



VICKY CHIA
WEI (嘉維) MO

FOURTH YEAR, BACHELOR OF FINE ARTS

Process and Product: Vicky Chia Wei (嘉維) Mo on Provoking the Public through the Personal

by Claudine Yip

Although Vicky Chia Wei (嘉維) Mo was exposed to and encouraged towards the path of visual art from an early age, it was only in high school when an artist talk by Jade Yumang incited her interest in the medium of printmaking. "I don't remember what he talked about, but he presented one of his pieces and it was so beautiful," Mo recalls during our evening Zoom call. She glances up at a corner of her bedroom invisible to the camera, as though reminiscing. Prior to meeting Yumang, Mo had only practised the more traditional art forms of drawing and painting. The extent of her printmaking knowledge included her brief experiences with monotypes and linocut from her high school art class. After enrolling in UBC's visual art program, she soon made up for lost time. "And then fast forward to second year," Mo continues, "I was looking at all the courses and I clicked into the beginner printmaking one. And I saw that the instructor was Jade Yumang." Naturally, she enrolled.

Straying from UBC's more theory-based art classes, Yumang's course was the first Mo took which emphasized technique, and that attention to craft drew her further into exploring the medium. Now approaching her final months at UBC, Mo has since completed the entire catalogue of printmaking courses offered by the Department of Art

History, Visual Art and Theory, and has added installation and performance to her impressive portfolio. She has a particular interest in screenprinting and copper etching, and often incorporates materials such as textiles and yarn into her installation works. "I'm very intimidated by a blank piece of paper," Mo confesses when I ask about her mediums of choice. "But with printmaking, you're using a different matrix and platform to make that first touch, and then transferring that image directly onto the paper." Process is a concept Mo emphasizes in our conversation. "I always like making things with my hands," she explains with a smile. "Printmaking becomes like a ritual, almost, because the steps are so consistent. And the actions are quite repetitive, so it becomes a very meditative process." In her previous studio space in the Audain Art Centre, hours often passed unnoticed as Mo found herself lost in the rhythmic, methodological procedures that brought her works to life.

Mo's piece *Communicating resistance through a broken tongue: 120 prints in 5 hours* (2020) exemplifies the importance of process in her practice, but particularly in relation to labour—another prevalent aspect of the artist's works. Upon viewing this piece, I immediately recognized the impersonal, rigid squares that once consumed the writing booklets I used to complete for Chinese

language school; the aesthetic effect of each print is almost identical to the clean black lines that a commercial printer might produce. However, the title reveals how long the artist spent toiling over the mechanisms to manually print each page. Despite this aspect of the process being hidden from their view, Mo describes how exposing these concrete numbers and the time spent creating this piece causes viewers to consider what lengths the artist went to communicate their messages. The phrases that comprise each unit—"To Become the Next Generation's Ancestors," "Whose land do we live on?" and "What meanings do your actions hold?"—were translated using Google Translate and with the help of Mo's mother. Mo tells me of her troubles communicating the ideas to her mother (who is not fluent in English), and laughs in retrospect at how the interaction aligns so well with the language struggle at the heart of her piece, and the idea of labour that centres her practice. Still, Mo explains her conviction in choosing to convey these complex ideas: "I think the phrases are important for people to consider in their daily life, in regards to their positionality and relationships in society."

In the performance aspect of this work, each classmate in Mo's upper-level studio course—most of whom had no prior experience writing Chinese—was given a copy of the booklet, with ten minutes to complete the "homework." As the "students" rewrote character after character, filling out each sequential box, they paralleled the repetitiveness of Mo's own printing process, along with the frustration of communicating complex ideas through an unfamiliar language. Rather than keep the audience as passive bystanders, the work forces them into the roles of participants to confront its ethos; the phrases combined with the performance directs the uncomfortable struggle of language barriers in culture-clashing discussions onto each "student." "I like to think of my work in relation to how things will

always remain the same unless something comes in to disrupt it," Mo articulates. "I feel like if I add the element of interaction to my works, it pushes that movement onto individuals even more."

Mo, the eldest daughter of Taiwanese and Hong Kong immigrants, was born in Victoria, British Columbia. She spent her early childhood in Taiwan before returning to Victoria, and then moved to Vancouver. Her experience as a first-generation Canadian—as well as her shifting sense of place—informs much of her work, which often explores ideas of identity and childhood.

In our conversation, Mo expresses how she uses these themes as a form of reconciliation. She references her piece *Remembering My Mother's Lullaby* (2018), where she produced about eighty identical prints with an image of herself as a toddler at their centre. One of four complementary colour schemes swaddle the artist—each of which captures the playfulness of childhood. "Anything that will intrigue me, anything colourful, anything that will make me happy," Mo lists in quick succession, "and that I just have an innate desire to use, I'm going to use it." These pigments swirl in a manner reminiscent of clouds in a hazy dreamscape, fitting for a work concerning memory. Two fantastical tigers wrap around the baby: the stars of the Chinese nursery rhyme "Liang Zhi Lao Hu" ("Two Tigers"); their presence incites a flashback—not one from Mo's own childhood, but from that of her youngest sister, to whom her mother would sing the lullaby. While Mo suspects her mother had done the same for her, she refers to a "glitch" in her memory that occurred due to her move from Taiwan to Canada when she was in early elementary school. As a result, she is able to relive, recall, and reclaim parts of her own—now distorted—childhood only through her younger siblings.

The more Mo reveals about the intimate nature of her art, the more I grow curious

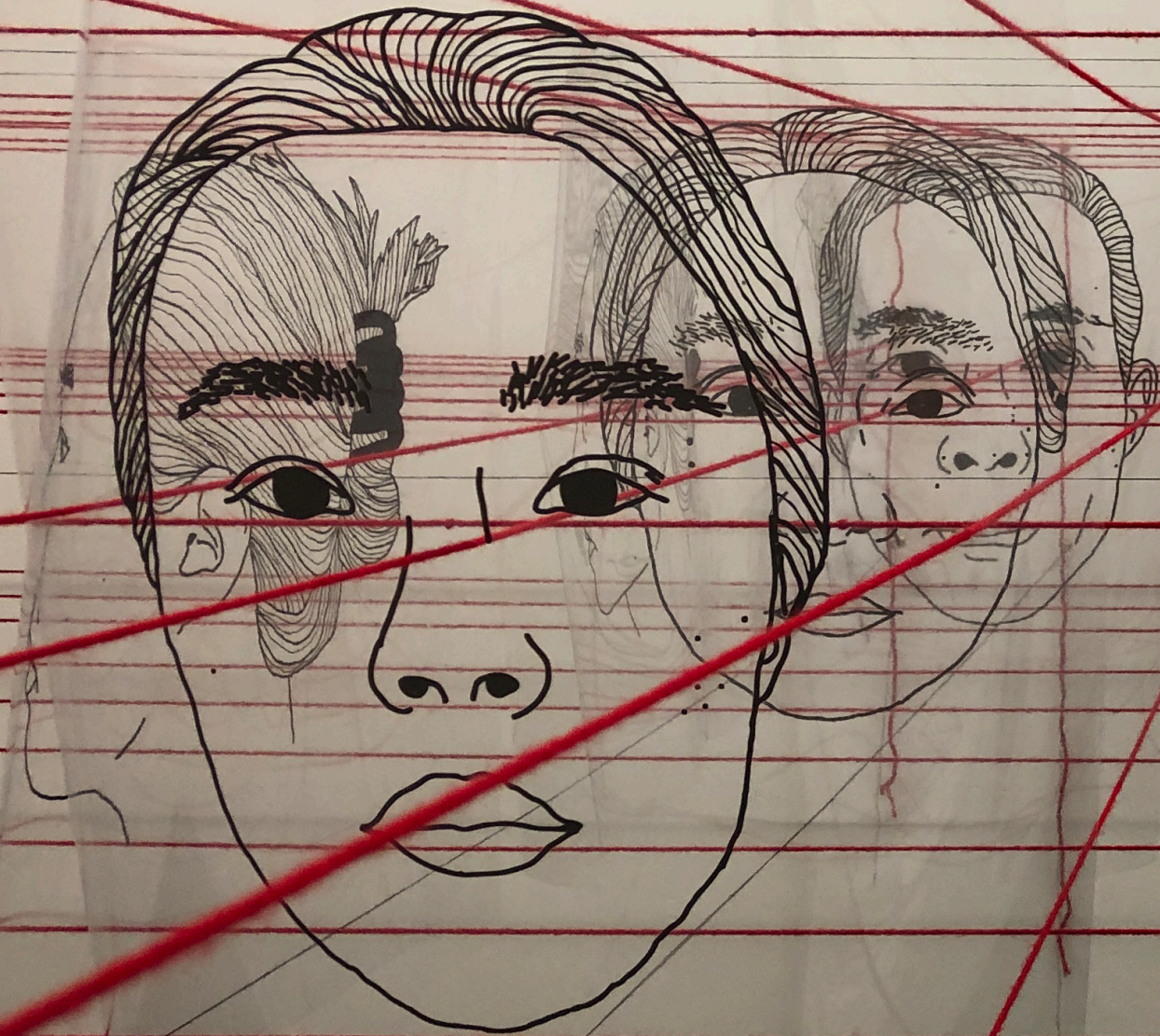
about how her practice has evolved alongside her own personal growth and sense of identity. In response, Mo describes that while her practice has always stemmed from examinations of personal identity, the themes in her research have broadened outwards over time. "In the beginning, my influences were a very narrow view about my identity and my identity's history," she reflects. "I viewed Asian Canadian history as only about Asian Canadians, and I didn't really think about it in relation to other communities." In recent years, Mo has become more active in widening her lens to issues of intersectionality, in an attempt to construct a more complex view of where Asian Canadians stand in triangulation with other communities in Canada.

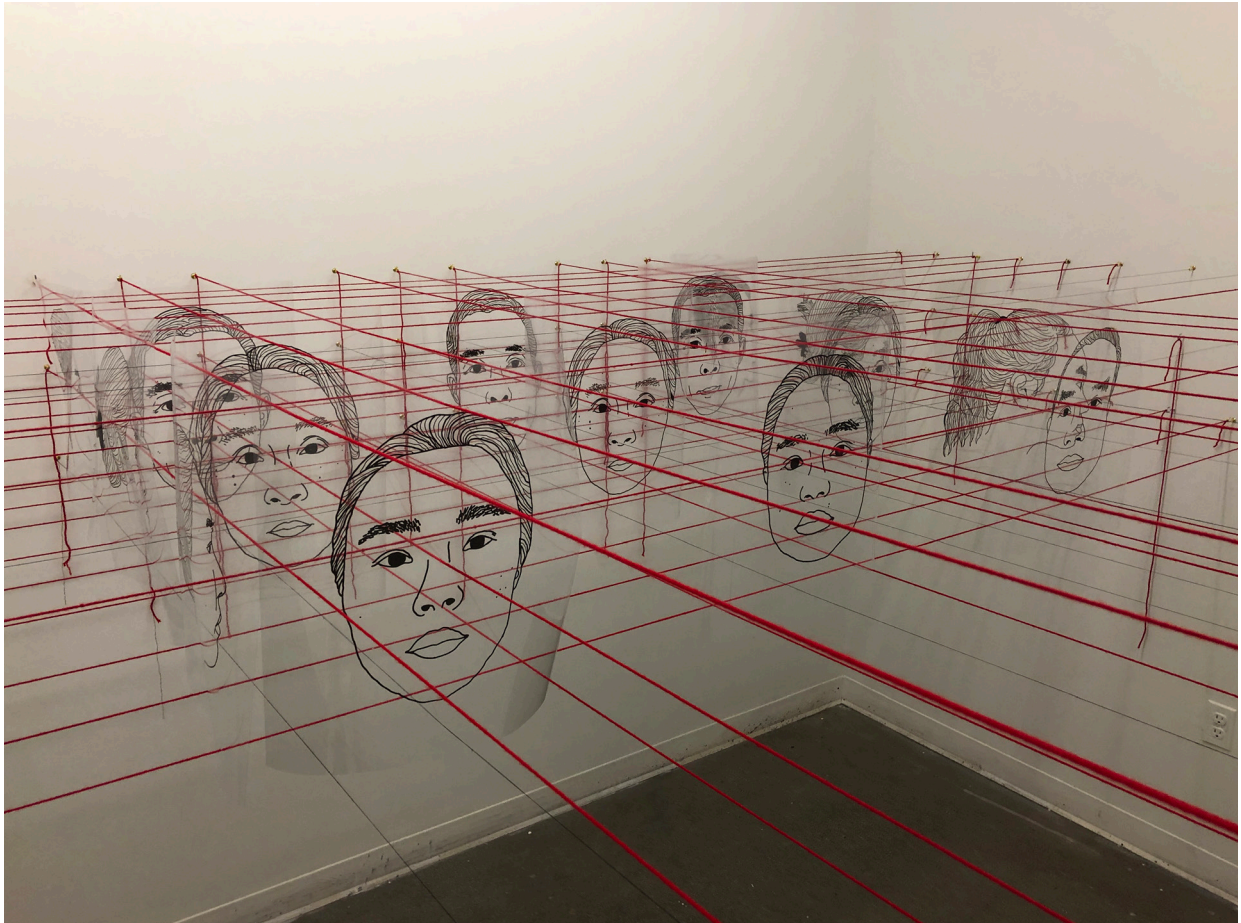
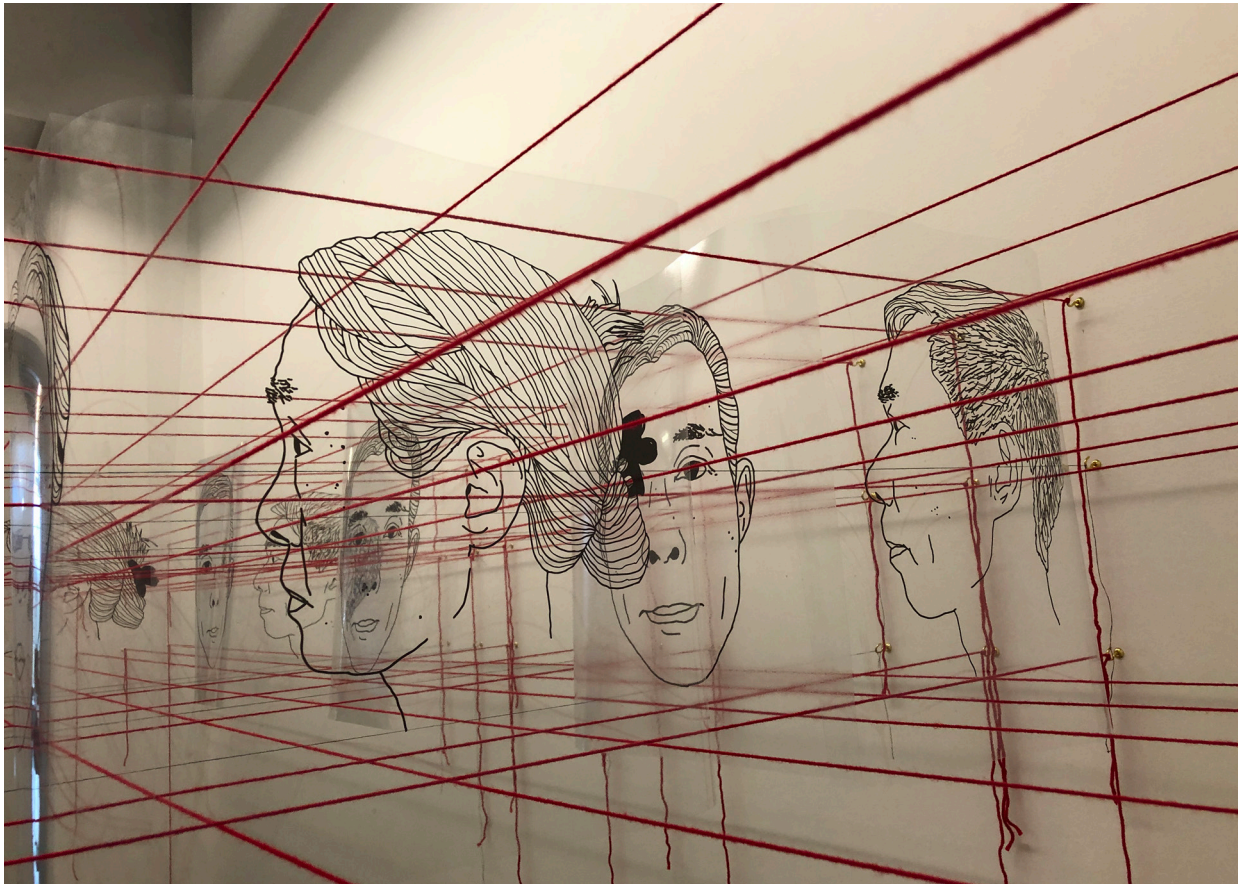
Fascinated by her passion, I wonder where Mo envisions her work finding a place in this conversation. To continue delving deeper into her research through her art practice, Mo tells me about her hopes to collaborate with Canadian artists from other cultural communities with the goal of helping educate audiences about cultural hierarchies through a means that is at once visually appealing and engaging. This desire returns to Mo's interest in creating interactive works that will promote a dialogue with its viewers. "If I want my practice to be something that will provoke people's minds," she's decided, "then my research is what I want them to be provoked about."

Perhaps unintentionally, Mo's memory of Jade Yumang's first artist talk—or rather, his work—parallels her approach in deciding which messages and meanings to pack into her own pieces. Much like her recollection not of his lecture but of the feelings his art inspired, she doesn't simply look to current events or moments in her life to incite new works; rather, she allows the emotional impacts they leave to influence her practice. "I think anything that I come into contact with, if it leaves a mark in my

mind, then it's going to be something I want to create a work in." Mo pays no mind to the systems and institutions that dictate ideas of "fine art," but this is an active choice she has taken to unlearn and relearn, to deconstruct everything she is taught about art. "Everything that I've said can be wrong," she laughs, "and I may not feel this way in the future, but acceptance of change is its essence." So, Mo asks, "What is art? Deconstruct it, shred it up, and then place your own ideas into what it should be. I think that's when true authenticity and the essence of you can be expressed through your works. And then you do it again and again and again." *

Family ties, beauty marks, and destiny scars, 2020





Vicky Chia Wei (嘉維) MO

Family ties, beauty marks, and destiny scars, 2020, digital print on acetate, red yarn, black thread, dimensions variable.
Viewers are encouraged to interact with the work by walking in between the spaces that are disrupted by the piece.

Communicating resistance through a broken tongue, 2020

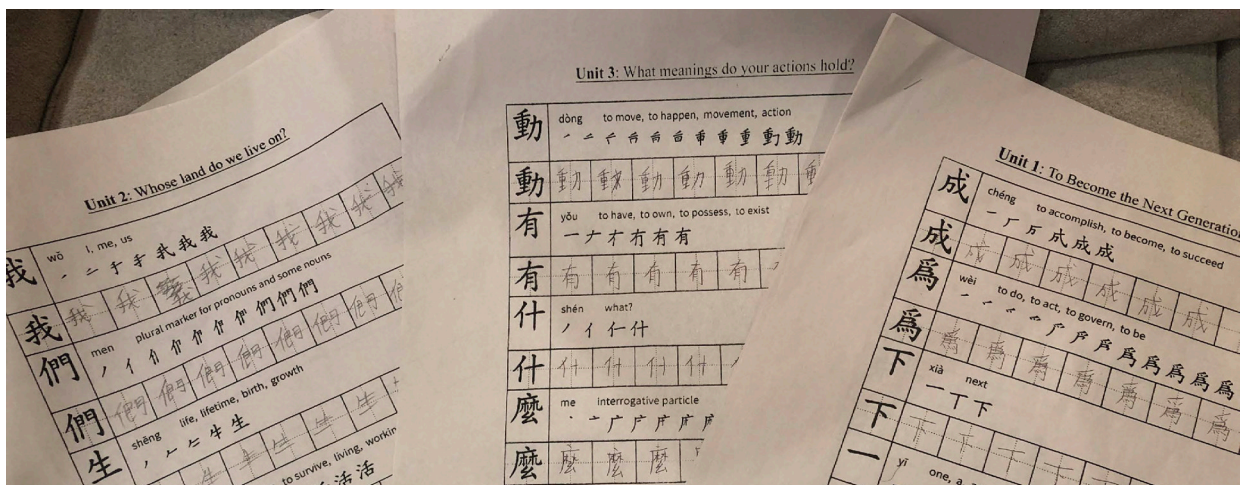
ARTIST PROFILES

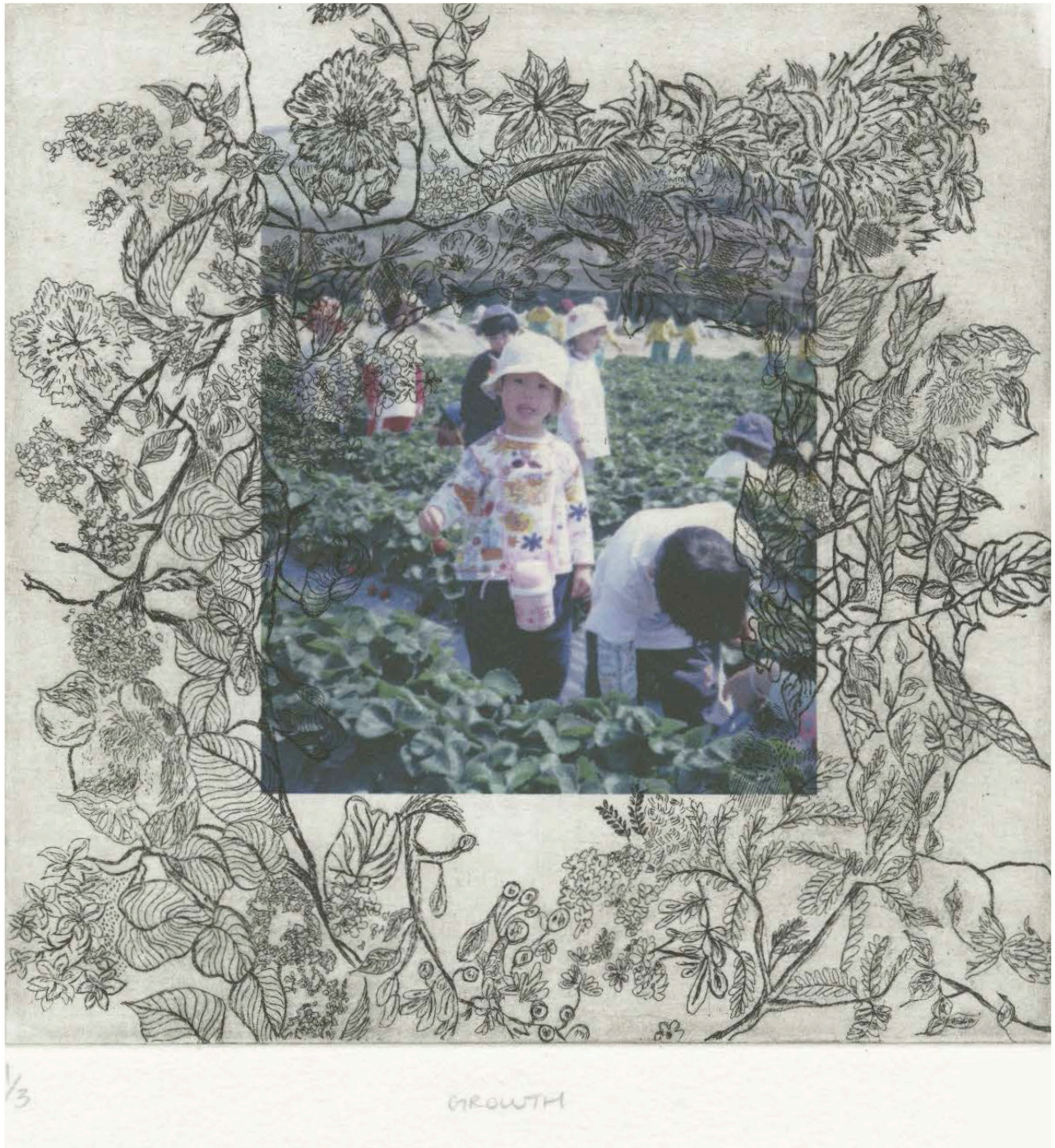
Unit 1: To Become the Next Generation's Ancestors

| | |
|---|--|
| 成 | chéng to accomplish, to become, to succeed 一 厂 万 成 成 成 |
| 成 | |
| 爲 | wèi to do, to act, to govern, to be 一 一 一 一 尸 尸 尸 爲 爲 爲 爲 爲 |
| 爲 | |
| 下 | xià next 一 一 下 |
| 下 | |
| 一 | yī one, a, an 一 |
| 一 | |
| 代 | dài era, generation, to replace ノ 一 一 代 代 |
| 代 | |

Communicating resistance through a broken tongue: 120 prints in 5 hours, 2020, 11 x 15, screenprint on newsprint, stapled together in booklet form, interactive print piece and undocumented performance that refers to the printing process.

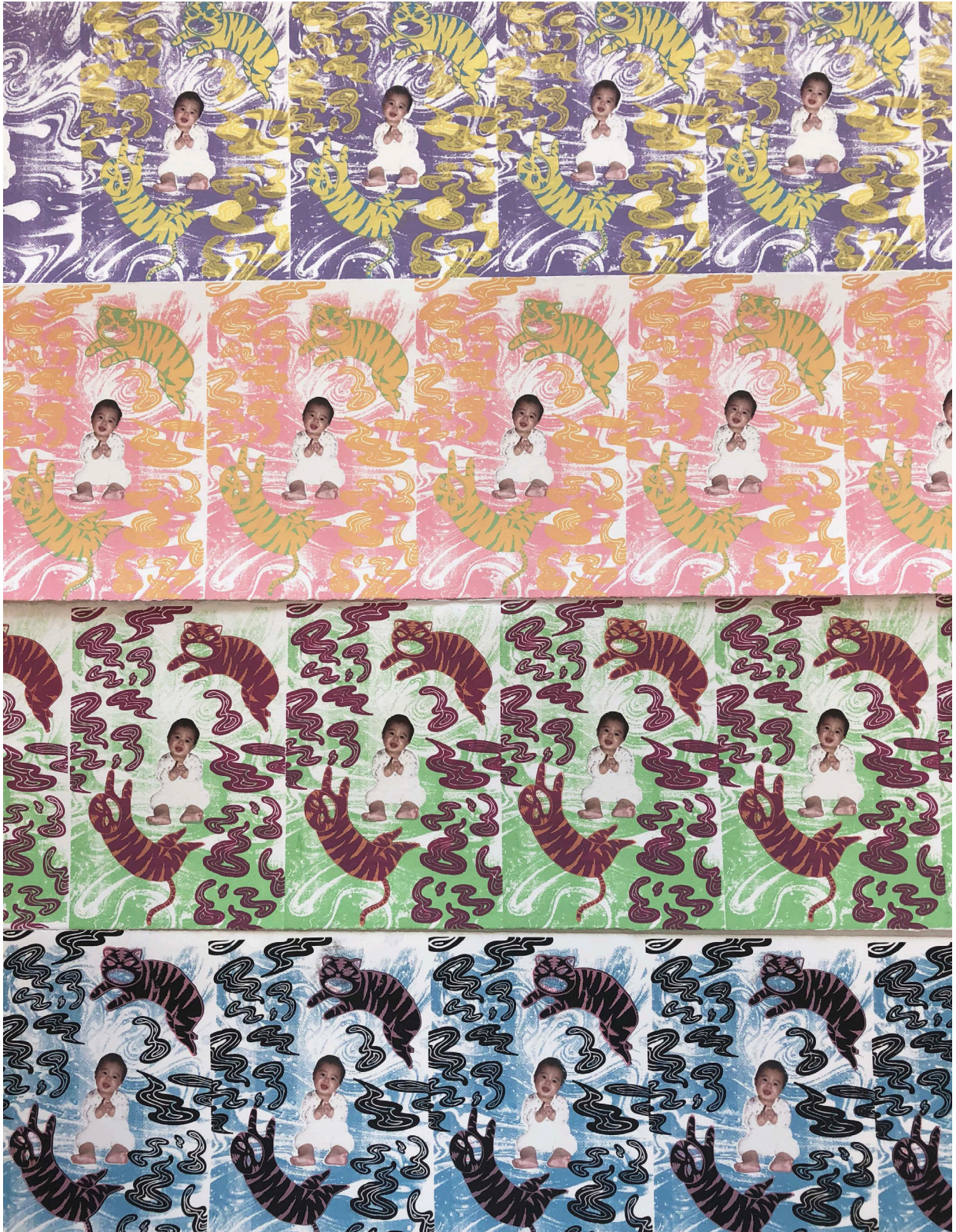
Each audience member is given a booklet. They are told the title of the piece and medium (interactive print piece and undocumented performance). The artist says, "I will give you ten minutes. Please take a few minutes to look over the pages and then fill out the worksheets I've passed around. The characters in the left column are what you should copy into each blank box. The diagrams under the English definitions are the order of the strokes the character should be written in. Begin." Timer starts.





Vicky Chia Wei (嘉維) MO

Growth, 2018



Remembering My Mother's Lullaby, 2018



Remembering My Mother's Lullaby, 2018, 5 x 7 in., or size of photo album, screenprint with digital print on fine art paper, placed inside a photo album.

The figure in the middle is a picture of me as a baby surrounded by clouds/smoke and two other forms resembling tigers. The tigers are rendered running about; one has no ears and the other has no tail. The illustration stems from a sudden memory that recently resurfaced in my mind. The "Two Tigers" nursery rhyme is a song that my mother often sang to my youngest sister when she was a baby. Experiencing the song through my sister's childhood rather than my own (even though I'm fairly sure the song was sung to me as a child as well) realized within me a feeling of aloofness that I had toward my own childhood.

As a second-generation child of immigrant parents, issues regarding identity formation and memory distortion are common themes throughout my works. After some casual thinking, I have come to the conclusion that a glitch must have happened within my mental system (psyche) during my move from Taiwan to Canada, as many of my memories are forgotten or distorted and even self-produced (this is self-proclaimed and I have no way of proving it otherwise). These prints aim to explore themes of nostalgia, memory formation, identity development, and the juxtaposition between reality versus fantasy. –VM