arts exploring Chinese themes. In these precarious times we need organisations like CAN more than ever." - Eelyn Lee

Seph Li

"I have been interested in timespace and the universe for quite a long time and the translation from scientific proposals to artistic representations have been practiced multiple times in my previous works. This time I find Dr. Wolfram's new proposal is uniquely interesting - I read it that the hypothesis proposes not only the spacetime is evolving but also the rules that define the universe. The connection with ancient Chinese philosophy - Daoism - is also a good source of inspiration. Chinese ink paintings, with its flowing characteristics and cultural elements embedded, is the best medium to illustrate this theory.

I really appreciate Chinese Arts Now (CAN)'s support for this project during this crazy time and am grateful to be elected as one of the awardees. CAN has been a great resource for artists for years and are also promoting digital arts. I'm looking forward to working with the organisation to develop the concept together."

An-Ting Chang, Artistic Director and CEO of Chinese Arts Now

"We are delighted to announce six new digital commissions. It is incredibly exciting to enable such strong works to happen during this difficult time. From a diverse range of innovative ideas, the commissioned works will explore how digital devices could be the best media for some artistic concepts and how we can deliver the best artworks to the public and the community we serve digitally.

During this hard time, CAN has started these partnerships with CFCCA, HOME Manchester and Yellow Earth Theatre. The pandemic is extremely tough for the arts sector. I believe that arts organisations need to work together and we need diverse perspectives and voices across the sector to get through this situation."

CAN Homemakers Commission in association with HOME, Manchester**Naomi Sumner Chan**

[said that the work] "is partly inspired by my own experiences as a transracial adoptee, adopted from Hong Kong into a White British family. I am part of several Facebook groups for Chinese adoptees and since the outbreak of COVID-19 there has been an increasing amount of worry and fear among group members when thinking about how their birth families may have been affected. Adoptees from Hubei province are especially worried that birth family members have died of corona virus and they have now lost the opportunity to meet people with whom they share a significant biological connection. On the flip side they wish they could find a way to reassure their birth families that they are ok. As well as dealing with anxiety related to their birth families, these Chinese adoptees are dealing with coronavirus related racism online and in real life, sometimes feeling unable to talk about these experiences with their White parents."

An-Ting Chang, Artistic Director and CEO of Chinese Arts Now

"Chinese Arts Now is delighted to partner with HOME. Naomi's piece will be an important voice about a rarely heard story particularly during this time when the Chinese community is often viewed with certain prejudice. We are also excited to see the other works and explore how theatre can be told in a variety of different ways digitally."

Jude Christian, Associate Director at HOME

"We're so proud to be joining forces with such a powerhouse group of commission partners, and to see what the brilliant artists they're bringing on board will create."

CAN Commissions in partnership with Yellow Earth Theatre

Pamela Carter

"Whilst the ideas for Monologue have been with me for a couple of years, it wasn't until I saw the call-out for the Digital Theatre Commission that I understood how I might realise and communicate them in a piece of public work. As an artist, I feel very lucky for this opportunity to explore professionally a medium new to me, and to be making work supported by Yellow Earth Theatre and Chinese Arts Now at this incredibly difficult time."

Tobi Poster-Su

Poster-Su said, *"For as long as I can remember I have been fascinated by the story of Chang and Eng Bunker, who started out performing acrobatics in stereotypical Chinese dress and ended up dressing and speaking as refined Southern American gentlemen. As a mixed-race and fairly assimilated product of the Chinese diaspora, with the complex intersections of marginalisation and privilege this entails, I'm struck by how familiar many of the tensions of their story feel. I'm delighted to be working with Chinese Arts Now and Yellow Earth Theatre, as well as director Tanuja Amarasuriya, to begin developing a multi-platform work exploring the lives of Chang and Eng, and my own relationship to their unusual story."*

An-Ting Chang, Artistic Director and CEO of Chinese Arts Now

"We are delighted to announce two new digital commissions with Yellow Earth Theatre. We're very excited to expand our works to puppetry theatre exploring the story of Chang and Eng and new writing exploring personal history, heredity and hybridity. Together with Tobi, Pamela and Yellow Earth Theatre, we will deliver this innovative work to the public and the community we serve digitally."

Kumiko Mendl, Artistic Director of Yellow Earth Theatre

"The range and quality of proposals we received was so impressive and it was not an easy task to select. However I'm thrilled that CAN and Yellow Earth unanimously reached a decision to offer not one but two commissions to two exceptional artists, both new to Yellow Earth, whose proposals have really excited us with their very personal responses as British East Asians to the complex and unprecedented situation we find ourselves in today."

CAN Commission in partnership with CFCCA

Jasmin Kent Rodgman

"I'm extremely excited to be working with the CAN team once more and CFCCA for the first time, a partnership which has long been an ambition of mine since I studied and lived in Manchester for many years—it feels great to have ties with Manchester and its cultural community, once again!"

An-Ting Chang, Artistic Director and CEO of Chinese Arts Now

"We are delighted to announce a digital commission with CFCCA. Jasmin was a CAN commission recipient for CAN Festival 2020 and we are excited to see how her artistic ideas transform and develop in this next digital phase. Together with CFCCA and Jasmin, we will deliver this innovative work to the public and the community we serve digitally."

Zoe Dunbar, Director of CFCCA

"We are delighted to have selected Jasmin Kent Rodgman for the CFCCA and CAN digital commission. Her unique approach allows us to harness and hear the audience's voices as part of her digital opera in response to COVID-19. Despite many strong applications, her proposal really stood out. We're really looking forward to working with Jasmin and supporting the development of nineteen ways of looking."

Please use [this link](#) to download related images. For more information on Chinese Arts Now, please contact ruth@chineseartsnow.org.uk.

NOTES TO EDITORS

Background information on artists and organisations

Eelyn Lee

Casting Fu Manchu continues Eelyn's body of work around monster, fear and 'othering'. In 2014 Eelyn began *The Monster Trilogy* [2014 - present], a body of work exploring the notion, we create our own monsters from fear. Taking Shelley's Frankenstein as a starting point, Eelyn made two short films exploring how a small estuarine community responds to the arrival of a stranger. *Monster* [2015] and *Creature of the Estuary* [2016] were supported by Barbican, Arts Council England and Metal. *Creature of the Estuary* premiered at the inaugural Estuary festival in 2016.

Eelyn Lee is an award-winning artist and filmmaker who has exhibited at Barbican, Tate Modern, National Portrait Gallery, Whitechapel Gallery, Palais de Tokyo, Haus der Kulturen der Welt and at international film festivals. Eelyn's practice combines collective research, devised theatre and filmmaking to create frameworks, for ensembles of collaborators to work together. In 2016 she co-founded Social Art Network [SAN], an artist-led network that builds agency in the field of art and social practice. Eelyn is currently developing her first narrative feature film exploring Empire and race through the western and horror genres.

www.eelynlee.com

Instagram: @eelyn.lee.film

Twitter: @Eelyn1

Facebook: @eelyn.lee.7

Seph Li

Born in Beijing in 1988, Seph Li has a mixed background in technology and design, and his keen interest in interactive artworks led him into the field of media arts. Seph has studied Computer Science and Entertainment Design in Tsinghua University and continued his M.F.A. study in Design |

Media Arts at UCLA. Seph has been experimenting with the role of interaction in storytelling using different forms, and also expanding his visual and conceptual vocabulary using installation, sculpture, video game, product prototypes. Seph's work transcended the medium by poetically instancing technology.

www.solid-jellyfish.com

Instagram: @sephli14

Naomi Sumner Chan

Naomi is a Manchester based playwright and dramaturg fuelled by salt and vinegar crisps and cups of tea. Her work has been performed at theatres across the North of England and in London including York Theatre Royal, CAST, Oldham Coliseum, Arcola Theatre and Theatre 503. Her play SAME SAME DIFFERENT was commissioned by Eclipse Theatre and toured to venues across the North of England in 2019. Sumner Chan leads new writing company Brush Stroke Order and has recently been commissioned by Chinese Arts Now. She is currently working for Yellow Earth Theatre, leading their Writers Academy in Manchester.

www.brushstrokeorder.co.uk

@naomisumner @BSOWriters

Pamela Carter

Pamela Carter is a playwright and dramaturg. Her previous theatre credits include *Fast Ganz Nah* (Edinburgh Festival Fringe) and *Skåne* (Hampstead Theatre).

Tobi Poster-Su

Tobi Poster-Su is a writer, performer and puppeteer. His credits as a puppetry director include *A Christmas Carol* (Bristol Old Vic) and *Heidi: A Goat's Tale* (the egg theatre). He is Co-Artistic Director of Wattle and Daub, with whom he co-created and performed in *The Depraved Appetite of Tarrare the Freak* (Wilton's Music Hall) and *Triptych* (Tobacco Factory Theatres).

www.wattleanddaub.co.uk

Facebook: @wattleanddaub

Jasmin Kent Rodgman

Jasmin Kent Rodgman is a British Malaysian-Chinese artist, composer and producer whose music brings contemporary classical inspirations together with electronic textures and sound art. Creating cross-arts work, I am a constant collaborator of dance, spoken word and film, investigating notions of otherness, displacement, connection and memory in relation to gender and racial identities.

www.jkrodgman.com

@jasminkentrodgman

Chinese Arts Now (CAN) is the first National Portfolio Organisation awarded by Arts Council England to produce and present contemporary performing arts work that explores Chinese themes, stories and art forms. CAN Festival is an annual festival that brings a diverse range of contemporary performing and digital arts to the public.

www.chineseartsnow.org.uk

@chineseartsnow

HOME works with international and UK artists to produce extraordinary experiences, creating an exciting mix of thought-provoking drama, dance, film and contemporary visual art with a strong focus on international work, new commissions, education, informal learning and talent development.

www.homemcr.org

@homemcr

Yellow Earth Theatre is Britain's award-winning British East Asian (BEA) theatre company, founded in 1995 and led by artistic director Kumiko Mendl. They produce new touring plays and readings across the year, as well as nurture BEA talent through their Yellow Earth Academy acting and writing courses and Professional Writers Programme.

www.yellowearth.org

@yellowearthuk

Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art (CFCCA) is a space for conversation, debate and cultural exchange. We work with established and emerging artists to explore Chinese contemporary culture through socially engaged exhibitions, events, community engagement and artist residencies. Based in Manchester's eclectic Northern Quarter, we've been part of the city's vibrant arts and culture scene for almost 35 years.

www.cfcca.org.uk

@cfcca_uk

CONTACT

For more information on Chinese Arts Now, please contact:

ruth@chineseartsnow.org.uk

For more information on HOME, please contact:

Kat.Harrison-Dibbits@homemcr.org

For more information on Yellow Earth Theatre, please contact:

chloe@katemorleypr.com

For more information on CFCCA, please contact:

nicole@cfcca.org.uk