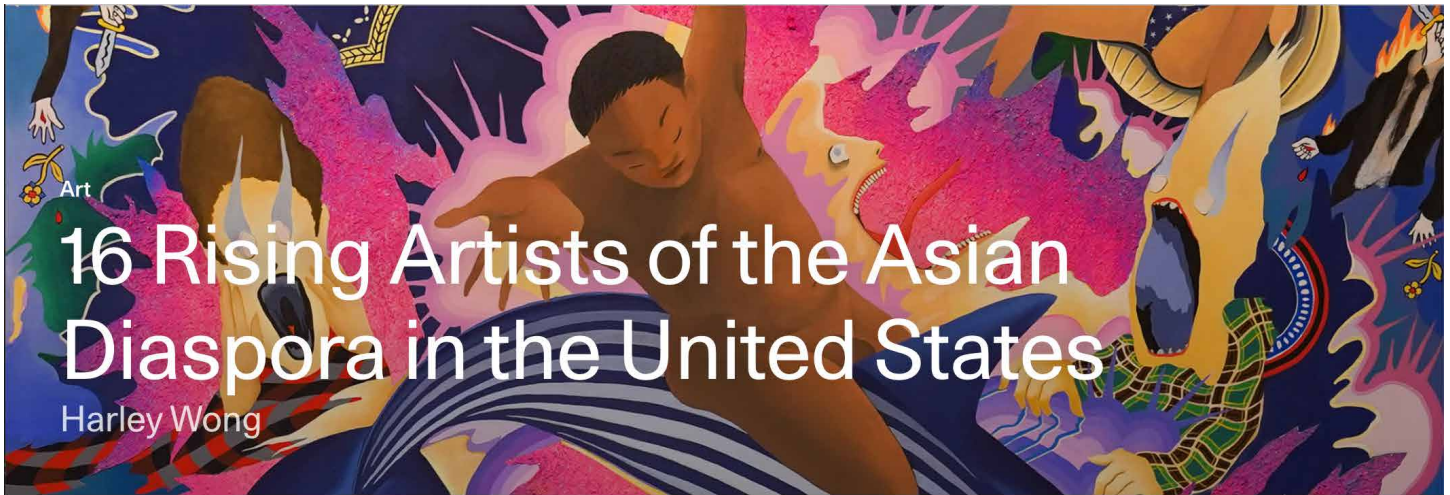


ARTSY



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Even as artists of color begin to gain a foothold in the upper echelons of the art world, naming widely celebrated Asian diasporic artists with cemented legacies in the art historical canon remains challenging. Oftentimes, it feels as though we're constantly excavating long overlooked or ignored artistic practices. However, thanks to decades of activism and advocacy from BIPOC artists and art workers, greater attention is being given to contemporary artists of color during their lifetime. Here, we focus on rising artists of the Asian diaspora currently based in the United States. Many of these artists have been experiencing substantial career momentum in recent months, exhibiting in art institutions or international biennials one after the other. Some have honed their craft and bypassed educational barriers, exhibiting in solo shows at leading galleries without an MFA, and sometimes even without a BFA.

My conversations with these artists and close readings of their works reveal an engagement with similar ideas through varied approaches and media, suggesting a collective consciousness created through shared experiences within the diaspora. Multimedia artist Catalina Ouyang and figurative painters Oscar Yi Hou and Timothy Lai spoke about losing the Chinese language or never having a firm grasp of it to begin with. Informed by theorists Gilles Deleuze and Isabelle Stengers's writings on how stuttering acts like a glitch, Ouyang pushes the English language to points of deterioration. Yi Hou, on the other hand, visually obscures the English texts in his paintings and drawings, relegating them to the space of inscrutability often reserved for Chinese characters. Meanwhile, painters like Lai, Bambou Gili, Sasha Gordon, and Dominique Fung expand on the color palettes used to render Asian skin—not only with shades of yellow and brown, but also hues of red, blue, and purple.

The artists featured also pay tribute to those who came before them, acknowledging the continuum of the diasporic experience. Gili includes the late Matthew Wong's spotlighted door from *5:00 PM* (2019) in *Blue Summer (An Ode to Matthew Wong)* (2020). Ouyang's "*Lift me to the window to the picture image unleash the ropes tied to weights of stones first the ropes then its scraping on wood to break stillness as the bells fall peal follow the sound of ropes holding weight scraping on wood to break stillness bells fall a peal to sky*" (2020) borrows its title from the last line of Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's 1982 publication *Dictee*, and features a portrait of the artist as the late poet. Multimedia artist Kang Seung Lee's labor-intensive reproductions of photos of painter Martin Wong and photographer Tseng Kwong Chi illustrate both the precarity of these artists's lives during the AIDS epidemic and their diminished presence in art history. While charting careers of their own, these rising artists bring their predecessors with them.

## Maia Cruz Palileo

B. 1979, Chicago. Lives and works in Brooklyn.

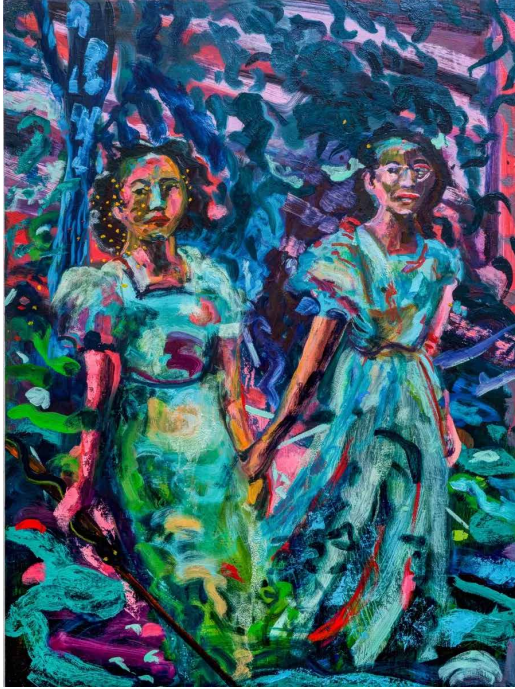


Maia Cruz Palileo, *Flores*, 2020. Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche.

Throughout Maia Cruz Palileo's oeuvre are gestural reflections on both familial oral history and colonial documents. Heavily influenced by photographs and stories related to their family's migration from the Philippines to the United States, Palileo's work initially explored their own personal archives. They dressed their figures in patterns drawn from their aunt's shirts and decorated interiors reminiscent of the house their grandmother grew up in. Several paintings, such as *Afterward* (2019), take place in classrooms, referencing both American re-education campaigns and Palileo's maternal grandmother's occupation as an English teacher.

Palileo's scenes, rendered in broad and loose brushstrokes, imagine Manila as their ancestors would have experienced it and parallel the fragmentary nature of memory to present an alternative history. Existing between figuration and expressive abstraction, the worlds they create embody what the artist has called their hyphenated or malleable concept of home.





Maia Cruz Palileo, *We Walked for Hours*, 2021.  
Courtesy of the artist and Monique Meloche.



Maia Cruz Palileo, *Glory of the Snow*, 2016.  
Taymour Grahne Projects

Since 2017, Palileo's paintings have also reckoned with ethnographic photos taken by Dean C. Worcester, who served as secretary of the interior of the Philippines until 1913. The zoologist amassed thousands of photographs that perpetuated notions of Filipinx natives as uncivilized savages in order to justify U.S. occupation. "Suddenly, so many of my grandparents' stories gained a lot of powerful context," Palileo told *Artforum* in 2019. "I felt like I was finally glimpsing my ancestors, albeit through someone else's eyes." The artist extracts figures and vegetation from Worcester's photographs and recasts them in scenes with rich and vibrant colors, removing the anthropological colonial gaze. In contrast to the authoritative texts accompanying Worcester's photographs, Palileo's works allow for multiple interpretations.

In "The Answer is the Waves of the Sea," Palileo's recent solo exhibition at Monique Meloche in Chicago, they continue the motif of painting doubles, as seen in *Flores* (2020) and *Night Crocuses* (2021). The recurrence of twin-like characters in Palileo's compositions serve as reminders of the existence of multiple versions of history, some well preserved and others lost to migration and colonization. The barely visible people and animals that slowly materialize from Palileo's bright flora after a close viewing of *Through the Fronds There Were No Stars* (2021) honor those absences in the historical canon and suggest the possibility for some to reconnect with their family history. In September, the Wattis Institute for Contemporary Art in San Francisco will present "Long Kwento," Palileo's second institutional solo exhibition after their 2018 presentation at Pioneer Works, curated by Vivian Chui.

Harley Wong

Header image: Yowshien Kuo, "The Myth of Liberty and Its House of Cards," 2020. Courtesy of the artist.