

Statement

Growing up in a Norwegian-Chinese household in Norway, my printmaking practice explores themes relating to the Chinese diaspora, and how the homeland one has left behind grows into a source of nostalgia, longing and myth. How do I interpret my family's fragmented memories through my contemporary, European lens, and replace the gaps in my cultural understanding with stereotypes from Chinese books and movies?

In the photogravure suite "Imaginary Photographs of my Great-Grandmother", I staged portraits of my Chinese great-grandmother, of whom we have no photographs or records of. All I know is that she was a concubine, and died in poverty at a very young age. By construing an old photo studio and dressing up as her, I tried to capture her throughout the various stages of her life, relying on both fantasy and historical research in order to re-construct a past that had been lost to us.

The portraits were originally captured using a digital camera. Instead of printing the images digitally however, I printed them using photogravure – a photomechanical process dating back to the 1830s. By rendering my images through this analogue technique, and physically etching the figure into a metal plate, I wished to impart the pictures with an illusion of aura and nostalgia. The photogravure process seemed to "slow" down the images, making them no longer simply remnants of instant exposure to light. The delicate traces of wiped ink and the embossment left in the paper provided a new haptic form of visuality, in which my eyes could almost feel the plate slowly running through the press. The portraits became less situated in a specific moment in time, and through this operation, I could almost convince myself that they were genuinely historical.

By creating my great-grandmother's portrait, I wanted to honour her, to give her a voice and a place in history which had been erased. What I did not realize, was that by trying to restore her image, I was also embarking on a quest in which I was forced to scrutinize myself. I could not make her image without also rendering visible, and confronting, my own role as a female artist in contemporary Europe, my childhood fantasies about China and my adult prejudices of traditional Chinese female roles. Franz Kafka is claimed to have once said "We photograph things in order to drive them out of our minds." To me, this was my chance to drive my lifelong obsession with my great-grandmother out of my mind once and for all, and pin down her ghost that had haunted my imagination.