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Vesseled Cultures; Figures of Diasporic Comforts

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VESSELED CULTURES
figures of diasporic comforts
ying na li / rachel ly / skylar sun
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DESCRIPTION

Contemporary Chinese American diasporas are disconnected with their practices through years of assimilation and generational passage, enhanced by a lack of access to Chinese culture despite emerging global communities. In order to combat this lack of connection, we aim to analyze the engagement with practice through adapting these processes for the younger generation to understand. How can diasporas connect to their culture through means of nonconventional “adaptable traditions”? Our thesis focuses on looking at the ritual of food making - specifically pickling - as a living means and methods of altering reconnection to one’s heritage through its routine.

The process of pickling is one that spans over periods of time - sometimes taking years - in order to ferment into an edible, valuable product. The act of pickling vegetables is seen as a key aspect of our project as means of architectural intervention, in its interactions with instruments within the kitchen landscape and the memories associated with the routine of food making. The process itself is typically a singular and internal process restricted by the existing kitchen’s space, something we aimed to combat by encouraging a collective and communal experience. Drawing inspiration from a variety of provocative furniture and mobile sculptural precedents, such Llamas and Kiesler, this Trojan horse assemblage transfigures the traditional domestic sphere. Through a system of interlocking and nested parts, the cart acts as vessel for diasporic memory and a catalyst for emergent identities, particularly in sites that lack common centers of cultural exchange. It’s a device for disrupting binaric categories such as individual/collective and inside/outside.

Architectural extrapolation is then seen in our project manipulating this domestic performance through the setting and instruments encapsulated in the feast, specifically on the one to one scale from the individual and their devices. Our intent is to physically defamiliarize this setting and practice of food making through the construction of the mobile cart and the vessels. Our design is then an instrument of reconciliation, a living heirloom providing comfort in the practices it details.
Syracuse is an ideal site since there is a lack of Chinese American presence and is optimal for us to test out our proposed methodologies with the intention of designing objects and environments encouraging communal and cultural revitalization.
This slide starts the analysis of the singular experience of pickling and how much one person (meaning one of us at a time) constantly has to multitask in the kitchen.
These images record the collective process of pickling and the intersection of activities and movements within shared spaces. Certain spaces called for small short social gatherings during and in between the pickling process - something we either wanted to celebrate or delegate spatially.
RESEARCH

Jars

1. Traditional Chinese Fermentation Crock pots via Google
   (TSL Agricultural Company in Changsha, 2018)
   + traditional chinese fermentation crock pots - able to hold
     many vegetables and other products with a lot of brine (for
     example, hard alcohol)
   - very big (to the point that you need another person to wield
     it with you) as a unit, requires a lot of water and material to
     create and maintain

2. Fermentation 01 (Leong Leong Architects, 2019)
   + a demonstration piece focusing on the formation of jars
     and the act of fermentation (as a demonstration) at the MAK
     Center
   - performative practice of domestic ritual with aim to appeal
     to a wider audience through lack of identity

3. Results from Searching on “Chinese Fermentation
   Jars” (Amazon, Modern Day)
   + functional, cheaper than “actual” fermentation pot
   - lack of cultural identity, turning away from clay construction,
     no exploration of form for utility
1. **The Frankfurt Kitchen** (Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky for Ernst May, 1926)
   - one of the first kitchens that prefers efficiency and low cost within the domestic sphere
   - lacks communal aspect within kitchen through less space, makes cooking (as a process) an individual process

2. **Roaming Market** (Abbarent Architecture, 2013)
   - mobile performance venues based on 16th century market stalls, emphasizing a return to the local market within a modern society
   - less space within smaller unit to possible fit a kitchen / cooking unit despite mobility

3. **Beyond Borders** (Merrett Houmoller Architects, 2017)
   - a mobile base for the Refugees and Befriending Project that serves as a kitchen and dining space for refugees in Britain
   - emphasis at aiming for different people without identity / cultural ties

4. **White Limousine Yatai** (Atelier Bow Wow, 2002)
   - re-imagining of the typical "yatai" (street-side food cart) as a communal effort - mobile and ten meters long to ensure a "banquet" experience within a small town setting
   - difficult to store and to move long distances, needs to be slightly smaller in scale in order to be truly "mobile"
1. Increasing Disorder in a Dining Table (Sarah Wigglesworth and Jeremy Till, 2002)
   + documenting movement through dining table
   - lacks step by step documentation of people’s actions and manners at the table

2. Chinese Communal Graphic Standards (Raven Xu, 2018)
   + documentation of Chinese domestic spaces (like the lazy susan, the set up of hot pot, etc.)
   - explanation is through description, not visually

3. Assembly for Chinatown (A+A+A, 2020)
   + proposals for NYC Chinatown’s to venture from the restaurant standard during height of COVID, documentation of mobile / street fixtures
   - lacks future possibilities of interactions
We tend to focus on the movement, like Walking Assembly’s rocking motion, materiality, like Rachel Whiteread’s massive pure forms in resin, or profile in shape like, LAMAS’ cart proposal.
We initially started more normative in the pragmatic design of the cart, but then experimented with the size and shape of the cart - almost treating it like a vessel itself.
WORK IN PROCESS

Jar
We used thin wood / MDF boards as surfaces with CNC-ed foam sheets and wood dowels as structural supports. The foam sheets are layered with wood dowels aligning them to enhance the strength. The interior structure is covered by the MDF boards, then being primed and painted for water resistance to ensure sturdiness against wear and tear.
Altogether, the cart posed as a monolithic vessel for the domestic environment that garnered much attention. Our design proposal focused on creating individual parts that could be taken apart with the help of two people - revealing programmatic units of the kitchen. The design encourages community spectacle and interaction in its performance - being disassembled and arranged within a large area. We ended up inviting more stragglers from the picnic that was long over, and through inviting them we were able to explain our design and the pickling process to them. Along the way, they were interested in the protruding spice jars (filled with ingredients) and all of the functions of the cart pieces and took joy in participating within the process of pickling along the way.
MOVEMENT

This drawing showcases the intended dismantling and move ability of the cart to reposition components to desired organizations. It shows a possible dismantling motion of the cart and how the different parts and pulled apart from an order, rotated, and shifted. These spaces are then utilized for different pickling tasks and intersection of social interactions.


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