

SPEAKERS

Morris Lum, Shellie Zhang

0:00 Intros | Land Acknowledgement

1:40 Ambient Emerald Restaurant Interior

2:30 Ambient Emerald Restaurant Exterior

3:00 Emerald Restaurant

31:00 Ambient Mississauga Chinese Centre: Grocery Store (All Premium Food Mart)

32:00 Ambient Mississauga Chinese Centre: Food Court (Sino Mall Food Court)

33:00 Ambient Mississauga Chinese Centre: Department Store (Best Shop 大多百)

34:00 Ambient Mississauga Chinese Centre: Pond (Soo Chow Garden 苏州园林)

35:00 Mississauga Chinese Centre

The Land

Shellie Zhang

My name is Shellie Zhang and I'm an artist and today I'm with my dear friend Morris Lum.

Morris Lum

Hey, I'm Morris Lum. I'm an artist.

Shellie Zhang

And today we're going to visit two particular sites and the two sites we're going to visit are the Emerald Chinese Restaurant and the Mississauga Cultural Centre.

Morris Lum

So first before we begin, I'd like to do land acknowledgement. The Emerald Chinese restaurant and the Mississauga Cultural Centre are located on the treaty lands and territory of Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat. The name Mississauga comes from an Anishinaabe word, meaning "Those at the Great River-mouth".

Shellie Zhang

And so for myself and Morris, who are both immigrant settlers who were permitted to live in this nation as part of the colonial project that is Canada, we owe our thanks and indebtedness not to the state who built this nation by exploiting Chinese laborers working on the railroad, but to Indigenous caretakers who do, did and continue to advocate and protect the lands that were blessed and thankful to live on today. And so with this, we reflect on two particular treaties made on these lands:

The Dish with One Spoon - to not take more than we need; and the Two Row Wampum, which is to live peaceably side by side with no interference, and existing and mutual respect and friendship.

The Emerald Chinese Restaurant

Shellie Zhang

Morris and I are going to start with a description of what is around us with these spaces that were chosen. And, in particular, we're going to start with just describing what's around us, from the restaurant we're in, to outside the restaurant - we are now with our five senses. So when we arrived, right when we walked into the restaurant, you hear this clattering of dishes, you hear people talking, you hear footsteps moving, and hear the squeakiness of the carts being pushed around. I immediately smelled fried things and it's almost like the scent you follow that you sort of get dragged in by. But of course, what was sort of the most striking about that environment is the visual elements of it all. It's an open hall, dining, great hall kind of space, the tables were all spaced two meters apart in small groups of like four, or possibly, you know, eight, in the back, for some of the bigger spaces. We had raised molding ceilings, and we also had lots of gold, lots of white, and lots of red. Everything felt sort of familiar. When we touched our table, it was a plastic clear table for easy cleaning. And then when we sat down, there were cushioned chairs. Morris, did you want to add anything to that?

Morris Lum

Yeah, one of the first things that I noticed walking into the restaurant was this floor mat that said "Welcome" and it was in bright red. It really felt welcoming, just as you're about to enter the restaurant. Right when we enter the restaurant, one of the serving staff came up and said the traditional thing that you would say when you're going to a dim sum restaurant, which is how many people? [Shellie Laughs] And you know, that is such a familiar sound to hear when you enter a dim sum restaurant. Beyond that, and just in terms of entering the space for the first time, like since after the pandemic, what is really noticeable for me, as, you know, I've been to this restaurant since I was like in grade school, and-

Shellie Zhang

Oh, wow.

Morris Lum

Yeah and they recently did a renovation in that space a couple years ago. So now, you know, it



Dim Sum Cart at Emerald Chinese Restaurant, Sept 4, 2021

looks very well done - very sort of wedding picturesque, Instagram worthy. [Shellie laughs] And they upgraded the lighting with beautiful chandeliers as well this really hot pink LED lighting. Yeah, sort of like as Shellie mentioned, the spacing of the tables is really nice and felt very open and welcoming. And also just a just to note that the restaurant is south facing and there are two large wall spaces that are just covered by windows so it's very bright indoors.

Shellie Zhang

Yeah, it's very.... you can see how it's a functional space in terms of, you know, we went for brunch, dim sum, basically, but also, that could be a party space for big gatherings when it's finally allowed a little bit. Okay, now i'm hoping we can talk a little bit about what's outside of the space, which is also kind of unique - we're in Mississauga, and we're at a strip mall at the corner of a major intersection. And this strip mall is such a case of suburban, diasporic communities, right? We've got a Wilcox bar here; we're next to Scotiabank. We're also next to a Coco, and there was a Boston Pizza, I think, nearby too. And then you get this sort of parking lot space - we're surrounded by what looks to be pretty new build condos. And there's a Master Toys?

Morris Lum

Masterminds.

Shellie Zhang

Masterminds, you know, it's like... I've never seen that in the city before. And then across the street is another strip mall [Shellie laughs]. As someone who doesn't drive, it's such a place you have to be able to get to with a vehicle almost - so, thank you for driving us here today. I would have it would have taken me quite a few hours to get here probably. What do you think of our surroundings? Because like you said, you've kind of been here since you were a kid and you've probably seen the height density and the density of this place change, for instance...

Morris Lum

Yeah, so we're at the intersection of Eglinton and Hurontario, and it's quite a busy intersection. There are several plazas that are at the four corners of the intersection. When I was growing up, it wasn't as busy as it is now - there are definitely a lot more apartment and condo style buildings built, you know, at the corners of the intersection, and it's definitely more of a car oriented intersection where there are a ton of cars driving by all the time. And just to point out, that there are, like Shellie mentioned, some of the businesses, like the Tim Hortons here is like, are extremely busy at night. A lot of car enthusiasts bring their cars up to two in the morning, which is great. And across the road, there's an Asian supermarket called Oceans, which opened up a few years ago, and it's been very busy there. So there are a lot of different unique aspects in this area that people come to and really like, bond and socialize.

Shellie Zhang

Yeah, I really want to go to Oceans actually. It's really interesting to talk about the fact that you've been going here since you were a kid and as part of the sort of conversation we're having today, what we decided to do is that Morris and I would both choose a site, and think about how those are

little vignettes into Mississauga's community basically. So I chose the Emerald Restaurant because, actually, Morris, you're very much like my ambassador to Mississauga - I live downtown in Toronto, and you helped me get my first job in Mississauga. And I think the first time we came here actually was to celebrate that because it's just around the corner from Mississauga Square. And so for me, this particular restaurant that we went to is actually very much in relationship to you as sort of someone who brought me here, someone who sort of introduced me to the city a little bit. And that memory has always sort of stuck with me in terms of how busy it was when we were there, how many families [there were]; but also, again, having come from the city, the ability for dining spaces to be this sort of buzzing is kind of different, you know, it's not the same kind of frequency, it's not the same kind of size. This is why I chose this space.

Morris Lum

Yeah, I mean, especially around the time of, you know, hopefully coming out of the pandemic. You know, like this size, the scale of this restaurant is really helpful for social distancing, and for people to really feel safe to be with family and friends and to dine, but also to feel safe at the same time. So, you know, it's definitely a good time to come down to the Emerald, if you're missing family and friends, because it's a safe environment, for sure.

Shellie Zhang

It's almost like it's kind of- it *is* very suburban in this area in the fact that I'm thinking about the fact that you mentioned Oceans, but you know, with a car, you can kind of get all your stuff done in one day. There's a gas station across the street from us, you can get your gas, you can go to the fitness gym across the street, you can go to Oceans to get your groceries, and then you can kind of cap off your afternoon with a meal. Like we noticed when we came here, for instance, that the parking lot for the grocery store is so much busier and I think that's when you kind of sparked in my mind that, oh, it's Saturday on a long weekend, people are running their errands and trying to do some recreational things in between there. So it's almost like you kind of don't necessarily have to leave for the resources that you need and the elements that you might be looking for in terms of how to go about the life you choose, you know?

Morris Lum

Yeah, I mean, also, just to note about Oceans - that supermarket space had several other incarnations prior to it becoming Oceans. Most recently I think it was a Food Basic.

Shellie Zhang

Oh, wow.

Morris Lum

Which is a generic supermarket style and then before that there was a Miracle, which is another supermarket, you know, sort of in the same vein as Loblaws or Metro. So it's interesting to sort of see like an Asian-oriented supermarket come into that space.

Shellie Zhang

Do we know who owns Oceans?

Morris Lum

No, I just know it's the same company as Nations. ^[1]

Shellie Zhang

Interesting. Okay, we gotta look this up after. This idea of, quote, unquote, big, ethnic grocery stores is really interesting I think because it is a place that many gravitate towards for certain resources and community. But just hearing the fact that you said it used to be a Food Basic is really interesting because there's a potential sort of income shift from something more low income to something more middle class, as well.

Morris Lum

Um hum.

Shellie Zhang

Okay, so let's talk about your work. Do you want to describe your work that's going on at the Blackwood in a few days?

Morris Lum

Yeah, so at the Blackwood I'm going to be showing four lightbox pieces on the exterior walls of the UTM, University of Toronto Mississauga, campus buildings. In this series, the exhibition is curated by Ellyn Walker and the four images are from two bodies of works of mine. Firstly, *Places of Worship*, which focused on looking at places of worship in Scarborough and then in Mississauga as well; and then the second body of work is titled *Tong Yan Gaa'i*, which means Chinatown in Cantonese and that work explores kind of the various facets that make up Chinatown and its history as well. And all the photographs, again, are printed and posted on lightboxes - they're quite large...I think they're nine feet by six feet, roughly. And they're all interior spaces that don't have any people inside of them.



Lunch at Emerald Chinese Restaurant. *Why are they so afraid of the Lotus* and *The Making of an Archive*, Sept 4, 2021

Shellie Zhang

Okay, so in addition to each of us choosing a site that we wanted to visit in relation to your work, we also decided on each of us posing a question for us to sort of reflect on while we're at these spaces. And so I thought of your work quite recently in a talk by [Astria Suparak](#) that I went to, where she sort of talks about this visual essay that she has created where she meticulously traces popular sci fi shows from the 1960s til now to sort of illustrate how they borrow from Asian cultures, but also misrepresent them in that process. And all the while omitting Asian bodies, or warping Asian bodies. So when you sort of talked about the fact that there's no bodies in your work—I also don't photograph people myself, you know—[so] this is kind of an interesting conversation I'm thinking we can have about how you present people without the presence of actual bodies in these spaces? And Astria's work is really interesting, because she sort of talks about what kind of future is implied in the sci fi worlds of these films where, you know, sometimes these films like *Blade Runner* will overuse Asian aesthetic influences. And what kind of future are they talking about where there's this world that's kind of fearful of being colonized by Asia, but at the same time, talking about how it sort of colonized Asia and has maintained these remnants of its objects, without the actual people present? So there's a really sort of ominous tone wherein these objects are there, but the people aren't.

And so this is where I'm hoping we can talk about your work a little bit, because for me, your work kind of actually does the exact antithesis of this, where despite having a lack of bodies present, there's this really interesting liminal space that's offered where you really kind of want to immerse yourself in these familiar and comforting spaces. I've gone on a few shoots with you before and there are these small evidences where you can almost see the human activity that sort of happened to them. And I'm really excited that this is why your work is going to be in a lightbox context, because I think it'll be even more of like a moth to a flame—where you just want to enter into these spaces after encountering them, and being away from them for so long, for quite some time. You know, like, sometimes there's like a chair that's slightly ajar from someone pulling it out and sitting there. Sometimes there's like a coffee or something left. Sometimes the table is just slightly pushed away where you know, somebody [was]; there was a negative space of a body that there. Things are sometimes a little slightly messy, you know, and they're kind of left that way intentionally. There's both kind of a balance of the fact that you've stumbled upon these spaces, but that you are also really welcome, and embraced. And there's a trust between photographer and space-holder there to sort of welcome you in those spaces as well.

So I'm just wondering if you maybe could talk a little bit about how the spaces we're visiting kind of offer a glimpse into a potential future. So almost looking away from these popular culture media descriptions of places where they really don't accurately describe our presence in those spaces. What are some of the spaces in your photographs? How can they teach us about potential futures?

Morris Lum

Yeah, so I think it's really interesting to think about these spaces, you know, after we sort of come out of a global pandemic a bit, and it's definitely a different way of looking at the spaces and images. Prior to the pandemic, where, when I was when I was at these locations and photographing, it was basically like, business as usual. And then, like, while we were in lockdown and everything, I was organizing all images, again, just from our archive organizational method and it really seemed like, you know, there was some longing and loss—in the sense that we weren't able to really go to these spaces. And I was really curious about what was actually happening: [in] these spaces, were the doors just locked, and you know, nothing was happening? Or, you know, would one or two people go in and check in on everything? So, it was really curious to think about it while we were locked down.

But you know, as we're coming out lockdown now—and we were just eating at the Emerald—you know, we saw a lot of people coming back to the restaurant. And that's a really great sign. Because, you know, often when I come back to visit my parents, I would drive by the Emerald, and it would be empty. And this was like, you know, at the beginning of the year, like in January, February, and December, usually around the Holiday time. And you know, that's when the restaurant is really busy. Like Christmas Day, the Emerald is super busy. Like dim sum is.... you have to wait like 20 minutes outside. Just because it's like one of the only restaurants has opened on a Christmas Day and this past Christmas, it was only open for takeout. So it's a completely different experience and energy, like when you're when you're going there.

And now it sort of feels like things are coming back. People are, are indoors eating, you have to wait a little bit for the, for the service person to come and greet you. So there's optimism in coming back, which is good.

Shellie Zhang

I think I kind of mentioned this before, but you know, your work kind of occupies this liminal space and I feel like that's even more intensified this past year, as we're all going through an existential liminal space that feels like it's been going on forever. I was looking at your photographs a little bit before our conversation just to rethink about them and they're really... there's a kind of potential tragic connotation for me, because sometimes I don't know when these photographs were necessarily taken, where they are, I don't know if they still exist, and I feel that thinking a lot this past year, when I think about: "do these spaces still exist?" "Are they okay?" You know, and I really missed them.

Just hearing you talk about the Christmas line a little bit... And after today, it's really interesting, because I feel like there's a real element of longing and desire in your work, too. So you want to sort of step in these spaces again. It's almost like looking at a photograph of an old friend, you know, and then you're kind of reminded that you want to see them, again, a little bit. So I think the idea that people are willing to wait 20 minutes in line... I don't wait in line for shit but I would wait in line for like something like this! You know, it's like the desire to see these old friends and spaces again, and become sort of reacquainted with them. And so with that, maybe we are coming to sort of an optimistic time of: "how can we get reacquainted and reintroduced to these places?" Maybe that's what our future consideration can look like. You know, it's like, yeah, these markers still exist. They still welcome us back.

Morris Lum

So it's been really interesting thinking about this conversation with you Shellie because we know each other so well.

Shellie Zhang

10 years!

Morris Lum

10 years! And, I mean, we've been on working on different projects together. And you know, thinking about your question, I really wanted to offer a question that sort of responds to it in a different way. So not necessarily thinking about the future, but, you know, thinking about the past. And so the question is like: "How are these spaces a glimpse of the past? And what happens to them when they're gone?"

Shellie Zhang

I think this is like an exercise me and you do quite a lot. And it's a common thread in our friendship, you know, we'll like go to places and be like: "what did that used to be?" "What was this?" Like, we're

gonna be old friends one day, and we're gonna be those old people who are like, "back in my day, this used to be a..." I can just like see it happening now.

So I was actually reading this essay by [Gabby Moser](#), about [Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn's](#) work, *The Making of an Archive*, which made me see your work and kind of have a perspective I didn't quite consider before, which is in the realm of vernacular photography. Again, because your photos don't have bodies in them, it doesn't really fit that particular realm and your photos are also a bit more "framed" purposely, right? But I think the reason for me why there is an element of vernacularism is because it does preserve this vernacular history throughout [car screeches] the various series that you do. So for instance, like, you document different things over particular periods of times, and it presents this lineage that is otherwise kind of too mundane to document in formal realms—even on the internet, really. The shift of like, you know, just like talking about the Emerald today, you're like, "they got pink LEDS and stuff now," so it's already moved from this kind of more traditional banquet hall restaurant, to something that's—like you said—more geared for perhaps younger consumers, perhaps something that is meeting shifting design trends, a little bit.

And so I actually want to read this quote that Gabby talks about, and she's citing someone named Tina Campt. And so Gabby quotes them, saying:

"As Campt has provocatively suggested, photographs do not necessarily need to be spoken about in order to be heard. For Campt, listening to images is both a description of a practice and a method for working in the photographic archive. It designates a quiet mode of recalibration, recalibrating vernacular photographs of quiet, quotidian practices that give us access to the affective registers through which these images and enunciate alternative accounts of their subjects. It is a method that opens up the radical interpretive possibilities of images and state archives we are most often inclined to overlook, by engaging the paradoxical capacity of identity photos to rupture the sovereign gaze of the regimes that created them by refusing the very terms of photographic subjugation they were engineered to produce."^[2]

And so Gabby continues with this question of: "If we listen closely, how might these photographs hum with the daily activities that sustain diasporic subjects in becoming-in-Canada?"^[3] And I just kept thinking of this question of like, "how do you listen to a photograph?" And I found that when I'm looking at your images of some of these gathering spaces, you can you can hear the sounds. You really can listen to them a little bit! You know, like, what did we see? Right when we walk into the restaurant, we saw this wall of photos.

Morris Lum

Yeah, so we saw this wall of photos of wedding receptions. So I guess the restaurant had asked people who have had wedding receptions in that space in the past to donate their photos so that they can advertise the restaurant further as a place for banquets, celebrations, anniversaries, weddings, and that they had capacity to actually host these, you know, very special events in people's lives. And just a bit to tie this back into the question, you know: "What happens to these places?" Or, "how do we think about these places in the past?" You know, what happens to them

when they're gone? You know, so thinking about, you know, if you had a wedding reception, or an anniversary or really a special event at these spaces, and they're suddenly gone. You know, like, what if the restaurant had closed during the pandemic, and never opened up again? You know, like, is there a loss of that sense of memory, because that special event that you had at that place is no longer there?

Shellie Zhang

I think what you kind of bring up that is key about the functionality of these spaces is that there's a primary function, which is to dine, to relax, to eat something delicious. And then of course, there's a secondary function, which is a communal space, a space to coexist in the spirit of celebration, or something together. And so thinking of photographs, when we shift away from the actual spaces themselves, those things are sort of intrinsic in a way, you know? You almost can't separate the vibe from the place that allowed that vibe to flourish. And I think that's what is the piece that contains that a little bit, the more we look to the past.

Morris Lum

And I think also, I guess the photographic medium in itself is sort of this record of these places in the past. And you know, if you think about like, how we sort of look at things today, especially on our phones or out in person where things are moving.... The way that we look at photographs is quite different in that the things that are in the photographs are static and the operation of looking is quite different.

Shellie Zhang

Yeah. It commands a certain patience with it.

I just got Tik Tok and it's the exact opposite where you don't have to have patience, you know? Maybe that's again, kind of the timeless quality of your work a little bit. It's like, this furniture that's been there for so long. There's people who have been there for so long. And so they offer a little bit of grounding in that respect.... When you think about the fact that, "oh, this is where so and so's anniversary or wedding was," "this is how long they've been there." It is a really sort of anchor in many different communities because of that hub that it's been.

Morris Lum

Yeah.

Chinese Cultural Centre

Shellie Zhang

Now, Morris and I are at our second site, which is the Chinese Cultural Center [Mississauga Chinese Centre] in Mississauga. And there's so much to see and do here. So let's see...

So we first started: we parked, we came into this little plaza that's so ornate. You've got pagoda roofs everywhere; green, gold, purple; there's a wall of nine dragons sculptured. And right now we're sitting in a small man-made pond with rocks, and a ting. And there's some children playing around us in a fountain. It's a much more serene environment than the highway we were next to. And we've gone to a few sites. We started out by going into the grocery store in the food court. Then we went to the department store. And then we went to a lovely little Vietnamese tofu, drink, and snack shop, and got some Vietnamese coffees. Everything around us is really busy. Every parking lot, every parking spot is filled. Every single one.

Morris Lum

Yeah, so it's Saturday morning, early afternoon. And the supermarket is super busy, which is great. And all the restaurants seem to be booming; people lining up to get tofu and drinks and do their like, weekend shopping. So yeah, it's definitely a nice time to be here. All this lovely energy. It's, you know, like a really nice day, isn't it?

Shellie Zhang

It's very similar to the Emerald Chinese restaurant, where in that vicinity of that location, you can get so much done that you need. You can eat, you can shop, you can do your errands, you can get a snack, and your day could be sort of completed right there.

So the food court we went to was really interesting, because there was a barbecue pork place. And then next to that was a Filipino restaurant. And what did you say about the Filipino restaurant? That was really interesting.

Morris Lum

So there is also a kind of a system of money exchange, and it's sort of like, Western Union [Western Union]. And I think they're offering this when you exchange so that people can send money back to their home, in the Philippines, which I think is really a really nice touch for a restaurant to offer that to the customers.

Shellie Zhang

It's so over the top but generous and also again, it's that really wonderful experience built in where you can be fed and also potentially care for relatives that you don't get to see.

Morris Lum

Yeah. And then the food court is quite busy. People are like, you know, buying lunch—it's around lunchtime. And there are different food vendors, which I really like. This seating was pretty nice as well. Yeah.



Fruit selection at All Premium Food Mart, Sept 4, 2021

Shellie Zhang

Yeah. Next to the Filipino restaurant, there was a Hong Kong-style restaurant or takeout place, I should say. And then next to that was a Korean-with-sushi restaurant in one. So it's kind of interesting, it's like kind of a little bit of everything right there. The grocery store, we didn't stay too long. There's a beautiful, immaculate fruit selection that was so beautiful. And we patted some melons and then left.

[Two small children come up to Morris and Shellie to say hello and they say hello back]

And then we went to the department store. They had like a lot of everything. There was an aisle for just food thermoses, and then another aisle for water thermoses! And you bought a tea set? I bought a foot peeling mask.

Morris Lum

A lot of great stuff in there. A very large selection of kettles to boil water, and rice cookers—it's a must. And yeah, it's super easy to find anything in there, basically. You know, there's an outdoor barbecue set that you could cook for bulgogi on it's great.

Shellie Zhang

I'm really excited to peel my feet!

And then we went to the tofu shop (Thanh Sou Tofu) where we're gonna go back, because they have pandan soy milk, which I'm super excited to and I want to try! And we got some Vietnamese coffees. They have this really gorgeous neon sign in the window that just says a bunch of food things in different colours, in Vietnamese. And it's just a beautiful storefront I really enamoured with the storefront that's like bright yellow, bright green, red, and blue. It's very saturated here—like the color is very saturated and we're also here in a very blue beautiful day, sitting next to this fountain.

Morris Lum

And the plaza that we're in is very ornate. Kind of like looking back at like, this Chinese style of clay tiling. And there's a lot of details, you know, like the main colors are red, and green, and gold, sort of good luck colors. And even the ting is also colored in red with the pagoda as well.

Shellie Zhang

This little pond is really cute. There's like planters in this pond with fake flowers in [them], these little islands of fake flowers. That's really charming. I really like it.

Yeah, it really is a place where you can get everything done. I'm just looking at this family who's like hanging out and playing while possibly other members of their family or shopping. It's really quite nice. There's something for everybody.

Morris Lum

And like as you enter the plaza, there's this gateway. I think it's like the only gateway in Mississauga: the Chinese gateway.

Shellie Zhang

So what did we smell? And what did we hear in these spaces? We heard shoes squeaking on the linoleum floor. [Car honking in background] We hear cars honking trying to get parking lots in this space. We heard people taking orders. We heard some classic Chinese background music in the department store along with the whirling of all the appliances turned on. There's also a lot of Buddha sculptures and diety sculptures around us in this courtyard.



Pond at Mississauga Chinese Centre, Sept 4, 2021

Morris Lum

And there are people hanging around the ting and the kids you know, playing by the pond. So there's a lot of activity, there's a lot of relaxing energy in this area.

Shellie Zhang

This place is so peculiar to me because, you know, in Toronto, back in the day—this was before my time moving here—but there was China Court where we had a really ornate sort of Chinatown plaza, and that is now what is Chinatown Centre. So we don't have it anymore.

But it is a little rare nowadays to see these sort of ornate spaces, because they're also of a particular time and place, right? There when the sort of Chinatown spaces had to over-orientalize after sort of following suit from San Francisco, for instance, and that's why they look the way they look. Largely also to appeal to white tourists. But now there's almost like a little bit of a—for me, also, these are the spaces I look for whenever I go to a new city, and there is a dose of the familiar and it's removed from Imperial China where these architecture references are taken, but it has become sort of a magnet in a different way as well.

Morris Lum

Yeah, I mean, I think the plaza structure also speaks to that.

Shellie Zhang

That's so true. That's so true.

Morris Lum

It's like a plot of land that's designed in a very specific way to function in a certain way as well. And then, you know, it's catering to the Asian community which is interesting because the area around this part of Mississauga, it was, in the 90s, more industrial.

Shellie Zhang

Oh, yeah?



Mississauga Chinese Centre, 2012 (From Morris' Archives)

Morris Lum

So the Chinese Plaza is close to Dundas and Dixie. Yeah, very industrial manufacturing happened in this area and in between all that there was this this oasis of a plaza.

Shellie Zhang

Yeah, oasis is like—literally we're next to a pond!—it's actually a really good way to describe it. We gotta look up afterwards how the architecture of a plaza like this came about, because it's not just one element. It's actually quite uniform across here. So you can tell it was all built probably around the same time—and I know businesses have changed, for instance, but the overall plaza was built around the same time.



The Chinese Centre Fountain, Sept 4, 2021

Morris Lum

Yeah, like it was built just before I moved here in the mid-80s. Or like, early 80s, mid-80s.

Shellie Zhang

So you've been coming here since you were a kid, again?

Morris Lum

Yeah. I mean, it was the place to be on a Saturday morning! Parents would go grocery shopping, you know. [Laughs] I used to be a big nerd and I went into the stationery store. But the stationery store

also had Asian comics, which is cool. And I was always into colouring. So like, big, like coloring books! It's just a fun place to be.

I mean, we used to go to the food court a lot and buy Cantonese takeout and then, you know, I would always just drink a gook fa -cha, which is like chrysanthemum tea. You could, if you're a family, get in your car, drive up here, park your car, and just get out and be here for a few hours and just really get a lot of things done. And then there's also you know—at the time there was this really nice dim sum restaurant. I forget the name of the top my head. Oh, it was called the Royal Dragon. It used to be called the Royal Dragon Chinese restaurant and the owner was actually Vietnamese and was, like, catering to the Cantonese cuisine. And then it got converted into kind of more of a mainland seafood restaurant. And as we're here now, it's just closed, so it's not even going to reopen again. So after lockdown, it looks like it's not going to reopen. So that's unfortunate.

Shellie Zhang

This is actually probably a good place to revisit our questions a little bit. But thinking about this restaurant you're talking about now that just closed... How do the spaces we're in offer glimpses into a potential future?

It's just really interesting, because I'm thinking of Astria's work, where she sort of looks at all these places that have markers of formal Asian aesthetics—without Asian people again—and here, it's a beautiful day, it's such the exact opposite. It's so buzzing here, we had trouble! We had to park in the back because it was so busy in this space. So even thinking about the presence of cars, the presence of like, a can left on the pagoda from someone who's drinking it, or the hum of footsteps. You know, these things that sort of keep this activity really sort of lively here... And I'm thinking of this in relation to our question about futurity a little and I do wonder what is going to happen to places like this with this kind of architecture in the future?

Morris Lum

So, thinking about the question and thinking about, you know, how we might see the future this place being like, I can really only answer it from the perspective of seeing what has happened, you know, over the last 10, 15 years. There's been quite a bit of a turnover, in terms of the businesses that have come in and out. And you can tell by the signage, you know, there's a lot more Vietnamese businesses in this plaza than there used to be, which is showing sort of the the demographical change of the neighborhood. You know, there's a lot more Vietnamese coming in, and really feeling that this place can be a home, a home base, right? Which I think is really great. And just like, at the top of the, the gate there's a Korean restaurant, and it used to be a Vietnamese restaurant as well. So there's been, you know, quite a bit of changeover. So in the foreseeable future I see that continuing just like, you know, as new communities come in, there will be new businesses opening up as well.

Shellie Zhang

Yeah, yeah. It's like a microscope into changing demographics, and where different waves of newcomers sort of look for—hone in on—where they can find that space that welcomes them a little bit.

Morris Lum

Yeah.

Shellie Zhang

I'm just looking across the street at this audio and video shop [Audio & Video Vantage] and it's so interesting, because I can't remember the last time someone got a video—like a cassette tape or anything like that. And it's still open. It's still buzzing.

Morris Lum

Yeah, this Plaza used to be where you would get your Hong Kong movies, you know? Not anywhere else. Or like, Cantonese music, you know? Opera, pop singers, you could only get those records, you know, at shops like this shop here.

Shellie Zhang

So while we were in the grocery store, actually, I was just looking at folks, sort of shopping around, and working, and thinking about how you can—almost like an RPG game here—you can go from one point to another point. So you can potentially work here, get off work, eat a meal in the food court, buy the things you need, you know, go home, pick up some groceries. It's kind of like a touchstone point for everything. And just thinking about the future a little bit, and if that will continue to exist; The mobility of being able to do all those things at once, as opposed to having to be more task-oriented (drive to a place intentionally). To be able to have that flexibility... it's kind of like a little neighborhood here, you know? The residences I'm just looking at—you still probably have to drive—but there are some living complexes across the street from us. But, you know, I think of family members I have who don't really speak English, for instance, and they can sort of thrive in this context. It is kind of like you said, in a little oasis, a little bubble.

And, of course, what you mentioned about the changing demographics—and how there's a lot more new Vietnamese businesses now—it's like that functionality has ceased to disappear over time, which I think also maps out a little bit of what it means to find belonging in Canada, right? If you need to have that bubble carved out, what does that say about the overall environment for other spaces? For instance? I do always wonder what a sort of “post-racial” world would sort of look like a little bit, and if these enclaves were to disappear? What the supposed goal of multiculturalism and assimilation is, I suppose....

Morris Lum

Community functions in different ways. Like when we were back up at the restaurant, the Emerald, I mean, there was a little bit more diversity in the types of businesses that were in that area. And I think it's more... Thinking about like, what businesses open up in what areas, and how they can share

a space like a plaza. Like if you go to Scarborough, you know, you can definitely see like a roti shop next to a Chinese restaurant, you know, next to a kebab place. I mean, that's so normal to see that in Scarborough, which I think is really awesome. And even in Mississauga, you can see that you can see that too. So, you know, like, as you're talking about post-.... like, what does it mean to be communal multicultural together? Right?

Shellie Zhang

Yeah. It's really interesting to see how these micro-economies sort of work, potentially. Like a restaurant could potentially source food from this area, if they run out of something. They could go to a hardware store across the street to buy things as they needed to. So it's like, almost being able to negotiate with your neighbours to find ways to make things work together.

Morris Lum

Yeah. Yeah, exactly.

Shellie Zhang

And those things can't exist in silos is kind what you're saying too. [ending at 9:02 in recording]



Koi, Sept 4, 2021

^[1] Oceans is owned by Nations Fresh Foods. The head office of the parent company is located in Mississauga, Ontario. In total, the parent company owns 8 stores, (4 Nations Fresh Foods stores, 3 Oceans Fresh Foods Market stores, and 1 Grant's Foodmart store, another affiliate chain). 2 of the stores are located in Brampton, Ontario, 3 in Mississauga, Ontario, along with the head office, 1 in Vaughan, Ontario, 1 in Hamilton, Ontario, and 1 in Toronto, Ontario.

^[2] Tina M Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017), 8.

^[3] Gabrielle Moser, *Porous Sounds: frequencies of refusal in diasporic family photographs*, *The Making of an Archive* Jacqueline Hoàng Nguyễn (grunt gallery, 2018), 82.