

# SINOPTICON

{ contemporary chinoiserie in contemporary art }

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## Suki Chan

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### ***Interval II*, film, High Definition video, 17mins 22secs, 2008**

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#### PLYMOUTH ARTS CENTRE

In time-lapse photography, Suki Chan's film, *Interval II*, explores immigration through two symbolic structures. A cast-iron pier in Northwest England and a rammed-earth roundhouse in South East China are carefully observed under Chan's cinematic gaze. She investigates traces of human presence within the buildings, as well as the social and cultural shifts within the different societies.

The pier, an icon of industrialisation, entertained a new demographic of holiday makers who caught the new railways to their seaside destinations. Today, many of these piers have fallen in to disrepair and a new community has taken refuge – thousands of starlings return to roost each day in mesmerizing swarms.

The roundhouses, were historically inhabited by the migrant community of Hakkas, or 'guest people'. The form of this traditional fortress-like dwelling articulates a collective spirit and an aspiration for security of the Hakka community. The round shape maximizes interior space whilst ensuring an equal split between the occupants, usually several generations of a large extended family. As China modernises many members of the family move away from these vernacular dwellings to the city in search of new opportunities, leaving the roundhouses to a similar fate of the seaside piers of England, and linking a human story of changing society.

Camera – Suki Chan & Andrew Hunwick   Post-production – Andrew Hunwick   Sound design – Svarte Greiner

Commissioned by Chinese Arts Centre. Funded by Arts Council England, London with the support of Film London Artists' Moving Image Network.

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## A Place on Earth

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*A Place on Earth* are a series of photographs taken in the English-style, Thamestown, near Shanghai, China; a residential property development that failed to attract buyers, and now lingers as a ghost town for the day-tripper; a back-drop for photographs.

Chan shows snap shots of the place, familiar and yet different – the reflected Tudor-style building used as a back drop for a newly-wed Chinese couple; the car park, built underneath a fake cathedral, with it's painted-on stained glass windows, careful not to depict Christian iconography. Like chinoiserie Thamestown is an aesthetic dalliance in another culture, subverted beyond all meaning. A theatre-set development which illuminates how we commonly revert to stereotypical aesthetic tropes when viewing other culture and histories.



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## Gayle Chong Kwan

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GAYLE CHONG KWAN is showing two works for SINOPTICON – both are new commissions for the project. Gayle is a project founder and has been researching this work over the past few years.

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***Blueprint (series), Milawi Parliament, Luther Plaza, Ark Hotel, African Union, Kilambi Kiayi, 2012, Five framed c-type photographic prints, Each 30 x 40” landscape {SINOPTICON Commission}***

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### PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

A series of c-type photographic prints, which play with viewpoints and perspectives through which we can consider contemporary developments in Chinoiserie. The works, which combine fixed Western viewpoints with deep, level and high distance vistas, refer to large-scale building projects in Sub-Saharan Africa carried out by Chinese firms and/or part-financed by the Chinese government, as well as recent master-planning projects in China, which are pushing building conventions in new directions. Each framed work has a miniature sculptural version of part of a featured building, which contains a lens through which you can re-view each work.

‘African Union’ refers to the recently opened African Union headquarters, with the entire 100m high building project, which cost £127million, being funded by the Chinese Government. ‘Ark Hotel’ refers to the 30-storey hotel built in only 15 days near Dongting Lake in Hunan province. ‘Kilambi Kiayi’ refers to the ‘new city of Kilambi Kiayi’, stretching over 3.3million square metres, 20 miles south of the of Angolan capital Luanda, which was built entirely by Chinese constructors. ‘Luther Plaza’ refers to the Lutheran headquarters of Kenya in Nairobi, which was built by African workers, under the aegis of a Chinese construction company, and reflects a growing number of religious buildings being built by the Chinese in Africa.

The series draws upon research carried out of Chinoiserie wallpapers at National Trust properties and refers to architectural blueprints, blue and white porcelain, and cyanotype prints.

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## ***Impressions of Inner Mongolia, 2012, Animated film*** **{SINOPTICON Commission}**

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PLYMOUTH ARTS CENTRE

This animated film developed from Gayle Chong Kwan's research at the National Maritime Museum into the tea trade. Investigating the huge movement of people and chinoiserie objects across the seas, the work is looped and imagined as a seemingly never-ending journey of the inner-senses.

Constructed out of back-lit tea leaves and tea stains, Chong Kwan's animation makes reference to Salvador Dali's pseudo-documentary to a fantastical and foreign land, 'Impressions of Upper Mongolia' (1976).



left: Blueprint, Ark Hotel, c-type photographic print

right: Impressions of Inner Mongolia, animation still

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## Stephanie Douet

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### ***Tableau: a diversion, 2011-12, Mixed media installation*** **{SINOPTICON Commission}**

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THE CASTLE, SALTRAM HOUSE GARDENS

Stephanie Douet is interested in chinoiserie as the birth of leisure in Europe. The fractured, fictional, idyllic life the aristocracy in Europe imitated of China is explored in her sculptures. Douet sees a similar distance in Europe's understanding of the country today and a continuation of trade and misunderstanding from that of the seventeenth and eighteenth century.

Most prized among chinoiserie wallpapers are those that depict people and tell stories, such as the making of tea, or the cultivation of silk. Vignettes show figures in small buildings set in exotic landscapes doing some activity. Such scenes – tableaux – also used to be a part of domestic social life in the c.18<sup>th</sup>. Members of the social group would dress in character and maintain various dramatic poses for the entertainment of their audience. Jane Austen describes the presentation of one such tableau in Northanger Abbey.

For Sinopticon Stephanie Douet has made a 3D vignette or tableau with various elements that can be seen in conversation with each other. A large screen forms an architectural framework; its design is taken from the c.18th designer Jean Pillemnent.

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### ***With Dancing Afterwards, 2011-12, Mixed media installation*** **{SINOPTICON Commission}**

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CHINESE DRESSING ROOM, SALTRAM HOUSE

Here Douet has created a 3D vignette for the Chinese Dressing Room at Saltram. Using her skill as a sculptor and her great knowledge of antique furniture she has explored the materials and quirks of design that chinoiserie items incorporate.



*The sculptures in the Chinese Dressing Room are designed to harmonise with the palette of the room. The pale one gleams out of the shadows – I wanted it to look human, and also like furniture and classical statuary with marble-like drapery and pose. Its top suggests a satellite dish while its legs argue with each other. I had been looking at Duchamp's Nude Descending a Staircase before making these two pieces, early attempts to convey movement which look oddly static.*

*The black running legs are drawn with Chinese waves in mind, and lacquered to a high gloss in the Oriental style, black over rusty red. They seem to be rushing and hurling themselves forwards in this fragile room where you actually have to keep very still. - Stephanie Douet*



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**Tower of Parts of There, 192 x 114 x 110cm Wood, paint, plaster, acrylic mirror, remote control unit {SINOPTICON Commission}**

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The Tower is an inverted pagoda of flowers, sharing its island platform with features typically found in Chinoiserie motifs – scholar's rock, trellis, fantastical leaves and a small architectural element that calls into question the scale of the whole piece.

Like Hong Kong or Taiwan, parted from the Mainland, it drifts around seeking ownership.

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## Christian Jankowski

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## The China Painters

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### PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

In a Post-Modern twist of the western historical economic relationship with China and the current contemporary art system, Christian Jankowski, commissioned works from seventeen painters in the ‘artist’s town’, officially named Dafen Oil Painting Village, in Shenzhen, China. The works became Jankowski’s series, The China Painters. The painters he approached all earn a living from the replication of artworks from internet sales; Dafen is essentially a factory of reproduction art. Jankowski bucks the system by asking the artists, who he gives a backdrop of the unfinished new art museum in Dafen, to impose any painted canvas they like on to the museum wall. From replica Old Masters to a family snapshot, the works are an open debate on the value of authorship and the relationship of commissioner and artist and commodity. Sold under Jankowski’s name in his European commercial gallery, the journey of the artwork and the ambiguity of authorship are heightened.

Three of this huge series are shown here in the Museum:

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## Classical Flowers

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This work references the popular flower paintings of c.17<sup>th</sup> Dutch still life tradition. The cut flowers representing life’s fragile transience, are displayed in an export ware vase from China. This type of vase would have been first bought to Europe by the Dutch East India Company which forged the way in trade with China and began the fashion for all things ‘Chinese’.

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## The Story of Dafen

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The author of this work has chosen to hang ‘The Story of Dafen’ on the wall of the museum. The eight canvases tell the story of the making of a new city; from poor artists working together to create a town of wealth and growth. The device of story telling through a series of paintings is reminiscent of the popular

sets of paintings bought by Europeans in the c.17<sup>th</sup> and c.18<sup>th</sup> from China; telling the story of how tea, silks or porcelain were made.



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## Burlak on the Volga

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‘Burlaki na Volge’ (1870-73) by Ilya Repin was widely exhibited throughout Europe in the late c.19<sup>th</sup> as a landmark of Russian realist painting. The painting shows men pulling boats up the Volga river. They are the Burlaki people, a nomad group who were seasonally employed, for virtually no wage, in the most back-breaking of labour. The painting is interpreted as both a celebration of men’s dignity and fortitude and as condemnation of those who sanctioned inhumane labour. The positioning of the work in the Dafen museum by this member of the Dafen village is particularly interesting and ambiguous: does this painter celebrate the fortitude of the working man, berate the slavish out-put of his trade, or simply hope to see such examples of realist painting in his new museum?



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## Isaac Julien

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Isaac Julien's powerful film *Ten Thousand Waves* interweaves modern, ancient and stereotyped China. Strands of references lead us to the horrifying last phone calls from the cockle pickers who drowned at Morcambe Bay and paint a dense and difficult landscape of two cultures meeting. In Plymouth a special screening of the single screen version, *Better Life*, will be shown at Plymouth Arts Centre, whilst the Museum houses images taken as part of the work.

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### ***Better Life*, single-screen film, 2010**

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PLYMOUTH ARTS CENTRE (screening event)

A 'Better Life' is a single screen version of Isaac Julien's multi-screen film – 'Ten Thousand Waves'. The film, concerned with China and the identity of women and workers, indulges in chinoiserie and stylistically explores filmic clichés of China. The action moves between Maggie Cheung as the Goddess of water Mazu and a 1950s Shanghai film set and was inspired by the Morcambe Bay disaster when Chinese cockle pickers were killed by an incoming tide and the neglect of their 'employers'.

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### ***Green Screen Goddess, Triptych (Ten Thousand Waves), 2010, Endura Ultra photograph, triptych, 180 x 239.8 x 7.5 cm each, Edition of 6 plus 1 AP (#1/6)***

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

One of two photographic works shown at the Museum, created during the filming of Isaac Julien's 'Ten Thousand Waves', a nine-screen film installation which indulges in chinoiserie and stylistically explores filmic clichés of China. The action moves between Maggie Cheung playing the Goddess of water, Mazu and a 1950s Shanghai film set and was inspired by the Morcambe Bay disaster when Chinese cockle pickers were killed by an incoming tide and the neglect of their 'employers'. The green-screen, used in filming to create illusions of flying, exposes the goddess as a mere human held up by strings. The works explores the façade and clichés of both film-making and belief systems – the Goddess, unable to help those who drowned at Morcambe Bay.

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***Hotel (Ten Thousand Waves)*, 2010, Endura Ultra photograph, 180 x 239.8 x 7.5 cm, Edition of 6 plus 1 AP (#1/6)**

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

This image, made during the filming of Isaac Julien's 'Ten Thousand Waves', plays homage to the 1930s silent Chinese film 'The Goddess', about a prostitute who endeavours to get her son educated despite the social shame and barriers. Here a woman stands in a contemporary hotel looking over the Pudong district of Shanghai, a symbol of China's financial clout and modernisation. She is dressed in traditional Cheongsam-style dress and with 1930s hair-style. The image illustrates the dichotomy of tradition and modernity that informs China's visual identity today. Whilst referencing filmic tropes found in films such as *Suzie Wong*, which reinforced a sexualized image of the oriental woman, the image hints at the darker narratives of Julien's exploration of migration.

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Tsang KinWah's 'You Are Extremely Terrified of Them...' (photo credit: Dom Moore), installed at Plymouth Arts Centre cafe/bar in 2012. The work was discussed with visitors before they entered and each table had an explanation of Tsang's work. The PAC also held a discuss with the racial equality council and the work was an important discussion point for the whole exhibition, taking in debate and raising serious problems of ingrained racism.




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**TSANG KINWAH, *Re-presenting Hakka/Taiwan/Oriental/Michael's Image in Various Ways*, 2011**

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Vinyl on painted wall

Originally commissioned for the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung

This work, originally designed for the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Art, explores Taiwan's

relationship with the global contemporary art arena and traditional representation. Tsang KinWah takes the traditional flower print used on fabric by native Hakka people, and turns the image in to text concerned with the exploitation of image and art. The Hakka are a people believed to have originated in Northern China but who are now predominantly based in south eastern China, parts of Taiwan and Hong Kong. KinWah references artist Michael Lin who uses the print for his installations in cutting edge spaces such as PS1 in New York and the Palais de Tokyo in Paris. It's not without irony that he addresses the use of traditional images within the context of contemporary art. This piece, now transported to Plymouth and displayed in the context of chinoiserie and the mis-interpretation of cultural images, takes on a whole new layer. Here, with great visual impact, the white vinyl letters are shown on the background of traditional Hakka fabric colours of blue (here at Plymouth College of Art Gallery) and pink (at Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery).

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## Grayson Perry

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Grayson Perry, Sex Drugs Earthenware, 1995



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## *Sex, Drugs and Earthenware, 1995*

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY – mezzanine virtine

Sex, Drugs and Earthenware was created in 1995 soon after the suicide of rock star Kurt Cobain. Perry, who chose a classical, elegant-shaped vase, covered the vessel in images of sex, drugs and rock'n'roll.

Like a piece of c.18<sup>th</sup> bespoke export ware the work is biographical and fashion conscious. Michael Jackson (now also deceased and living on as a figure of controversy), is joined by Perry dressed as a transvestite, alongside random, throw-away clip-art. This accumulation of random icons seems to mirror the development of styles used with little understanding in the c.17<sup>th</sup> and c.18<sup>th</sup> on export wares.

For Sinopticon Grayson Perry was invited to select works from the museum collection to sit alongside 'Sex, Drugs and Earthenware'. The five works selected illustrate an amazing breadth of technique and refinement being replicated in late c.18<sup>th</sup> European potteries. The works, all made within a 50 year time-frame were made in Delft, London, Liverpool and Plymouth. Their iconography, from loose dabs of cobalt blue, to fine brush work depicting birds feathers, are all derivative from Chinese export ware and show how pervasive the iconography of chinoiserie became on ceramics.

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## *High Priestess Cape, 2007, Embroidered cape, rayon on satin, 96 x 166 cm*

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This cape was recently on show at the British Museum as part of Grayson Perry's exhibition 'The Tomb of the Unknown Craftsman'. Perry created this exhibition with artifacts from the British Museum collection alongside his own ceramics and autobiographical icons, telling the story of a very modern pilgrimage whilst embracing the hand of creativity through the ages.

Perry himself has always been interested in chinoiserie and in the way a misinterpreted or misremembered image may be given a fresh vision.

This cape was made to be worn. Perry is a transvestite and many of his works look at, and question,

gender roles and our attitude to sex. In the context of chinoiserie this beautiful satin cape copies the exported silks of the Eighteenth century and mirror the common phoenix icon. Here the phoenix becomes a penis as Perry wittily brings the design up to date. The wearing of a silk cape is a symbol of power, from Kings, Emperors and priests. Here the cape becomes a cheeky prop in the artist's continued subversion of artistic heritage.

In Saltram the cape rubs shoulders with the properties prized Chinese wall papers and the display of fashions of those c.18<sup>th</sup> collectors of all things chinoiserie.



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## Ed Pien

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Ed Pien, Bloom, 2012, papercut, 7 x 9 ft

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### ***Bloom, 2012, Papercut, 7x9ft {SINOPTICON commission}***

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SALTRAM HOUSE, Stairway Hall

For Sinopticon Ed Pien has created this intricate paper-cut piece specifically to replace a landscape painting in the Stairway Hall of Saltram House. Using 3M film Pien hand cut this complex weave of sea creatures over a series of months. The 3M film is washed with colour, designed to use the natural light of the stair well and reflect on the surface, mirroring the shimmer of the sea. The symmetry of the work seems to stem from the idea of chinoiserie wallpapers whilst the iconography is inspired by Plymouth's maritime history of trade and immigration.

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### ***Wallpaper, 2012, film {SINOPTICON commission}***

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SALTRAM HOUSE, Servants Rooms

VIEW WALLPAPER in TWO PARTS HERE – [Wallpaper 1](#) [Wallpaper 2](#)

This digitally manipulated film uses footage from Ed Pien's garden in Canada. Pien wanted to create a 'living wallpaper' that captures the changing seasons. Entitled simply and unapologetically, as Wall Paper, the artists presents images of flora that are personally meaningful to him; plants and flowers that he planted and nurtured himself. Referencing the wallpapers at Saltram House, he videotaped them showing their different states: spring, summer, fall and winter, in order to highlight the fact that they are taken from reality, not frozen in time and always undergoing change.

The plants are always moving as they are shot out-of-doors where they are constantly exposed to the elements, including wind. The captured flowers are manipulated (mirrored – like Rorschach) and repeated as patterns to reference the decorative and the chinoiserie wall papers Pien saw at Saltram House.

Wall Paper shows the real and personal to counter chinoiserie wall papers that convey the fanciful,

exoticised and imagined images from and of the Orient.



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***The Blue Vine, 2008, ink on paper, 29 x 69 cm & The Colour of Jade, 2008, ink on paper, 29 x 69***

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, North Gallery

The blue references the Delft Blue colour iconic of exported Chinese porcelain and the green, the colour of China's precious export, jade. Pien's drawing technique consists of a layering of images in which here mirrors the hand-painted effect of glaze. Creatures of all sorts abound and the politically motivated and denigrating caricatures of the "Orientals" in the late 1800's to the early 1900's comes into play.

Composite drawings inspired by Jean Pillemnent, an c.18<sup>th</sup> engraver who produced many chinoiserie images, reference style and racial stereotyping.



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## Meekyoung Shin

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### *Translation series*

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SALTRAM HOUSE, Lord Morley's Room

Translation is a series of works by Korean artist Meekyoung Shin. She presents replica ceramic works all intricately copied from museum collections, decorated and made by hand with soap. Shin is interested in the idea of translation and what happens when an object is moved from its original country or context.

As copies of Chinese porcelain vases, Shin has transplanted a foreign cultural tradition not only geographically (from origin to Korea to London to Plymouth), but also in terms of media (from marble or porcelain to soap).

Meekyoung Shin's use of soap, a seemingly transient and unstable material, questions the authority and originality that the original vases demand. Presenting the vases on the packing crates in which they are shipped from location to location, further emphasizes the sense of dislocation and transformation.

This group of works, displayed in Lord Morley's room at Saltram House, could be a new shipment of export Chinese wares from the cargos of trading ship in the c.17<sup>th</sup> or c.18<sup>th</sup> when the owners of Saltram would have been keen to keep up with the fashion for chinoiserie. The shape and decoration of a Chinese ceramic has become a part of our visual language, and many can be found in Saltram house; they transcends location and, as Shin demonstrates, material as well.

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### *Ghost series*

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART COLLEGE, North Gallery

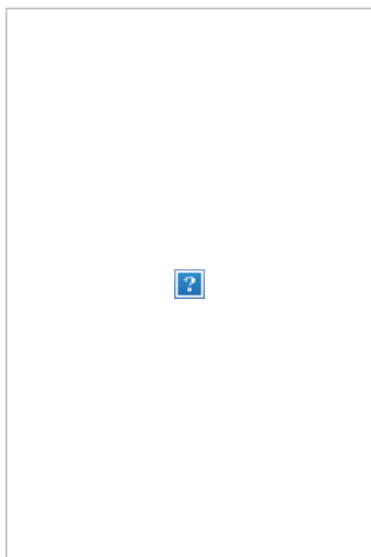
*Ghost* is a series of replica ceramic works all intricately copied from museum collections, and all made by hand with soap. The shapes are recognizable as historical ceramic wares but in translation have been



pared back to their basic form.

Shin is interested in the idea of translation and what happens when an object is moved from its original country or context. Grouping vases of various shapes and translucencies into colours she further explore notions of identity – colour is all that separates these shadows of their former selves one from the other.

Meekyoung Shin's use of soap, a seemingly transient and unstable material, questions the authority and originality that the original vases demand and playfully respond to the museum environment.



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## Susan Stockwell

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Susan Stockwell presents three works at Couriers of Taste at Danson House.

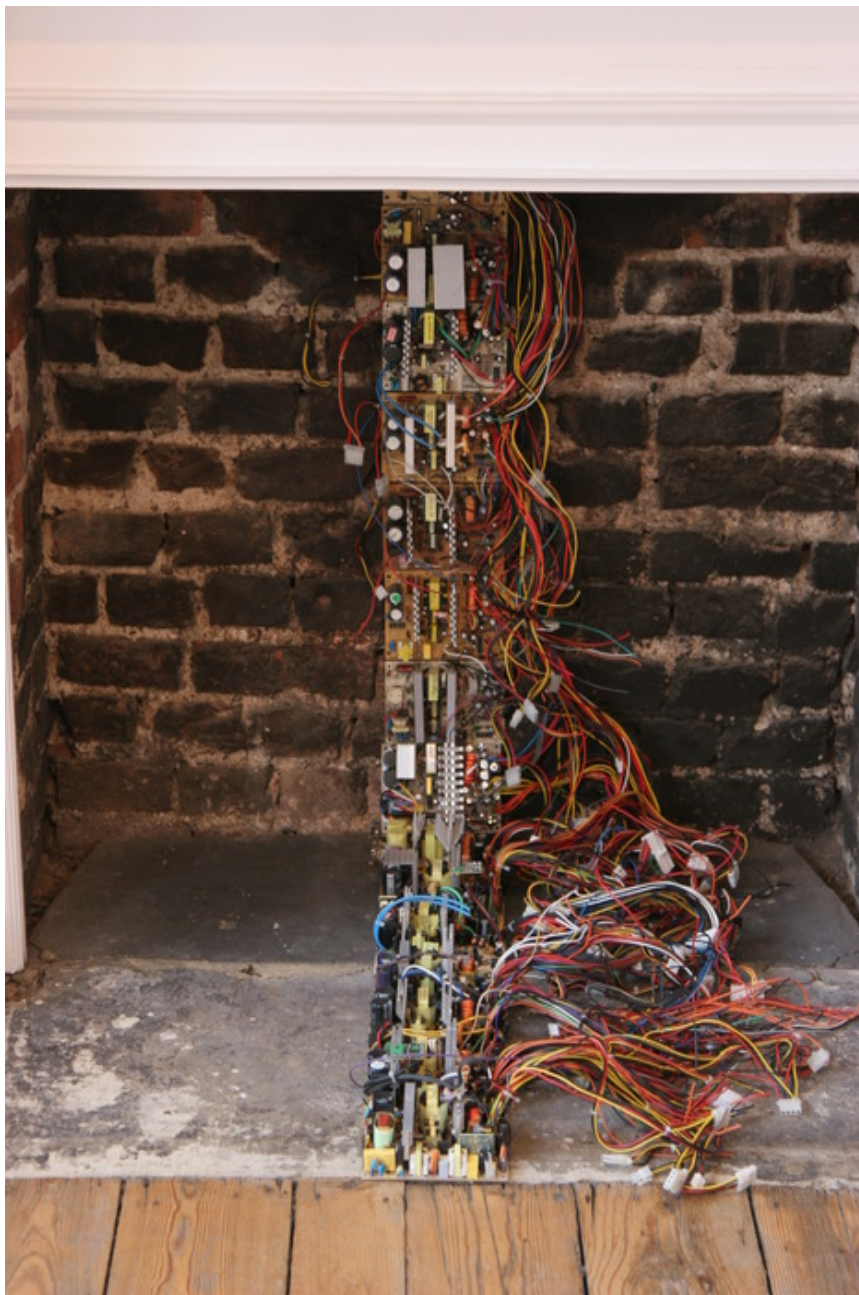
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### Susan Stockwell, *China Gold*, 2010, *Stitched American dollars and gold leaf* and *Africa*, 2011, *Money notes and cotton thread*

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Susan Stockwell pieces together economic distribution and geography to create works that consider alternative narratives to conventional understandings of international trade. By using obsolete paper currencies, maps and technological detritus from around the world she provokes questions as to the fluid nature of trade and territories. With the West now looking firmly to the East for both inspiration and economic deliverance the shift in global wealth and political currency is ever more present. Rapid growth in contemporary hi-tech consumerism and global manufacture is epitomised by *Firewire*, an installation of computer cables tumbling down through an antique Western fireplace. Our reliance on technology and the huge impact that online shopping has had on production and global trade creeps into the imaginary trader's bedroom at Danson House and begins to encroach on every aspect of his world.

Chinese money is re-appropriated in a map, *Africa*. The underlying history of China's relationship with Africa, through trade in manufacturing, building, expertise has parallels with the Blueprint works of Gayle Chong Kwan. Citing these works within the historical context of Danson engages us further in our understanding (or misunderstanding) of the relationship between economies, land, trade, identity and the power paradigm.



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**Susan Stockwell, *Fire Wire*, 2013, Recycled computer power supplies**


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## Karen Tam

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Karen Tam, Terra dos Chinois, jade soap detail, 2012

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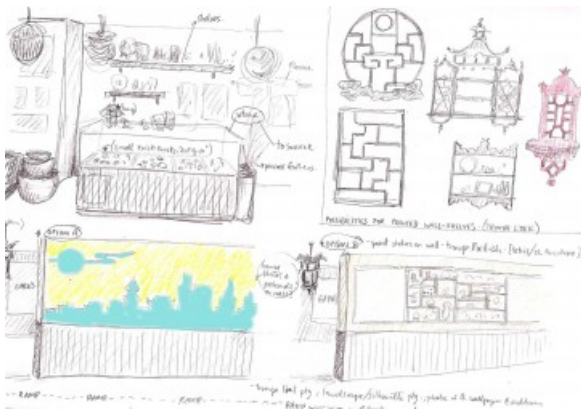
## ***Terra dos Chinês Curio Shop, 2012, installation {SINOPTICON commission}***

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PLYMOUTH ARTS CENTRE with interventions at SALTRAM HOUSE

Karen Tam's work looks at the impact of the Chinese diaspora on North American aesthetics, the infiltration of chinoiserie, and the continuing, conflicted relationships between "East" and "West". The fascination with the East dates back to the days of the China export trade and Silk Road (14<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries). Even at the height of chinoiserie, as the Western market was being flooded with Chinese products, Chinese people overseas were targeted by racist laws and deemed inassimilable aliens. Today, the fear of "Yellow Peril", of the unknown and unfamiliar, while not virulent, is reflected in talk shows, news reports, and blogs on china's rising status as a superpower, its economic strength, position as the world's manufacturer, and host of the 2008 Olympics. As negative attitudes towards the Chinese are on the rise, we also see a return to the exotic "Far East" in Western popular culture, along with the use of relational terms such as "Far East" and "Oriental" which had emerged during the British colonial and imperial past.

For Sinopticon Tam has created Terra dos Chinês Curio Shop: an installation styled after San Francisco and New York Chinatown curio shops circa. The 1930s. Questioning and playing off notions of authenticity and the copy, she has produced her own faux/fake artifacts and antiques. Based on the East Asian and chinoiserie objects in various museums and local collections, and Ebay, Tam uses everyday materials and methods; seemingly genuine jade ornaments are sculpted out of soap, porcelain dinnerware are fashioned out of papier-mâché, and silver objects created out of aluminum oven-liner trays. Terra dos Chinês is a space that appears to be real but is a façade of DIY chinoiserie, hoping to highlight the encounters that occur between specific locales and East Asian-influenced material culture. The mass of objects Tam has hand-made for this work refer not only to mass production of pirated consumer goods in China but also to the questions that are always present where artistic production is concerned.



## Opium Den, installation

### PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY

Karen Tam's 'Opium Den's are interactive installations, usually placed amongst a museum collection. These theatrical sets invite the viewer in to what might be a constructed historical environment. Lying down enjoying the 'opium beds' you might consider the hand cut screens and notice a woman parachuting (this is Lee Ya-ching, taken from a comic strip, although a real woman who toured the US to drum up support for war relief in China and even made a cameo in some Hollywood movies), or a knife fight between two opium dealers. You may look with fascination at the opium pipe on the tray next to you and then note the cheap replica perfume, 'Opium by Yves Saint Laurent'. You might begin to feel less comfortable on your bed. Tam's layout for the Opium den come from visual references such as 'Tintin and the Blue Lotus' and purposefully poke fun at how, particularly within a museum environment, we are obediently accepting of the cultural stereotypes we are fed.

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## Erika Tan



Erika Tan's *Sensing Obscurity I, II, III*, commissioned by SINOPTICON, will be showing at the launch programme of Gillman Barracks (A new contemporary art space in Singapore). The exhibition, 'Encounter, Experience and Environment', opens 7pm on Friday 14 September 2012

## **Sensing Obscurity (Parts I, II, III), 2012 {SINOPTICON commission}**

PLYMOUTH COLLEGE OF ART GALLERY

What happens to symbols of cultural dominance when the world-order shifts?

Set in Saltram House, an English country house (now National Trust property), the film takes place 'some point in the not so distant future', at a moment in time when China's ascendance as a global power has given rise to an opportunity to re-visit history differently. Using a mixture of documentary and narrative film tropes, the cut and paste aesthetics of hip hop and chinoiserie; the history of Saltram House as we know it, under-goes a slippery transition in an attempt to remain relevant and shore-up its status as cultural capital.

Sensing Obscurity I: The Manor House; English Literature; artefacts and the performativity of objects; contrapuntal readings; and looking inwards backwards.

Duration: 28.31min

Medium: 2-channel HDV projection, 4 track audio, looped

Sensing Obscurity II: Chinese Chippendale

Duration: 1.30min

Medium: streamed video with bootleg DVD

To view ... click the link: The Chinese Chippendales: <http://youtu.be/9FLBWR614ks>

Sensing Obscurity III: After Chinoiserie

Version I: 5 min text and audio work, produced in collaboration with Neil Rose.

Version 2: 5.30min video.

Produced in partnership with Saltram House, National Trust and Plymouth College of Art.

Funded by The Arts Council Lottery, National Trust's 'Trust New Art' programme, Plymouth Arts Centre, Plymouth City Museum and Art Gallery.

Project developed with the support of the B3 TalentLab.

Commissioned by Eliza Gluckman.

Cast: Catarina Lau, Adam Lau, Jessica Li, Zongyang Li, Loi Xuan Ly, Chris Ong, Clem So, Wang Weiming, Ming Qiang Xie, Jay Oliver Yip  
Harmonica Player: Ming Qiang Xie  
Singing: Zongyang Li,  
Voices: Kandemir Esmer, Erika Tan, untranslated anonymous voices.  
Spinners: Wang Weiming, Loi Xuan Ly, Chris Ong  
Capoeira:  
Jay Oliver Yip, Adam Lau

Production:

Directed, produced, edited – Erika Tan  
Production Manager – Ashley Cox  
Assistant Directors – Kandemir Esmer, Beverley Fulford, Eve Mahoney, Gary Vincent Mead.  
Camera – Deirdre Dowley, Kandemir Esmer, Eve Mahoney, Gary Vincent Mead, Andy James.  
Post Production effects – Kandemir Esmer  
Dance choreography – Catarina Lau  
Dance assistant – Jessica Li, Adam Lau  
Sound recording, design and mastering – Neil Rose  
Creative consultant – Andy James  
Technical consultant – Stuart Bailey

Music:

After Chinoiserie, written by Neil Rose and Erika Tan, produced by Neil Rose, 2011.  
Boys, He Jie, 2008. Cover of Boys, Boys, Boys / Summertime Love, Sabrina Salerno, 1987)

With additional thanks to – Louise Ayres, Zoe Baxter, Felicity Blomeley, Marc Boothe (B3 Media), Tom Freshwater, Eliza Gluckman, Kathy Hall, Hannah Jones, Anthony Lam, Susan Pui San Lok, Kumiko Mendl, Lab Ky Mo, Dienneke Oestindier, Paula Orrell, Dan Paolantonio, Neil Rose, Ben Shapcott, David Tse, Jih – Wen Yeh, Lazy Yellow, Eiling Wong.

Inter-titles:

From Sense and Sensibility, Jane Austen, 1811 and Ang Lee's filmic adaptation, 1995.

ES: the library... these are mostly foreign.

E: indeed, magnificent.

ES: I never like the smell of books.

E: oh no, it's the dust perhaps. I hear you have great plans for the walnut grove.

ES: oh yes, I shall have it knocked down and replaced by a Grecian temple.

—

W: it is folly to linger in this manner.

I will not torment myself any longer by remaining among friends whose society it is impossible for me now to enjoy.

—

M1: you know that all this is an invention of your own, and that there is no such person in existence.

M2: well then, he is lately dead, for I am sure there was such a man once.

—

E1: you talk of feeling idle and useless – imagine how that is compounded when one has no choice and no hope whatsoever of any occupation

E2: our circumstances are therefore precisely the same.

E1: except that you will inherit your fortune.

E2: we cannot even earn ours.

E1: perhaps M is right.

E2: right?

E1: piracy is our only option.

—

W: I have three unanswerable reasons for not liking C: he has threatened me with rain when I wanted it to be fine; he has found fault with the hanging of my curricule, and I cannot persuade him to buy my brown mare.

—  
MM: concealing it from us! My dear child, do you accuse W and M of concealment? This is strange indeed, when your eyes have been reproaching them everyday for incautiousness.

Translation of voice over:

Voice 1:

Voice 2:

Voice 3:

Voice over lists:

Voice 1 & 3: (forward and in reverse)

Chang'an

Xi'an

Gansu

Lanzhou

Wuwei

Yumen

Anxi

Donhuang

Hami

Turfan

Urumchi

Almaty (alma-ata)

Tian Shan

Korla

Aksu

Khotan

Taklamakan

Kashgar

Bishkek

Namangan

Fergana Valley

Tashkent

Samarkand

Turkmenabat

Bukhara

Merv

Mashhad

Caspian Sea

Baki

Ashgabert

Tehran

Kermanshah

Bagdad

Damascus

Adana

Iznik

Seleucia

Alexandria

Constantinople

Rome

Voice over 2:

House objects:

Georgian mahogany

Corinthian column candlesticks

Rococo ceiling

Joseph Peretti tables

Symmetrical palladian façade

Tudor timbers

Imari porecelain figurines

Joshua Reynolds portraits in oil

Italian giltwood table  
Venetian window  
Chippendale chinoiserie keyhole escutcheons  
Etienne le Noir clock  
Crimson flock wallpaper  
Robert Adam neo-classical chimney piece, matching carpet and door handles  
Ming vase  
Wedgewood black basalt ware  
Etruscan plaster urns  
K'ang His Blanc-de-Chine Kuan Yin  
Red brascia marble  
Padouk wood pagoda shaped creshing rails  
Pale blue damask walls  
Famille Verte Dog of Fo  
Regency Doric portico  
Delft ware vase  
Neo classical Paktong firegrate  
Thomas Chippendale giltwood armchair and sofa suite  
Emperor nerva marble bust  
Scagliola columns  
Ming Famille Rose jug  
Nathaniel Richmond parkland  
Francesco Vassalli overmantle frame  
Chinese Chippendale elbow chairs  
Victorian gas lamp

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# SINOPTICON

{ contemporary chinoiserie in contemporary art }

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## WESSIELING

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WESSIELING, National Dress, V&A installation 2011

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## Fashion Chess

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SALTRAM HOUSE – Library (Ground Floor) and Study (First Floor)

These high-gloss ‘lacquered’ chess-tables house two bespoke armies of chess pieces representing the international world of fashion. The work is a visual metaphor for cities at war and globalisation within the fashion and textile industries.

Historically chinoiserie saw the fashion for silks from the East become a major source of trade alongside tea and ceramics. In the modern world fashion is a key source of income and investment in China and India. Here the pawns are a front-line of dress makers dummies and the main pieces represent the major ‘fashion’ cities of the world. Shanghai’s Pudong tower is King on the chess board. The modern Pudong district of Shanghai faces the old European style buildings of the Bund and the tower is a symbol of China’s economic growth and positioning in the global power structure.

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## National Flag {SINOPTICON Commission}

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PLYMOUTH CITY MUSEUM AND ART GALLERY, Entrance & SALTRAM HOUSE AMPHITHEATRE


These Chinese national flags have been transformed to reflect the traditional cheongsam dress. The dress has become a symbol of Chinese female identity which has been adapted and absorbed in to western culture. The dress is imbued with tales of national and sexual identity and the sexualisation of Eastern women represented in the West.



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# SINOPTICON

{ contemporary chinoiserie in contemporary art }

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## Laura White

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### LAURA WHITE, *The Esque Collection*, 2012

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The relationship with trade routes and the fashion frenzy for desirable objects of historical chinoiserie easily resonates with our contemporary obsessions with luxury goods, global economics and who will be the next super power.

Laura White makes work that responds to the things, objects and stuff we see everyday, from cheap objects sold on the high streets, to ornaments displayed in museums and peoples homes. She is interested in the language of objects through anthropological profiling: how objects define who we are and how we interact with them. Her new work responds to Sinopticon, making connections to both global and local meaning and value given to different types of everyday stuff. For example, what value/meaning is given to cheap UK souvenirs in China, such as a royal wedding mug? It is this sense cross-cultural influences that can create the most extraordinary objects, such as cheap replica plastic chinoiserie vases sold in Turkish bricolage shops in London, to replica Gucci handbags sold in Shenzhen.

This work was commissioned for SINOPTICON



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**Laura White, Sinopticon, 2012**

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