

4A TALKS // SOPHIA CAI **TRANSCRIPT**

Sophia Cai: Art, craft, collective solidarity and fandom culture
Held as part of Acute Actions: Responses To I Am Not A Virus



Curator, writer and knitter **Sophia Cai** speaks with producer **Mariam Arcilla** (from 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art) about the mobilising power of art, craft and fandom culture as antidotes to racism and socio-cultural trauma. Hear Cai reveal the story behind her work, *Safety Yellow Woman*, and how collective solidarity and self-care have helped shape her creative practice. Cai and Arcilla also discuss the cross-cultural digests that have become vitamins during surreal times. This conversation took place on Thursday 13 May 2021 over Instagram Live as part of the exhibition series *Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not a Virus*, on show at 4A from 15 April - 3 July 2021, presented by 4A and Diversity Arts Australia.

[Listen to the conversation HERE](#)

TRANSCRIPT

[Intro music: *Blood, Sweat and Tears* by BTS]

Mariam Arcilla Welcome to 4A TALKS. I'm Mariam Arcilla from 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, and you were just listening to *Blood, Sweat and Tears* by the K-pop boy band BTS, which will make sense later on in the talk. Joining me for this conversation is curator, writer and knitter Sophia Cai, who lives and works in Naarm / Melbourne. Sophia is featured in the group exhibition *Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not A Virus*, a two-part exhibition series presented by 4A and Diversity Arts Australia as part of the I Am Not A Virus initiative. I'd like to start by acknowledging that I'm broadcasting from Cadigal-Wangal Country in Inner West Sydney. I'd like to pay my respects to the Gadigal people of the Eora nation—Elders past, present and emerging—and I extend this warmth and respect to the Traditional Owners of the Lands that we are reaching.

In a moment, I'll be in conversation with Sophia about how art, craft, collective solidarity and fandom culture can become powerful antidotes to combat racism and socio-cultural trauma. Sophia will also explore her curatorial, writing and creative projects and how these are shaped by her lived experience as an Asian woman living in Australia. A quick note, this audio file was recorded on Instagram Live, so please excuse the sound quality. A transcript of our talk, accompanied by visual notes, is also available on the [4A website](#). Now, before I bring Sophia on, here's a quick lowdown about 4A for those who are unfamiliar about what we do.

4A was established in 1996 and is known today as a leading Australian arts organisation. We operate as a not-for-profit, and over the past 25 years, we have commissioned, presented, documented and researched contemporary Asian art and the active role it plays towards understanding and developing the multifaceted relationship between Australia and the wider Asian region.



4A is located in Sydney's bustling Chinatown precinct in Haymarket. But right now, our gallery is under renovation, so we're staging exhibitions, programs and events online and offsite. One of these temporary spaces is 4A @ Darlinghurst, which houses the exhibition *Acute Actions*, presenting the works of 12 artists. This show explores the processual and healing acts that stem from the lived experiences and racialised trauma faced by Asian people. Part 1 runs until 15th May; Part 2 is on show from 3rd June to 3rd July. One of the exhibitors in *Acute Actions* Part 1 is Sophia Cai, who has created a hand-knitted piece, *Safety Yellow Woman*. Let's get Sophia on the line to tell us more about her work.



Mariam Arcilla Hello, Sophia!

Sophia Cai Hello!

Mariam Arcilla Would you like to give an introduction to our viewers today and tell us a bit about who you are, but also an Acknowledgement of Country from your end as well?

Sophia Cai Of course. Before I begin, I'd like to acknowledge that I'm 'live-ing' from the unceded Lands of the Wangal people of the Eora nation. I'd like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and also pay my respects to any First Nations people who might be listening. So, a little bit about myself for people who are listening: I'm a curator and arts writer. I also teach as a sessional lecturer at the Victoria College of Arts in the University of Melbourne. I'm also a knitter, and I guess we'll talk about all of those things in a little bit. In terms of where I'm joining from, I'm currently in Sydney, so I am sitting in the living room of my family home.

Mariam Arcilla For a visual description: I'm sitting in Enmore, in an old boys' school and live in a classroom that's been converted into apartments. There's books behind me to continue the lineage of learning. You've got a shirt on and I've got a shirt on...let's talk about our shirts!



Sophia Cai I'm wearing the COLOURED TM sweater, which is a project by the artist Roberta Joy Rich. She did an exhibition a number of years ago and it looked at the experience of being a person of colour. You can get a sweatshirt and I think also a T-shirt...and you have a black one!

Mariam Arcilla I *do* have the black COLOURED TM t-shirt. I can't find it, it's somewhere in my vacuum seal pack. But tonight I am wearing the t-shirt 'Do The Right Thing' from the amazing film, and I've got a badge by Aboriginal artist Destiny Deacon that says, 'Trust me, I am a witch doctor', which is fab. I'm wearing knife earrings from an Asian jeweller called Xiao from Meanjin. I've got black hair, I'm of Asian descent, I'm Filipino-Singaporean. So that's our visual description for tonight.

Now, let's start by talking about your work *Safety Yellow Woman*, which is a hand-knitted sweater that you began knitting during Melbourne's extended lockdown in 2020. Now it's being presented almost a year later in Sydney for *Acute Actions*. So this is a hand-knitted sweater that resembles hazard-warning tape, with these hyperbolically long sleeves that extend to 1.5 metres, which is a social distance length of required between people to allow for safety precautions during COVID. You've also chosen to use the colour yellow for the yarn, which is a colour commonly associated with anti Asian pejoratives. Yellow peril and yellow fever, those are the words that come to mind. Do you want to talk about why you made this work and what your headspace was like during that time?



Sophia Cai I started knitting near the end of last year [2020]. So at this point, we were maybe 3 months into what would be a 6 month hard lockdown in Melbourne. I kind of had the idea of ruminating in my mind for a little bit. And it's not the first time that I've knitted something that speaks to the intersection of race and identity, and using knitting as a way to play with that. I'm also a hobby knitter, because I'm interested in straddling those spaces as well. The sweater itself is a sort of a visual pun. As you mentioned, it's yellow and that's a very deliberate choice.

I wanted to find bright yellow yarn as well, because I wanted to replicate the visual experience of safety hazards signs, which itself is a visual metaphor for keeping your distance, being hazardous and so forth. And then, of course, yellow is also a kind of term used to describe people of East Asian descent, their appearance, and being a 'yellow woman' is quite complex. It's a word that has a lot of baggage, but also a lot of potential, I think, for further unpacking and so forth. For example, it brings up ideas about 'yellow peril' and those sort of negative stereotypes. But then there's also more positive spins on it in the film *Crazy Rich Asians*, how there was a cover of the song *Yellow* by Coldplay. Obviously that was a very deliberate choice for the film. I'm interested in the particular identity of the East Asian woman.

There's scholars doing interesting work in that space. So the idea of yellow and the idea of safety came together in this visual metaphor sweater. And also for me, I kind of liked the idea of making something that is unwearable and spending hundreds of hours making something that I can't really [wear] or doesn't have a function. Some of my knitter friends were like, but why would you make this? I felt compelled to [laughs] and I'm sure other people can relate to that.

Mariam Arcilla Yeah, it's funny that you mentioned Asians because, you know, for those that don't know, at the end of the film, *Crazy Rich Asians*, there's a Mandarin cover of *Yellow* by Coldplay song by Katherine Ho. And the reason for this is that the film director [Jon M. Chu] wanted to use the song as a debunking tool, a reverse cultural symbolism of the pejoratives being called a yellow person. Ever since the director was a child, he acquainted the word 'yellow' person as something to be ashamed of. When he heard the Coldplay song, he instantly realised that being yellow meant you were magical and incredible. He fell in love with the song. But the fact that he had to get permission from Chris Martin to use the song in film. And at first Chris Martin said no! But then the *Crazy Rich Asians* director contacted him to actually persuade him to see this song from his point of view, which is not derogatory, but a healing point of view. That said, though, it still means that we have become accustomed to this proximity to whiteness, towards getting permission from gatekeepers because we are the model minority.

Sophia Cai Of course!

Mariam Arcilla There is this idea that if you are a person of colour, you're automatically born into a political body. Your body is harbouring intergenerational trauma. Your body receives racism from society in all kinds of forms. Your body is made to feel safe by being in the orbit of white communities. Your body goes through generations of being told to shrink, to feel small, to adapt, to be gaslit, to assimilate under this umbrella of the model minority myth. I wanted to know: how do you quarrel with these complicated issues? How does that feed into your work as a writer and as a curator?

Sophia Cai Ooh good question. I think...[pause]...actually, I just want to go back a little bit and then I'll come back to this question, because I actually didn't say what the actual motivation for the sweater was. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, when there wasn't a lot of mandatory mask-wearing happening or governments were very slow

to take action, at least in the neighbourhood where I lived, which is very close to the CBD, is that the only people wearing masks would be Asian people. And I got to a point where I actually felt unsafe.

Sophia Cai I was tossing up whether I wanted to wear masks, and potentially be unsafe because then I would be exposed to racism, which basically happened because people would then see me and my mask and just take a long way around to avoid me. This is like very early on when these things [like wearing masks] weren't yet mandatory.



Sophia Cai So there was also that idea of distancing in that sense of isolation, that grappling with: What safety am I choosing? Am I choosing the safety of invisibility by not wearing a mask? Or am I choosing safety against the pandemic by wearing a mask? And this was, I think, an experience that many Asians still continue to feel about our public body as the pandemic goes on. I was also wondering whether I wanted to knit a matching face mask for the sweater.

Mariam Arcilla Yeah. Or you could make a trinkini? You know how Lizzo was on Instagram and she was showing off this trinkini that she had, which is a mask, a top and bikini? You could do a *sweater-maskini*!

Sophia Cai [Laughs].

Mariam Arcilla Let's patent that. Nobody steal that please, that is Sophia's idea [laughs]

Sophia Cai That's your idea [laughs].

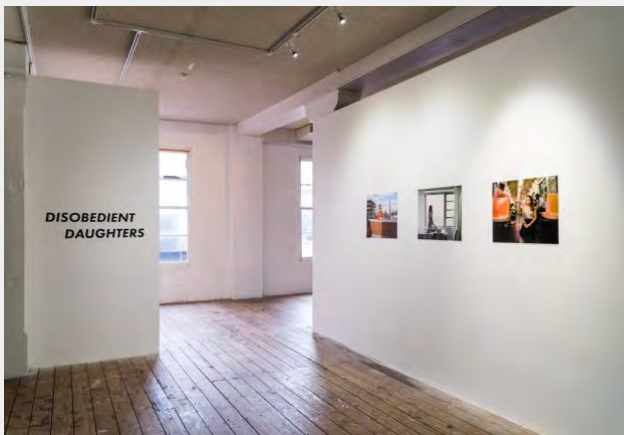
Mariam Arcilla We'll share the profit of maybe three people buying it [laughs].



Mariam Arcilla Disobedient Daughters is an ongoing project that you started at Metro Arts in Meanjin / Brisbane as an exhibition in 2018. It was a fantastic show, I was really lucky to have seen it. It presented nine female and non-binary artists who examined the stereotypical images of Asian women in a global context. This year [2021], the project saw a second iteration at Counihan Gallery in Naarm / Melbourne. It was accompanied by a publication that paired ten artists with ten writers from across Australia, and the writers were asked to respond to these works. I'm going to show this book on my screen while you talk about it. I want to know: what motivated you to curate *Disobedient Daughters*? And why is it important to congregate this multitude of voices now?

Sophia Cai Going back to the curatorial premise and the motivation for the project, it really came from this place of wanting to talk about some of these positions of being a woman of colour: you are grappling with racism and sexism at once. And it is a very nebulous space that you're navigating. And I think at that point in my career, I was also starting to see how those things also played a part in the artworld structures that I was a part of, whether that be through higher learning institutions or galleries, museums, or even within the local artists communities. Who do we see and who do we not see? And there's a lot of media studies about representation: this idea that you want to see yourself and what visibility means.

So a film like *Crazy Rich Asians* got a lot of positive attention for representation. But I was kind of interested in thinking about what the terms of that representation are. So if you're represented, but if you're not in charge of how you are being represented, how does that affect it? Because, for instance, there's a lot of negative stereotypes about Asian women that still persist to the present day. There's two extremes: you're either submissive and docile or you're Dragon Lady, like Lucy Liu in *Kill Bill* [playing character O-Ren Ishii]. It's that extremity and there's no nuance and it's like, yes, it is not coming from that lived experience. Also for me, selfishly, this was a show that I wanted to see, which is often a motivation for me as well. And what's been, I guess, most important about the show is also recognising that there's a multitude of different lived experiences. And they are all equally valid and to kind of hold space with things that might even agitate against each other as well.



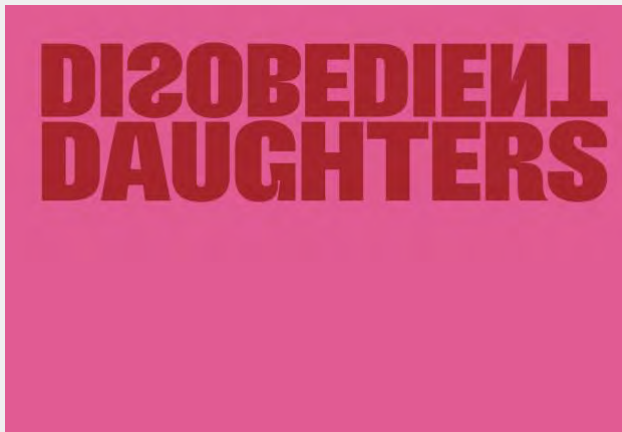
Sophia Cai For instance, for the first *Disobedient Daughters* [exhibition], I had feedback and reflection that that show was very biased towards an East Asian perspective, which is the one that I guess I come from. But then I took that on into the second show, I wanted to try and include West Asian and South Asian voices as well. So there's also that constant process of learning and growing as well with the projects that I work on. I think the publication was also an exercise in bringing in non-artists and non arts writers into a space to show that there's so many different ways that you can interpret a work of art. So I think having the written responses as a creative response really added another element to it.

Sophia Cai And I feel like it wasn't just a show of ten artists and ten writers. It was a show of twenty artists; everyone's contributing in the same equal way. And you were one of the contributors to the project!

Mariam Arcilla Yes, so that was a really healing process to be able to write about Sancintya Mohini Simpson's work for the book. I feel really grateful to have been in those conversations as well with you, Sophia, about the project. And Sancintya is doing amazing things right now, as are all of the artists in this book, which you listeners can read about if you were one of the lucky ones to have bought copies, which sold out in a hot minute. Hopefully we get to see another iteration of *Disobedient Daughters* in the near future because it is an incredible time capsule of how we are feeling right now as Asian women living in the diaspora.

Sophia Cai Yeah, we should also mention the catalogue is beautifully designed by Joy Li, who is an incredibly brilliant designer based in Sydney. And she just knocked it out of the park with the design for the book.

Mariam Arcilla Joy definitely did, it's a gorgeous book!



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Mariam Arcilla I'd like to now jump into your lecturing work at Victoria College of Art in Naarm / Melbourne. In a recent class, you decided to case-study the project White Pube: Ideas for a new artworld with students. As a primer for people listening in: the White Pube

installation was a series of billboard posters around the UK designed to address some of the systemic injustices and inequalities we see in the art world. So some of the statements I'll read to you right now:

Ideas for a new art world #6: Dear museums, give back all stolen objects.

Ideas for a new art world #5: The art world should not replicate the capitalistic structures of other industries and instead should set a better example with a horizontal approach to decision making and pay.

So I'd like to know, Sophia, how did your class go? What are the teachable moments that you like to share with us from your time with your students?



Sophia Cai I'm pretty new to teaching. And since I'm not an artist, I feel like I can only really teach theory or histories of art. So I guess I'm really interested in thinking about how art is shown, how art is received and how artists reconcile with it. I've been such a fan of the White Pube for such a long time, because I think they really are just so generous with their writing, but also make sure that they don't cater to the artworld elite. They're really about access and inclusion, and not just talking the talk, but walking the walk. The billboards...when I saw them, I was really struck by the messages and I think they also made very deliberate choices about the colours of the billboard as well. They were just very striking visuals. And I thought it might be interesting to frame a class around the billboards.

Sophia Cai I'm still teaching via Zoom, which has its own challenges. But it also affords kind of funny situations like, oh, I can maybe break up the students into smaller groups, six groups, and each of the groups spend half an hour discussing one billboard. So I split them up and I didn't expect anyone to come up with an answer or a resolution. But I just wanted

them to sit with that proposition and think 'how would I maybe enact that' or 'do I agree with that?' One of the luxuries—or one of the greatest things about working in a teaching space—is also that I'm constantly learning, too. And I don't really treat it as a 'I'm an expert and you are learning from me'. I really treat it as a 'I am a facilitator; here are the things that we're going to talk about and we will work through this issue together'.



Sophia Cai In that session, I really had no idea how it was going to go. I thought, 'oh, they could end up hating each other afterwards' [laughs]. I put people who might not like each other into a group for 30 minutes to talk about these really loaded and often contentious topics. And then afterwards I asked them to come back and share what they all talked about. But actually, it was one of the best classes and I felt like I also learnt so much. I'm

actually just basically giving the floor to the students to kind of grapple with some of those things. I was really interested to see how people's different experiences would inform what their response would be, but also the capacity they all have for listening to each other and holding space for each other. I think the classroom setting is a good one in terms of doing that, because that is the space where you can test these things out before you take them out into the real world. And I guess that's the approach to teaching that I want. I think about what I felt like I missed when I was studying art history 10 years ago at ANU [Australia National University]. On paper I had a really great education. I did learn a lot. But when I think back on it, I had no subjects that taught me about Indigenous Art. I had barely any engagement with Asian Art. I made a choice to pursue that during my Honours and my Masters. So I try to make sure that I fill some of those gaps that maybe I thought I was missing. When you are learning, you can form your view of the art world based on what material you're being taught, basically.

Sophia Cai We also have some really great critics in Australia, who are doing excellent work. Like Running Dog - that publication is really great- and Runway Journal, I used to be on their board. There's Liminal mag...

Mariam Arcilla Yes and Diversity in Food Media and New Voices in Food by Somekind Press...

Sophia Cai ...and Sweatshop in Western Sydney—they just had a new anthology that just came out.

When I was younger, I used to think that to be a writer, you have to write in a particular way. But I actually realise now that the best writing is the one that comes most authentically. That might not work for other people, but for me, that is reflective of my personal values, basically. So I guess that's what I'm also trying to bring into the classroom, that sense of ownership and agency.

Mariam Arcilla Yeah, through the auto-theory that you were telling me about as well, [relating to] the feminist practice?

Sophia Cai So I guess the one-sentence summary of this idea is that basically you're merging autobiography and critical theory in this idea that the 'personal is the political'. For writers or artists that are coming from a position of —I hate the word 'marginalisation', but you know what I mean—when you are outside the white hetero-normative patriarchy...for creatives in those 'othered' spaces, bringing in that autobiography is actually a really strong way, because our lived experience is just as valid as other forms of research.

Mariam Arcilla Let's talk about fandom culture. For listeners who joined early on, we were playing a BTS song to lead into our conversation to prep everybody up. For those living under a rock, it doesn't mean 'behind the scenes' it means BTS, the K-pop boy band from South Korea. And BTS fans are called BTS ARMY. In 2020, the boyband famously mobilised millions of their ARMY around the world to take political action against anti-BLM protesters and white supremacists in the US through online raids, hashtag hacking and ticket manipulation. That caused a lot of havoc in the US political elections. In a way, these fans aren't just dormant listeners of K-pop.

Through collective solidarity, ARMY literally helped to dismantle euro-centric infrastructures by making tangible actions that would hopefully lead to a fairer world for marginalised communities. Sophia, I know you're a massive fan of BTS. So I'd love to know

what attracted you to BTS in the first place? How does their music and celebrity advocacy fit into your personal life? And how was the BTS conference that you just presented at recently - what was that like?



Sophia Cai I've always been into K-pop, and I've had other bands that I've liked. But I feel like it's one of those things where, like, if you are ARMY, then you understand. If not, it feels like I'm talking about a cult, but it really isn't. And I think at the heart of it, they are basically a boy group from Korea, but they're also agents for social change, in the sense that they use that platform really responsibly to advocate for causes. Especially in terms of them being a South Korean boy band, that there are a lot more limitations in terms of being able to be vocal on social media, and things like that. But during last year, they made donations to Black Lives Matters and that also inspired ARMY to match the donation within 24 hours and things like that. I think people also relate to them because of the journey they've been on. And for me, it was also like a healing process, especially during last year. How am I going to summarise such a big question [laughs]? It's like, why do you love what you love?

Mariam Arcilla Why do you breathe? Why do you exist? These are existential questions [laughs]!

Sophia Cai There is an element of obviously [the band] being manufactured. But at the heart of it, I think, they inspired a fandom to do these things. I think that's really cool. I've always been a massive nerd in other ways, [I've always been into] comics or anime or video games. So this is not really new for me. But I think the art world, when I look at the art world, it takes itself so seriously and it doesn't really give you that space to play to just be really nerdy about something. And I really love people that love things deeply, like hobbies or fandom and so forth. And I've been starting to do a little bit of research about fandom. Obviously this actually intersects with what we talked about earlier, because there is such a gendered and racialised dimension to why BTS isn't taken seriously by the

Western media, or why ARMY isn't taken seriously. And this very negative stereotype about ARMY as teenage girls. Well, firstly, what's wrong with being a teenage girl? Secondly, that's not true to the nature of the diversity of the fandom.



Sophia Cai So I'll speak to the [BTS] conference now: one week ago, I was part of an online global virtual conference, an academic conference, that was all about BTS. And it was incredible: two days of content [where] scholars were working in really different areas, like music studies, language studies and visual art. I was there from a curatorial research [position]. Also they had fans there too. And obviously it was virtual [so the interaction] was not in-person, but it was a very active chat thread! I'm used to giving talks and things like this, and I've never had so many questions before. They were just...*engaged*. I think that's why I love this thing that exists. It can mean so much to people. Then it makes you want to do better things or ask questions. I think that's really incredible. And at some point it stops becoming about BTS. It becomes about what hope may be, and that they inspire people. And that's really that's something that I think people relate to. I think ARMY will know what I'm talking about. Once you're ARMY, you don't go back.

Mariam Arcilla I've got *Dynamite* stuck in my head all week trying to find the appropriate song to play for this talk [laughs]. We can now lead into why you're on Gadigal Land in the first place. You've got work in *Acute Actions*, but you are also curating a show called CERAMIX, which is a collaborative show that pairs ceramicists and non-ceramicist artists together. The show opens tomorrow at Manly Art Gallery and Museum. This project has been in the works for you for two years?



Ceramix

14 May - 20 June 2021

An exhibition of new works by fourteen contemporary Australian ceramic artists and their creative collaborators working across a range of mediums. By pairing ceramics with non-ceramics arts practices, Ceramix presents the creative outcomes of their cross-disciplinary collaborations and dialogue, with a focus on experimentation and on the open possibilities of clay as a starting point for making work.

A Manly Art Gallery & Museum and The Australian Ceramics Association partnership exhibition with guest curator Sophia Cai.

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[†]Image courtesy: Sassy Park, and Mona Schwarzfänger, Sassy Park, 2012, ceramics and enamel.



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A Manly Art Gallery & Museum and The Australian Ceramics Association partnership exhibition with guest curator Sophia Cai and featuring the following artists:

Glenn Barkley, Ceramics, NSW & Louise Meuwissen, Textiles, VIC
 Caronba Bayraktar, Ceramics, NSW & Yeliz Yurulmaz, Mixed Media, NSW
 Claybia (Cassandra Chilton & Molly O'Shaughnessy), Ceramics, VIC &
 The Huxleys (Garrett Huxley & Will Huxley), Performance/Fashion, VIC
 Alan Constable, Ceramics, VIC & Peter Atkins, Painting/Sculpture, VIC
 Sam Gold, Ceramics, SA & Sarra Tzjian, Jewellery, SA
 Varuni Kanagasundaram, Ceramics, VIC & Kate Beynon, Painting, VIC
 Sassy Park, Ceramics, NSW & Mara Scherdtferg, Music/Composer, VIC
 David Ray, Ceramics, VIC & Hannah Bertram, Installation, VIC
 Sarah Rayner, Ceramics, QLD & Sophie Cornell, Jewellery/Silver, TAS
 Simon Reece, Ceramics, NSW & Vicky Browne, Sound/Installation, NSW
 Franz Schroedl, Ceramics, ACT & Shesha Reddy, Architect/Sculpture, ACT
 Vipoo Srivilasa, Ceramics, VIC & Sai-Wai Foo, Mixed Media, VIC
 Eloise White, Ceramics, ACT & Noel McKenna, Painting, NSW

Exhibition dates
14 May - 20 June 2021

Exhibition Opening
Friday 14 May 2021, 6-8pm
[RSVP here](#)

Curator & Artists in Conversation

Saturday 15 May 2021, 2-4pm
Join the guest curator in conversation
with several of the featured artists for an
engaging look at their works in the exhibition.
Book here

Vipera Steinhilber & Sal-Wea Foto. Spring roll, Dumping & Starg, pleasure, capital, and: glad her! Knives, media, 2000

Sophia Cai Yeah. Ceramix is the members exhibition for the Australian Ceramics Association, which is basically all different ceramicists in Australia. For this particular exhibition, it's really about the process of collaboration. So more than two years ago, we had an open call process, and we basically asked a ceramicist with another artist of their choice to submit a proposal together for a collaborative work. And I remember reading the proposals and we had received so many. And it was actually incredible to read about how people were thinking about collaboration in a way that was actually very much rooted in dialogue and experimentation. And I also really love the idea of a project where you're basically buddying up with someone that you really like, there's something really nice about that as well. So from that, there were 13 collaborators chosen, so 28 artists in total. Manly is a beautiful, beautiful gallery. Every time I come here, I'm like this is peak Sydney. It's on the water and the windows that look out onto the water, and then you go out into the beach like this, is this real life? We're doing some artist talks on Saturday from 2-4pm, so if anyone would like to come, they're most welcome. And the [talks] will also be recorded, I believe.

Mariam Arcilla I look forward to seeing the show. And Sai-Wai Foo, who is also in *Acute Actions*, is also in this show.

Sophia Cai Mhm!



Mariam Arcilla I want to ask you a final question: what has been your vitamin during these tumultuous times? In the current unstable period that we're in, what do you do for reparation and self-nourishment? Besides BTS and knitting...

Sophia Cai I feel like I'm still working that out, but for me I am very lucky to have my family and my community be there for me and make me want to better myself and also be that support. One thing I've also learnt—which you can gather from the nature of our talk so far—that as a curator and as a writer, I'm always thinking about the broader arts infrastructure. And I think all of that kind of came to a head during lockdown last year and there were a lot of existential questions right. And I think it kind of offered me a chance to pause and also reflect on what kind of futures that I wanted to be a part of and contribute to. And I think this is a conversation that is happening with many, many different people at the moment.

Sophia Cai There's a sense of anxiety, like maybe a little bit of optimism, but not too much, because everything is really fucked up. You know, whatever inequalities we see in the world, we're still seeing it happening now. How do we build towards a better future? And I guess being grounded in remembering that even though I really care about the work that I do and it's such a privilege to work with artists, I'm not defined by the work I do either, I realised that's what's really important for me.

And that's why I think hobbies are really important, because they actually are a form of resistance against our capitalist society, of doing something just for the joy of it. That's why you never monetise your hobbies [laughs]. Never turn your hobbies into a side hustle, because they destroy the joy. Because you've literally given in to that. That's why hobbies

and fandom are sacred spaces because they exist outside of that expectation of that buying or selling - that consumption. So yeah, I spent a lot of time on my hobbies last year and spent a lot of time with my greyhounds...



Mariam Arcilla Do you want to show us your new tattoo? All the dog lovers who are listening right now will just gush!

Sophia Cai [Shows a tattoo off a greyhound on her arm] Everyone's asking me whether I'm going to get another tattoo, because I have two dogs. And I feel like if I do, it's going to set me up to tattoo all future dogs that I will ever live with. Rosie is my first dog, so it's special to have her represent all of the dogs [laughs].

Mariam Arcilla Well, that could be your other hobby as well, you have knitting, BTS and now tattoos...

Sophia Cai They are addictive, I'm actually limiting myself to one [tattoo] a year, which actually sounds like a lot.

Mariam Arcilla Oh! Ok we'll have to touch base with you in a year's time to see what kind of tattoo you have. I think we'll make this a yearly thing. I'm speaking for myself, not 4A [laughs].

Sophia Cai [Laughs].

Mariam Arcilla It's been a really fantastic conversation with you. It's been nourishing; always a treat to chat to you Sophia. Thank you so much for your time.

Sophia Cai It's really great to talk to you, Mariam.

Mariam Arcilla To the audiences tuning in: if you'd like to get resources on ways to actively address racial and social prejudice in your communities, or if you're part of an organisation that wants to incorporate cultural consultations and anti-discrimination policies into your work culture, please visit creativeequitytoolkit.org, which is run by [Diversity Arts Australia](https://diversityartsaustralia.org) and the [British Council](https://britishcouncil.org). We'll be making a recording of this 4A talk available online,

accompanied by hyperlinks and visual notes based on the topics that I discussed with Sophia. This conversation took place on Gadigal Land. Thanks for listening.

[Outro music: *Blood, Sweat and Tears* by BTS]

Biography

Sophia Cai is a curator and arts writer based in Naarm/Melbourne, Australia. She currently teaches as a sessional lecturer in the department of Critical and Theoretical Studies, Victorian College of Arts at the University of Melbourne, while also maintaining an independent curating and writing practice. Sophia is particularly interested in Asian art history, the intersection between contemporary art and craft, as well as feminist methodologies and community-based practices.

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Images (T-B; L-R):

1. Sophia Cai in Naarm, with her dog Rosie, 2017, photo: Pia John
2. Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not a Virus (installation view), 2021, 4A @ Darlinghurst; Right: Andrea Srisurapon, Covid Clean, 2021, photographic print. Left: Sophia Cai, Safety Yellow Woman, 2020-2021.
3. Sophia Cai, Safety Yellow Woman, 2020-2021, hand-knitted wool garment – adult size, yarn support provided by Fancy Tiger Crafts.
4. Sophia Cai, visual description
5. Mariam Arcillai, visual description
6. Acute Actions: Responses to I Am Not a Virus (installation view), 2021, 4A @ Darlinghurst; Sophia Cai, Safety Yellow Woman, 2020-2021.
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9. Disobedient Daughters, 2021, (installation views), Counihan Gallery: Melbourne. Photo: Janelle Low
10. Disobedient Daughters, 2021, (installation views), Counihan Gallery: Melbourne. Photo: Janelle Low
11. Disobedient Daughters, 2018, (installation views), Metro Arts, Brisbane Photo: Louis Lim.
12. Disobedient Daughters, 2018, (installation views), Metro Arts, Brisbane Photo: Louis Lim.
13. Sad Asian Girls
14. Disobedient Daughters, 2021 (publication), Edited by Sophia Cai; designed by Joy Li; published by Heart of Hearts Press.
15. Disobedient Daughters, 2021 (publication), Edited by Sophia Cai; designed by Joy Li; published by Heart of Hearts Press.
16. Disobedient Daughters, 2021 (publication), Edited by Sophia Cai; designed by Joy Li; published by Heart of Hearts Press.

17. Disobedient Daughters, 2021 (publication), Edited by Sophia Cai; designed by Joy Li; published by Heart of Hearts Press.
18. *Changing into Jug*, Manisha Anjali, Disobedient Daughters, 2021 (publication), Edited by Sophia Cai; designed by Joy Li; published by Heart of Hearts Press.
19. Gwan Tung Dorothy Lau, Disobedient Daughters, 2021 (publication), Edited by Sophia Cai; designed by Joy Li; published by Heart of Hearts Press.
20. The White Pube's ideas for a new art world, 2021 (installation views), source: Build Hollywood, accessed 2 June 2021.
21. The White Pube's ideas for a new art world, 2021 (installation views), source: Build Hollywood, accessed 2 June 2021.
22. The White Pube's ideas for a new art world, 2021 (installation views), source: Build Hollywood, accessed 2 June 2021.
23. The White Pube's ideas for a new art world, 2021 (installation views), source: Build Hollywood, accessed 2 June 2021.
24. BTS, photo courtesy Big Hit Entertainment
25. Time Magazine's 2020 Entertainer of the Year cover: BTS; photo: Mok Jung Wook| Sophia's BTS shrine pic, 2021, photo: Sophia Cai
26. CERAMIX flyer images, photo: Manly Art Gallery & Museum
27. Vipoo Srivilasa and Sai-Wai Foo, *Have You Eaten?*, 2021 (installation view), photo: Mariam Arcilla
28. Sophia Cai, portrait, supplied.
29. Sophia Cai with her tattoo and Rosie, 2021, photo: Sophia Cai.

Music snippets: *Blood, Sweat and Tears* (피/땀 눈물), BTS, from the album Wings, 2016, Performed by BTS,
Songwriters: Pdogg RM Suga J-Hope "Hitman" Bang Kim Do-hoon

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