



吃得开 eat the open

by

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Finally, I would like to acknowledge that this work was finished on the land Amiskwacîwâskahikan, treaty 6 territory and Métis nation of Alberta Region 4. As an immigrant, I have been learning the history of the land since arrival and feeling extremely thankful for the ability to live, study, work, and gather in this traditional homeland of diverse nations, including the Cree, Blackfoot, Métis, Nakota Sioux, Iroquois, Dene, Ojibway/Saulteaux/Anishinaabe, Inuit, and many others.

In Chinese, 吃得开 (eat the open) is an adjective that describes a state of being popular; when people are involved, food always eats the open. *吃得开 eat the open* is an exhibition that explores the connections and relationships created through making and sharing food. Having grown up in a Chinese background, I have experienced culinary culture being the most vital part of Chinese culture, which made me wonder what food offers us aside from nourishment. The habit of understanding cultures from a culinary perspective has been directing how I express myself as a person and through my creative practice. I love how food brings people together; whether it is during festival times, family and friends' gatherings, celebrations and condolences, farewells and welcomes, art creations, philosophical thinking, anything and everything that involves people is inseparable from food. From the linguistic aspects, "to eat" is given various emotional colours by Chinese people. Being sought after and getting benefits are "eat fragrant or sweet" in Chinese literal meaning; being left out is "eat the closed door"; being in hardship is "eat bitter"; being popular among people is "eat the open"; suffering losses is "eat loss"; and landing oneself in serious troubles is "can't finish eating, take it away." "To eat" is omnipresent in the daily life of Chinese people, not only limited to edibles.

In *吃得开 eat the open*, I create food, prints, drawings, ceramics, videos, and interactive projects influenced by the repetitive processes of buying groceries, cooking meals, dining out, documenting food, and learning to cook from family members. Through eating and creative expression, I am trying to find a harmonious pattern of connecting with myself, people, and my cultural background.

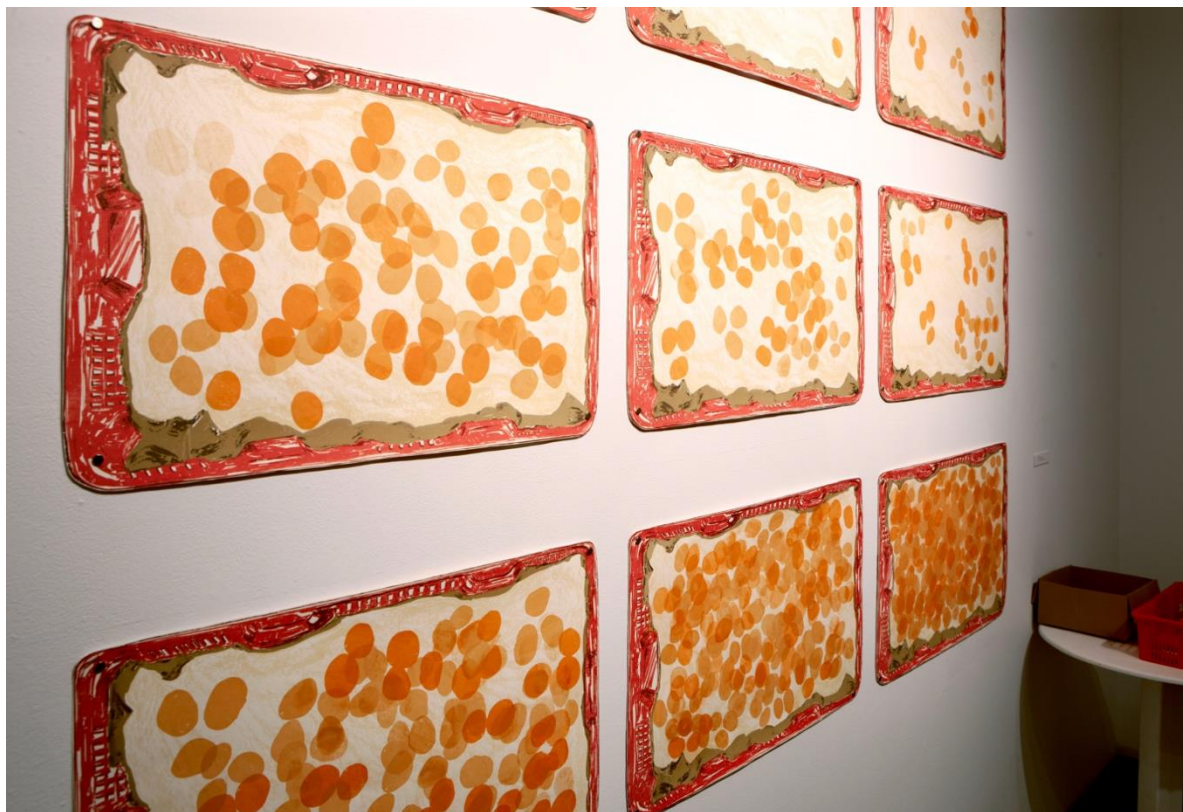
My project *开门大桔 help yourself* and "*potluck*" are in dialogues with Nicolas Bourriaud's "relational aesthetic"¹ and the generosity shown in giving /exchanging food. In various versions of these two participatory events, I connect with others through the familiar and friendly act of offering free mandarin oranges and creating an environment where people can gather, talk about food and develop relationships. Smell, taste, and tactile sensations in my works immerse the audience in the gallery setting and influence how they interact with the pieces.



开门大桔 help yourself !

Mandarin oranges in orange basket, orange peels in folded paper box, 2021, 70 x 110 inches

¹ French critic Nicolas Bourriaud created the term "relational art" in 1996 to describe artworks that blend art and life and relate to human interaction and its social context. Works use live bodies to emphasize "bodily socialization, the bureaucratization of senses, and our collective habituation to public". David Howes, *A Cultural History of the Senses in the Modern Age* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 213-14.



help yourself ! (details)
photos credit: James Boychuk-Hunter



"Potluck"

Relief print, color pencil drawings, hand carved/laser engraved erasers, wood

2022, 2 sets, 115 x 114 x 16 inches/set



"Potluck" detail, a stamped card in front of stamped papers on the wall



"Potluck" detail, stamping station



"Potluck" detail, eraser stamps



"Potluck" detail, take away cards

Edition of 190

In addition to these two interactive works, *Yilu's Pancake Party* is a participatory food event that happens during the 吃得开 *eat the open's* opening reception on Nov 25th, 2022. Before and after the event, I have one table set up with cooking utensils, containers, plates, and condiments; during the event, I have several tables set up for all the dishes I cook at home, including pancakes in an edition of 60. When guests order pancakes, I take their names, write the order numbers on stamped paper bags (also in an edition of 60), heat pancakes with a pan, ring the bell, and shout the guests' names for handing in their hot pancakes. As an experimental piece that involves homemade and hot food, it helps me to further connect with guests in all five sensations around food, including sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch.



Yilu's Pancake Party, Nov 25th 2022

Homemade dishes, handmade/readymade/purchased objects, Polaroid photos,
60 pancakes and printed paper bags



Yilu's Pancake Party (detail), stamped paper bags in an edition of 60



Yilu's Pancake Party (detail), polaroid photos



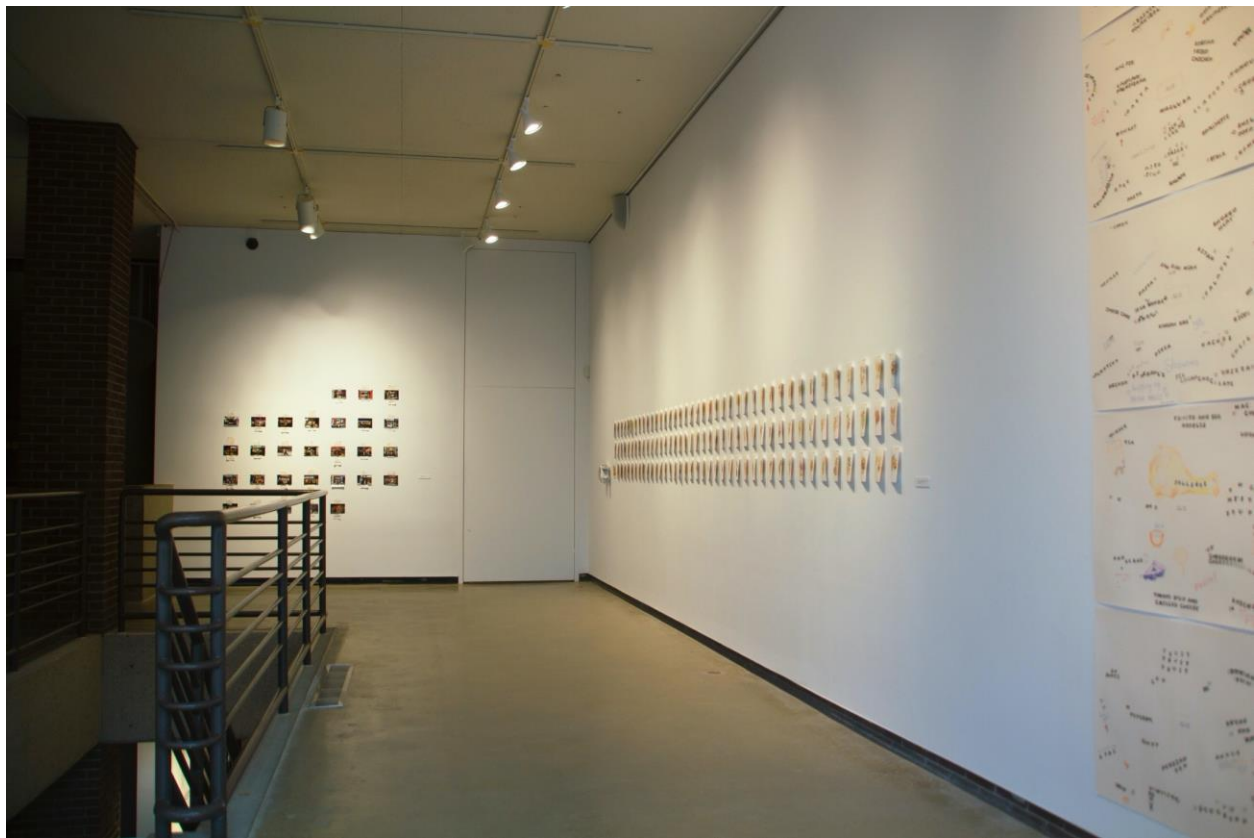
Yilu cooks pancakes at *Yilu's Pancake Party*

Photo Credit: Riddhi Patel



Yilu's Pancake Party (detail), homemade food

Artistic creations that are reflected in Chinese culinary culture² have influenced me in the process of creating *Daily Practice* and *Dining Out with Sister*, I make my choices of eating and repeat these two everyday eating behaviours. The marker drawings and stamped receipts are based on my homemade meals in Edmonton; the photographs are taken in front of the restaurants I consume daily while away from home and have limited kitchen access. Through the experiences of repetitively cooking, eating, and drawing, I have been experiencing a state of flow and actively communicating with myself.



Gallery layout, 2nd floor

² In Chinese culinary culture, the use of utensils, preparation of meals, the colour effects of the ingredients, the art of taste, literary and musical arts...are all influenced by food. Hongwei Ma, *Zhongguo Yin Shi Wen Hua. Di 1 ban.*, (Nei Menggu ren min chu ban she, 1992), 442-483



Daily Practice: shopping, cooking, drawing, writing

Marker on paper, stamping on receipts, wood, nail
2021-2022, 275 x 26 x 3.5 inches



Daily Practice: shopping, cooking, drawing, writing (detail)



Daily Practice: shopping, cooking, drawing, writing (detail)



Dining Out With Sister, July 2022

Digital prints, receipts, Photos by: Yixin Xing, 2022, 80 x 60 x 0.5 inches



Dining Out With Sister, July 2022 (detail)

In other works, including installations *Mom's Pastry Board*, *Family Dough*, and video *Heirloom (from mother)*, I work closely with my family members, research our family diet routine and regional heritage, and depict the transmission of cultures through lineage. "The southerners primarily eat rice, the northerners primarily eat wheat, that is the habits."³ As family from northern China, wheat staples occupy the most important place in our diet. Various forms of wheat-based food and working hands are continually captured in the works to indicate the repetitive process of learning, making, and teaching about this regional food. I reflect on the process of passing down knowledge to the next generations and the impacts my mother has on me of her positive working spirit. Due to the changes in languages, ingredients, kitchen utensils, cooking methods, living conditions and other factors, food is constantly changing; family members can indeed make the food called the same name, but the taste varies by generation. The transmission of taste is both the passing down of practical cooking techniques and the quest for impalpable relations to the food we had before.



Mom's pastry board (detail)

³ "The southerners primarily eat rice, the northerners primarily eat wheat, that is the habits. Ben Cao says: 'rice can nourish the spleen, Wheat can nourish the heart.' Both are beneficial to people." Yu Li, *Xian Qing Ou Ji, Yinzhuan Bu*, (Yuan Shi Dan, Edited by Chu Zhiying, Yun Nan Ren Min Press, 2004), 178-228



Family Dough:

1. Kneading

2. Pulling

3. Shaping

4. Rolling

Laser engraved wood, ceramics, flour

2022, 38 x 195 x 16



1. Kneading detail



2. Pulling detail



3. Shaping detail



4. Rolling detail





Heirloom (from mother)

video

5 min 11 sec

Yilu Xing and Yufang Chen

The philosophical ideas of Yin and Yang, elements phases and the unity of humans and nature are essential components of Chinese culture; unity and harmony are the core of Chinese culinary culture, emphasizing the excellent relationships among many factors in balance.⁴ I am no expert in Daoism philosophy; still, I try to achieve a better relationship with the people, land, and nature on the long way to harmony. Although my work engages deeply with my food culture, the ideas around food are universal. By emphasizing the similarities in food relations, I encourage viewers to slow down and think about themselves, their families and friends, their unique cultural backgrounds, and their relationships in the surroundings.

⁴ The five elements, wood, fire, earth, metal and water, are reflected in culinary, corresponding to food's sour, bitter, sweet, spicy and salty flavours. The flavours are in harmony with the Qi of the five human organs because of their different properties. Hollmann Thomas, *The Land of the Five Flavors: A Cultural History of Chinese Cuisine* (Columbia University, 2010), VIII

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Yilu Xing and Yufang Chen sitting together and watching their work *Heirloom (from mother)*