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SLATE
CONTEMPORARY GALLERY
+ ART CONSULTING

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SLATE contemporary is pleased to announce the opening of *Phoenix*, a solo exhibition of mixed media work by artist Holly Wong that will be on display at the Oakland gallery from April 1 through May 31, 2021. An opening artist's talk via Zoom is planned for Thursday, April 1, 2021, at 5:00 pm PST.

This is the first solo show of Wong's works in the San Francisco Bay Area and her first exhibition at SLATE contemporary, since she joined the gallery in the summer of 2020. All of the works featured in the exhibition were created during the shelter-in-place order over the past year and, so, reflect her spiritual and visual responses to the pandemic, social injustice, and her desire for personal and social transformation.

The display will present a wide variety of expressive modes, including a large-scale drawing-based installation titled *Phoenix*, to which this show is dedicated, as well as a series of more intimate works on paper, larger scale paintings on paper, and assemblages.

Holly Wong earned her MFA in New Genres from the San Francisco Art Institute, and her studio practice can be most readily described as interdisciplinary. Though drawing-based, she utilizes line, shape, and pattern as a jumping off point to create immersive environments. In the case of her sculptural installations, the immersion is quite literal, as they may fill a room or be large enough for viewers to move around inside of them. With Wong's smaller-scale two-dimensional works, the worlds she creates are on an almost microcosmic scale, made by layering intricate line work, textures, and patterning.

Although Wong's work is abstract, it is inspired by Buddhism, Greek mythology, and the universal power of myth. She is attracted to feminine archetypes from ancient cultures, which she finds empowering, particularly as she copes with the personal, social, biological, and political challenges of the present day. In her work, she shared both her struggle, as well as her call for hope and rebirth.

SLATE's public open hours will vary depending on guidance from the County Health Department. So, please check slateart.net/contact for updates, or email info@slateart.net to make an appointment for a private viewing.

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Phoenix, an 11x11 ft sculptural installation made from sewn graphite drawing, will be featured in the exhibition.



The artist working on *Phoenix*



Smoke and gouache, 12x16, from the *Juliet of the Spirits* series.



Persephone, made with smoke, gouache, and drafting film, 24x19



Detail of *Persephone*

Inspiration and Process for Phoenix and Related Works

Phoenix is artist Holly Wong's most current work, created for the exhibition in January of this year. Feeling a deep sense of loss and grief at the state of world affairs, Wong built a large mythical bird, which is a metaphor for her own body. She sees *Phoenix* as her desire for purification, cleansing and rebirth.

Buddhist philosophy is a common thread in Wong's work. Buddha's Fire Sermon inspired both the title of the exhibition and the installation itself. She offers the following excerpts from the Fire Sermon as inspirational passages:

The mind is burning, ideas are burning, mind-consciousness is burning, mind-contact is burning . . . Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hate, with the fire of delusion.

Wong's use of materials reflects her desire to delve deeply into the unconscious, to find the nature of destruction in herself and the environment. She begins her work often with the action of drawing lyrical, tangled forms that she never premeditates. Afterwards, she may layer paint and, then, will burn her work with candle smoke to diffuse the images. Then she resurrects them by painting back into them or layering the images with hand cut drafting film. She often cuts up her work and then reassembles it with a sewing machine, making use of her history as a fiber artist. Drawing and sewing sometimes become interchangeable in Wong's work. For her, the sewing line is a kind of blood line.

Some of Holly Wong's mid-sized framed works on paper are named specifically for Goddesses, such as *Persephone*, the Greek goddess of the underworld. In her imagination, the underworld is the place of the unconscious. And, for her, the reprocessing of psychological trauma is personified in the metaphor of traveling within the underworld. *Persephone*, as well as many of the other works in the show, represent Wong's fearless process of looking within her past and through the layers of memory, bringing forth the potential for new life. She also utilizes the realm of fantasy to bring forward hidden truths, as in her series *Juliet of the Spirits*, an homage to the 1965 film by Federico Fellini. For Wong, exploring fantasy and the unconscious in her art are a path to liberation.

As a fitting bookend, Wong also created a series of larger-scale paintings on paper titled *Aurora* for the exhibition. In her effort to explore silence and introspection, she attempted to channel the Roman Goddess of the Dawn. Hope feels very fragile to Wong at this point, as the early efforts of vaccinations take hold and there is a new presidential administration. Yet she hopes that viewers can find healing, comfort, and renewal in her work, and she is thrilled to share it with SLATE contemporary and the Bay Area community.