



Catalina Ouyang: it has always been the perfect instrument
February 29 - April 12, 2020

Exhibition Programs

Saturday, March 21, 2pm

slow jam: active restfulness is its own kind of money, a movement workshop with Lu Yim.

Friday, March 27, 6pm

[Conclusion and Findings] Readings with Mia Kang, Paul Legault, K-Ming Chang, Maryam Ivette Parhizkar, Yanyi, and LA Warman.

Catalina Ouyang: it has always been the perfect instrument is an exhibition of large-scale interactive sculpture, salvaged objects, assemblage, text, and video. Employing divergent processes of mending, shrouding, as well as accumulated layers of translation, these works further Ouyang's ongoing examination of the power and attendant violence that language can wield.

The exhibition presents sculptures made over the last two years—some of which have been refigured and fused together—and a new two-channel video that is a continuation of the artist's ongoing project *[Conclusion and Findings]* (2017–). In *[Conclusion and Findings]*, Ouyang pollutes the email inboxes of hundreds of strangers and friends with a 2016 document that weaponized institutional language to exonerate an act of violence. The recipients of Ouyang's prompt are then invited to appropriate, handle, and "translate" the contents of that document back to the artist.

The two-channel video *unable to Title [a reordering of every word written to make sense of [] for Catalina* by Amanda, Amber, Amy, Andy, Annelyse, Annie, Ariana, Arisa, Avery, Brighde, Chelsea, Ching-In, Christina, Claire, Diana, Douglas, Edward, Elena, Geoff, Geri, Gowri, Hanif, Heather B., Heather N., Jacklyn, Jane, Jennifer, Jesse, Jessica, Joy, Julia, Julie E., Julie W., Jungmok, Kathryn, Keegan, Keith, Kelly, Kenji, K-Ming, LA, Lara, Larissa, Laura, Lillian, Liz, Luca, Lynn, Marci, Maria, Maryam, Maura, Meredith S., Meredith T., Mia, Molly, Muriel, Nathaniel, Nora, Paul, Philip, Raquel, Robert, Rosebud, Sam, Sara, Sarah G., Sarah S., Sarah V., Sennah, Sharon, Terese, Thylias, Victoria, Xandria, and Yanyi) (2020) presents Ouyang's rearrangement of the nearly 40,000 words generated by the contributions to *[Conclusion and Findings]*. This exhaustive task reflects the artist's initial struggle to make sense of polyphonic data and to comprehend a manuscript designed to create silence. The works in the exhibition, however, ultimately forgo that endeavor toward consolidation and instead grow out of a space where language fails.

An elongated sculpture titled *bitch bench* (2018) stretches across the space. The extended torso of a figure somewhere between human and the Capitoline wolf, bearing jagged teeth, sharp claws, and elated expression, serves as seating for viewing *unable to Title*. Flanking either side of *bitch bench* and lodged into the base of two derelict and altered chaise lounges, screens flash with the short, poetic phrases produced by the artist's reordering of the *[Conclusion and Findings]* responses, building yet another layer of translation, distance, and perhaps even protection from the original document. These corresponding works create and reuse seating objects, inviting questions of burden and weight. The chaise lounge recalls an originary site for integrating trauma through psychoanalysis, while the seating in *bitch bench* echoes Napoleonic- and Victorian-era conversation chairs designed to facilitate courtship and gossip. Taken in context of the project's response to failures of the law, the work points to gossip as a fugitive form of protection.

Other sculptures merge bone, wood, plaster, stone, and other materials to produce hybrid objects on the edge of recognition. In *risk assessment (By What Love Have I)*(2020), Ouyang has fused gestures from two 2019 sculptures to produce a new piece whose components toggle between discipline and protection, violence and tenderness. The skeleton of a child-size chair hovers above eye level, with limbs whittled into sharp points. A single leg interrupted by a blue-stained horse tibia extends precariously down to join the body of a headless figure crouching and cradling a security camera shell, its protective and weaponizing interior—the camera apparatus—replaced with mothballs. Approaches of salvaging, joining, and mending, continue in *font IV* (2020) and *font V* (2020), whereby partial faces carved from soapstone reference holy water fonts. Here, the mouth and the ear, respectively, form the hollow meant to hold holy water, but instead contains a vinegar egg in an obstructive gesture that indicates sound, speech, and silencing.

Together, the objects in the room—each hybrid in some form—evoke the monstrous, the Othered, and the cast out. In some of Ouyang’s works, acts of mending and salvaging allude to physicalized balms for woundedness and devastation, while in others, accumulated layers of translation create distance, forming a protective gesture of cradling and shrouding. In resisting any overarching visual, material, disciplinary, or tonal vocabulary, it has always been the perfect instrument trades linguistic and taxonomic control for a landscape of rhythm, texture, touch, and communion.

This project was supported in part by a Puffin Foundation Grant and a Foundation for Contemporary Arts Emergency Grant.

Organized by Alexis Wilkinson, Knockdown Center Director of Exhibitions and Live Art

About the artist

Catalina Ouyang’s practice spans sculpture, text, installation, performance, video, and participatory projects, among other modalities, exploring the interstices of myth, desire, subjugation, and monstrosity. Ouyang has had solo exhibitions at Rubber Factory (New York, NY), Selena’s Mountain fka Selena Gallery (Brooklyn, NY), Make Room (Los Angeles, CA), and fort gondo compound for the arts (St. Louis, MO). Group exhibitions include Helena Anrather (New York, NY), fffriedrich (Frankfurt, Germany), like a little disaster (Polignano a Mare, Italy), Anonymous Gallery (Mexico City, Mexico), projects+gallery (St. Louis, Missouri), No Place (Columbus, Ohio), Field Projects (New York, NY), and Gallery 400 (Chicago, IL). Ouyang has attended residencies at Shandaken: Storm King (New Windsor, NY), the NARS Foundation (Brooklyn, NY), OBRAS (Evoramonte, Portugal), the Atlantic Center for the Arts (New Smyrna Beach, FL), and Palazzo Monti (Brescia, Italy), with a residency upcoming at the Vermont Studio Center. Ouyang holds an MFA from Yale University.

About Knockdown Center

Knockdown Center gallery hours are Thursday and Friday from 5 PM to 9 PM, Saturday and Sunday from 2 PM to 8 PM. Knockdown Center is located at 52-19 Flushing Ave, Maspeth, NY 11378