

## Furen Dai x Tiger Cai x Emily Cheng | Artist Talk

August 11, 2022

**Matter Matters: Tiger Cai, Shuyi Cao, Emily Cheng, Furen Dai, Antonia Kuo  
Curated by Eva Ren**

Exhibition Dates: June 15 – August 26, 2022

Opening Reception: Wednesday, June 15, 2022, 5 – 7 pm

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**Dan Chen:** Welcome. I'm Dan, the director of chamberchambers fine art. We have a group exhibition that has been going on this summer, which is curated by Eva Ren. She's going to have a conversation with these artists. It's an interesting group of artists who were brought together because although their work is quite different visually, they share a similar broader view of humanity.

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**Eva:** I think we should start with the introduction of two artists. Maybe you can tell us a little bit more about your personal and the educational background first.

**Antonia:** Hi, I'm Antonia. I have a background in drawing, painting and printmaking. I did my undergraduate at school of museum in fine art in Boston. And then from there became more involved with photography. Then I did a one year intensive program at a school of international center of photography. At 2013, I began making these painting and photographic hybrid works. Then I did my graduate studies at Yale university in the painting program. Since then, I started devoting myself on interdisciplinary practices.

**Shuyi:** Hi, my name is Shuyi. I'm from a city in southern part of China called Guangzhou. My undergrad and graduate studies are in social science and public policies. And I moved to New York six years ago and got my graduate diploma in conceptual fine arts. My practice has been Interdisciplinary. I make mixed medium sculptures and installations combining handcraft objects and digital artifacts.

I often describe my work as archaeological speculation or ecological fiction. My work also involves a very different scales and materials. In this show, I presented artwork that was made by the glass and ceramic sculptures. The process of making these art pieces is stimulating the geological formulation of earth materials. I also use digital fabrication in my work such as laser cutting and 3d printing to represent the contemporary industrial time.

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**Eva:** Both of you introduce the using of different kind of medias. So I was wondering can you share with a little bit more about your main theme and the process of finding the most suitable media?

**Antonia:** For me, it's heavily depending on the project. For example, I just came back from the west coast and I did a lot of metal and ceramic based works. However, I tend to find a lot of my impetus through the process itself. Sometimes it's a little retroactive where I'll be learning or becoming more familiar with a certain process. But through that process, I'm able to find something that's really speaks to kind of the core aspects of my practice in general. Some of the ideas are recording and encapsulating a certain thing like light, time and heat. Things like metal casting, glass, photography are all records of mark making. Actions of materiality are encapsulated in a certain material. The idea is similar to Chinese calligraphy: recording and time.

My process is also a lot about mining mistakes and failures. I like to see how far you push a material and usually using a material in a way that it would never be used for. That's how I have fun making my work and my core principles.

**Eva:** I can see the hybrid of painting and also the photography process from your work. You told me before that is called chemigram. Could you tell me a little bit more about the technique?

**Antonia:** It's a way for producing analogue photographic development. I choose to call them chemical painting, because I want to separate myself from the old school photographic male lineage and focus specifically on what I've discovered on my own. My way treats photographic material as material that triggers the innate principal of material: the ability to record time. I used some technological processes such as machinery, software, laser and silk screen. There are a lot of different processes that filters into the work as well.

**Eva:** Comparing with the traditional photography, I know that your work needs a longer period of time to create.

**Antonia:** Yes, for example, the very first works that I did in the series only had one round in the dark room, and now I've been going back with multiple stages of masking and painting. Now the most recent ones have three layers. It also depends on the pieces lying. You know, and there are works that I finished fast. I've made within a month, within a few weeks. In comparison, there are also works that sit around and percolate on what they might need. Because they're recordings time, they're also absorbing all this time in the interim, even if they're not completely active in the moment.

**Eva:** Also there is color showing on your work, how do you control the color?

**Antonia:** There's a lot of variables for coloring. So I'd say in the initial process of making it, most of the colors are inherent to the kind of paper that I'm using. It's a silver gelatin, like

sensitive paper. Each different kind of paper has its own innate color and texture and brands. And then when you're processing in the dark room, the differences of temperature of the chemistry, the dilution of the chemicals, like all these different variables that you can tweak to get different coloration. And then beyond that, with extra layers, I've been doing toning and other ways to add supplementary color that might not be innate to the paper itself. There are so many different kinds of toning and dyeing method, some of them are more toxic or more benign. But they are all acting differently on paper. So there are many variables, but that's something that worth exploring at work.

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**Eva:** So for Shuyi, why didn't you tell us a little bit more about your main practice and the technique behind it?

**Shuyi:** Yeah, sure. I just came back from the Banff the residency. The residency is called material transformation. I think that's like the best description of my general practice. During the residency, we experimented with different process of materials and different ingredients. Mainly the natural ingredients. In that residency, I have been experimenting with different kind of clay bodies. I also dig my own clay from the local environment and then I burned them. I also experiment with different fire techniques, like solar fire, rock fire, creating different temperatures. With the clay you digged yourself, I need to do various experiment to test out the right temperature. So I've been having a lot of fun experimenting.

And for my sculpture, I work with various organic and inorganic materials, from glass, ceramic, Silicon to more biomaterial like Myss bioplastic. I also teach sustainable materials in designing technology programs. So I'm kind of like doing a lot of like different recipes and experiment on the side

For the glass, it seems to be like my major body of sculptural work now. The clear borosilicate glass is what I'm using and I found the material by accident. four years ago, I was searching about how the modern science and laboratory practice shape our relationship with natural materials, which is the consistent thread of all my work. My general interest is just this complex entangle relationship between biological, geological and technological matters. Different kind of glass making process is largely different. So even though glass has been around for like 3,500 years, but the glass used in scientific glass blowing is very different from the commonly seen glass. What make clear borosilicate glass different is that it's very heat resistant, which makes it suitable for Labware and chemical processing. It has also been widely used in engineer and design. The material itself come along with the rise of modern chemistry and technology. Once I discovered such an interesting material, the sculpture creation process became very spontaneous. I devoted on experimenting with air, heat and glass.

**Eva:** Your work has an unconventional name. Can you explain your choice of name?

**Shuyi:** The name of these series of artwork is called Egg-Born, Moisture-Born, With Scales, Without Scale. The title references the category system in the Ben Cao Gang Mu, which is one of the most authoritative ancient Chinese medical compendiums published in the 16th century. It represents the first taxonomy of vegetal animal mineral and men matters,

including some hybrid species that seems to come straight out for Chinese fictional encyclopaedia. The name can be separated into two parts:

“Egg-Born, Moisture-Born” are the categories of insects that indicates the criteria of Genesis. They resemble so many things and I like to be very open about it and let people just to see whatever they want to see from those forms. They are both familiar and alien. They could look like microscopic single cell organisms, such as bacteria, or sea worm, tentacle, embryo, or exoskeleton. I like the ambiguity.

“Scaly”, as one of the chapter titles, refers to biological anatomy that distinguishes organisms, while in English, the term “scale” also means an ordered reference standard. This series marks the discontinuity of spatial and temporal scales in a more-than-human world and invites us to rethink networks of affinity between us and the ecological others we are enmeshed with.

**Eva:** Yeah. I also see, like, there are two different kinds ones. Once has color and once is totally transparent. So is there any differences of it? Are there any technique differences?

**Shuyi:** They’re two different kinds of glasses. One is hollow and the other one is solid. For the hollow one you can blow and twist it. For the solid one is pretty much only bending and twisting.

**Eva:** One of your sculptures Precarious Encounter are able to divided into two parts. At top is the glass part and the bottom is the stoneware. So is it coming from the same series?

**Shuyi:** Yeah, conceptually and formally, they are all related. For this one, I'm just imagining these hybrid fungal species. Fungus are able to infect other species such as bees or ants. Over time they would slowly take over their bodies and eventually change their behaviour. I think it's quite fascinating. So at my work, I want to representing the “hybrid form” of fungus and other animals.

My another work subsurface (fungus) synthesize different textures from desert rocks, swamp frog, forest mushroom for live casting. When I was at Utah for a road trip last summer, I did a lot of live casting on the rock surface. And all these geological textures are the most ancient recording formation of earth because it just inscribed all these forces like erosion. So I'm just very interested in the texture. I just make a lot of life cast of the rock texture and bring it back to my studio and also have a lot of, all of different animal skin. So I just collect them together and tap.

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**Eva:** Antonio how about you introduce the coloring of your work?

**Antonia:** The process of creating art is very intuitive. I didn't start with the concrete idea of the composition. Every element in my work is built up organically. I named one of my works carpet beetle, because it reminded me of kind of all these fragments of like the body of insect. It's almost like the fragmented form of fossil. There's some kind of tonal banding on

the surface of the paper. And that was actually from the amount of light that while the paper was rolled up it was exposed to before I processed it. That was the example of the incidental thing that I really wanted to exploit.

Another of my work is called Sieve (Pink and Green). It was my first attempts at coloring the paper and dying and toning after the initial processing. I did a handful of the same motif and each one was like a different permutation of playing with color and seeing what would happen. I used some silk screen in this, as well as, placing masks like blocks individually. The pinkish tone in particular is innate to the color properties of the paper. And then the kind of greens were later masked and added in to the work.

The work I introduced here are more of like a painting decoy rather than a photograph. When people are viewing it, the commonly raised question was how was it made this doesn't look like a regular painting? I've played with many different ways to present questions like this. And I think this kind of removes one step further from the photographic context and kind of confuses it more. I really enjoy the work that sits in the space between painting and photography and not really delineate itself clearly as one or the other.

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**Eva:** The title of this group show is called matter matters. Both of you are focusing on experimenting the "matters" through your work. I'm wondering how your work is interacting with each others' idea?

**Shuyi:** It's fascinating to see the differences of our ways to reveal the same topics. Some create the artwork in a more ordered and scientific based way, the other focuses more on the spontaneity and intuitive. I found myself resonates with this tension. Recently I'm feeling like I've been stuck in the research driven and analytical concept and my works are being restrain. Because of my academic background, it's difficult for me trying to completely divorce from the analytical approach, but Antonia's work inspires me to give more space to create intuitive and sensitive work.

**Antonia:** I think all of the artists here are in the similar soup, but Shuyi and I in particular have a very strong bond in the way that materials can embody certain concepts. I remember it was Ava Hessa said something once about wanting her own work to surprise her. And that, to me, that's like one of the most fruitful moments of being an artist is to make things that are alien to yourself.