

About the artist

Lauren Warrington is an artist and researcher from Saskatoon who works with sculpture and digital space. Her practice is grounded in her experiences as a "mixed race" Chinese Canadian on the prairies and explores the complexities of how cultural memory is created, stored, and concealed, as well as the possibilities of its recontextualization through digital and physical forms. Through her work, she positions the body as an active site of memory and identity formation; it is both a repository and a medium through which diasporic identities are negotiated and expressed. Her research on archives and materiality challenges pre-existing historical narratives and reframes the significance of personal and collective memories, which move through bodies, objects, and spaces as critical sites of knowledge.

Warrington's practice contributes to a broader discourse on emerging technologies as sites of access and speculative infrastructures that have the potential to hold and transform cultural knowledge. Her installations consider how technological systems are mobilized to articulate diasporic subjectivities as layered, iterative, and moving. Through the interplay of virtual and material forms, she builds spaces that offer frameworks for continuous re-making, relationality, and narrative multiplicity.

Lauren holds a Master of Visual Studies in Studio Art from the University of Toronto, as well as a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Studio Art and a Bachelor of Science in Physiology and Pharmacology from the University of Saskatchewan. Lauren is also a founding member of Biofeedback Collective, a three-member artist collective focused on creating programming for underrepresented and emerging artists on the prairies.

About the author

Yantong Li is a curator, artist and researcher of ethnic Bai lineage working from the contemporary Chinese diaspora, based in Toronto, Canada. He is a Master of Visual Studies (curatorial) graduate at the University of Toronto. Li works at the intersection of transregional infrastructure, geopolitics, and regional folklore in the Southeast Asian massif. Currently, Li's work engages with indigenous cosmologies in Chinese borderlands and the concurrent dispersion of myths and languages across borders and oceans.

Li often works collaboratively. His past curatorial and artistic works have been shown internationally, including Justina M. Barnicke Gallery at the University of Toronto (2025); Goethe Institute Beijing, China (2025); The New Gallery, Canada (2024); Jackman Humanities Institute at the University of Toronto (2024-2025); Durian-Durian: the First Trans-Southeast Asia Triennial, Guangzhou, China (2023); Trinity Square Videos, Canada (2023); the Curatorial Awards at Jimei x Arles International Photography Festival, Xiamen, China (2022) amongst many.

About the InterAccess Media Arts Prize

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On Tracing Memory Lauren Warrington

Essay by Yantong Li

2025 Media Arts Prize Exhibition
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*Mother's talk does not let itself be caught, for kindness belongs to no system; it stands at the limit of the tale's moral. As she speaks, she crosses limits, she remembers the texture of memory, and if she loses, she loses without losing. The loss of brain, for some, is the healing of an open wound, for others.*¹

– Trinh T. Minh-Ha

For Warrington and I, diaspora evokes spasmodic memories conjured through the inheritance of family stories, archives, and rituals in unofficial strata. Official archives mapped through early Chinese migration histories in Canada were often patriarchal recombinants that have rendered mothers' stories opaque. Its gendered dimension often becomes diminished behind the pronounced racism and harsh living conditions faced by early migrants. Within the gaps and silences of official archives, Warrington draws on her matriarchal lineage to reconfigure the notion of home, responding and (re)tracing the cultural memories kept at an arm's length by her foremothers.

By attending to the stories that account for the past, however, Warrington isn't petrified in the past tense, nor is she anxious to locate an inert origin of home. Instead, the scars and cracks are remade as generative nodes that encourage the perpetual return to the mnemonic spaces left for future generations by our elders. In this regard, *On Tracing Memory* is proactive, foregrounding acts of tracing and leaving traces rather than recovery. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha notes, when we can no longer recapture the "original" home, and its presence/absence is made obsolete in the remaking of a home elsewhere, the act of *return*, both as a physical and psychological gesture, becomes a journey into layers of *future memory*, for the generations to come². Through her own material fabulation, Warrington works beside and against the archive to sketch out what history has left unattended without filling the gaps, while activating microscopic traces left ubiquitously absent within a kaleidoscope of trans-Pacific migration tethered to the crossings of her family from Taishan, interwoven through the mothers' stories.

As a whole, Warrington's work encourages a counter-archival approach embedded in the body. To be part of the objects atop the vitrine-less light tables, one must kneel or squat, in a position as though they're making offerings to an elder's tomb. The physical gesture breaks the expectation of table-height viewing and brings a distinct viscerality that goes beyond

the indexable quality of conventional archives. While traditional archives seek perpetual externalization through reason, alienating the corporeal dimension of the migrant body, Warrington works from a more innate formation, grounded in the memory of the body that is at once gustatory, olfactory, somatic, and tactile.

In *A Message to Elsewhere*³, Warrington traces her family's gathering at the cemetery to make offerings for the deceased elders. The piece includes a spectral analysis of a voice memo engraved on birch wood, facing some 3D-printed incense, an incense holder and oranges, alongside glazed raku-fired earthenware teacups. The spectral analysis was sourced from an inquiry to the elders for permission to proceed with the project. It functions as an alternative textual record that breaks down linguistic barriers across generations of migrants, forming a middle ground where they can communicate in reciprocity and care.

The use of semi-translucent filament is consistently employed across different pieces. Its distinct opacity echoes a particular frustration that accompanies the perpetual return to one's search for roots, sketching a mnemonic opacity that upholds its texture while rendering the contents illegible beyond the silhouettes. Return mirrors repetition. In *For What I Could Not Hold*, the raku-fired ceramics are concealed within womb-like shells to mimic tangyuan dough. The repetitive labour of making tangyuan acts as a body archive of its own, mapped onto a familial tradition of gathering through food, but formed through the labour of love of our mothers. Similarly, the pink slippers in *A Space for Her Absence* function as a bodily index of Warrington's grandma, retraced through memory and remade through the repetitive motion of printing that mirrors the process of sewing. However, the perpetual acts of return are also acts of transformation. The earthenware and 3D printed oyster shells in *To Form a Pearl*, incubate the gradation of memory through time - it morphs, withers, burns, but it is indiscrete in its shape and textures.

In *Things She Kept Close*, Warrington remakes familiar family items, such as polymer-clay crayons, jade and po chai pills, hidden in pockets attached to a shirt made with rice (joss) paper. While the work traces her Po Po's practice in sewing underpockets to keep valuable accessories, it speaks to a broader contention with the state during the Cultural Revolution, where valuable items were often confiscated from outgoing migrants. Fire, as a ritualistic and spiritual element, is also drawn in close affinity in Warrington's work. The consumables of offering, such as incense and rice (joss) paper, are released from their intended function to

transmit the object of offering to the afterworld through fire, floating as spectres that infinitely postpone the moment of immolation as a space of potential. If sublimation through fire accommodates a linear transgression from the living to the dead, then its postponement disrupts this very linearity, where the living and the dead are called to the space in between, without transgression.

Further, by mobilizing the digital as a point of access, the works in the exhibition function as a negative archive that collapses multiple temporalities as a continuous loop, destabilizing a linearity of time that underlies the organizational principle of conventional archives. From the outset, Warrington's scans of the Chun Collection from the University of British Columbia have been broken down into randomized particles mapped across the whole space. In the middle, a projection is wrapped in a lattice scaffold, enacting as its own metabolizing organism, constantly devouring fragments of familial memories to keep its structure integral. For Warrington, the recursive logic of the digital almost mirrors the psychiatric state of tracing memory, burdened by the mnemonic faculties of incessant return against a backdrop of institutionalized history of trans-Pacific migration. Home, in this regard, has become an unstable category falling outside institutionalized appraisal of history that begets absence and homogeneity, while functioning as a mutating node within a diasporic constellation in flux. Here, home disregards any singularity of roots, but holds it in discretion. In it, the texture of trans-Pacific migration isn't always metallic and gold, and its ambiance isn't always clanks and whistles. They are oral stories passed down in the kitchen and at the dinner tables, simmered in a bowl of tangyuan; they are sparks of memory immolated alongside the incense at the sites of offering; they are also body archives indexed through the fabrics our mothers have sewn, and spectres left by the lost negatives inside our family albums. It speaks to a mode of dwelling within the entropy of origin, something the Martinique poet Édouard Glissant evokes as a nonfixation of "rootedness"⁴ that forms the basis of diasporic thought – a homely becoming elsewhere, untethered, that is often private, and sometimes visceral.

¹ Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "Mother's Talk," in *The Politics of (M)Othering: Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature* (Routledge, 1997), 26-32.

² Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "Other Than Myself, My Other Self," in *Traveller's Tale*, eds. G. Robertson, M. Mash, L. Tickner, J. Bird, B. Curtis and T. Putnam (Routledge, 1994), 9-26.

³ The contextual reading of the works was drawn in reference to the studio visit and conversations with the artist.

⁴ Édouard Glissant, "Errantry, Exile," in *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Besty Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 11-22.