

## Curatorial statement

For recent landmark exhibitions in the Western world, the question of representation has formed a kind of gravitational pull. The New Museum Triennial in 2018, *Songs for Sabotage*, sought response to “the deployment of a technique, or activation of a capacity, in order to challenge the apparatus or system within which it is situated,” drawing from contemporary theories like Fred Moten’s *undercommons* and Elizabeth Povinelli’s *geontopower*. In that same year’s Whitney Biennial, Dana Schutz’s painting of Emmett Till sparked art-world scale protests and demands for the painting’s removal from the museum’s walls. Meanwhile, the UK’s 2018 Liverpool Biennial, titled *Beautiful world, where are you?* after a 1788 poem by German poet Fredrich Schiller, reached for similar curatorial goals with a very different historical focus. Inviting artists to reflect on a world in social, political, and economic turmoil, the project referenced a period of “upheaval and profound change in Europe, from the French Revolution to the fall of the Napoleonic Empire,” making clear its preoccupations with European empire and colonialism.

Across these examples alone, we can locate shared underlying sentiments re: representation whose impetuses are founded on very different histories and references, both far-reaching and immediate in perspective. The present exhibition, featuring eleven younger Asian and queer artists, emerges first from a place of community and is driven by two interconnected questions: How do specific diasporic experiences reveal variations in localized systems of power? And: Under this framework, how are our individual artistic practices not just represented but employed as interventions in representation itself? Most of the artists in this exhibition currently live and work between the poles referenced above: the United States (New York City) or the United Kingdom (London), two global powers that became hotspots for East and Southeast Asian immigration, and two English-speaking countries that share an inextricable and complicated history. As culturally linked as the US and UK are, we still find that differences in institutional curatorial and conceptual approaches can reveal just how affective the sociopolitical climate of a nation—or even a city—can be.

Diasporic experience is determined as much by where you end up as where you are from; the local expression of colonial powers shape the processes by which work is made and received. This tension allows us to create work and speak *nearby* instead of speaking *about* diaspora, a term taken from filmmaker and scholar Trinh T. Minh-Ha. The *nearby* respects the opacity of its addressee(s) and reflects critically upon the speaker’s own proximities. For the artists in this exhibition, our shared circumstances of urban transplantation, queer sociality, and ancestral migration have granted us the room for dialogue that interrogates our geopolitical histories and conceptions of self. By bringing these voices together, we do not seek to produce a clearer universal image of an Asian diasporic identity, but rather to obfuscate, expand, and particularize such an image. In other words, we wish to be nearby one another.

—Amanda Ba

