

koffler gallery

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Artist Karen Tam creates a new series of immersive installations evoking historical Chinese Canadian photo studios for her first solo exhibition in Toronto at the Koffler Gallery

Toronto, ON, December 18, 2019 – This winter, Toronto's **Koffler Gallery** presents *the chrysanthemum has opened twelve times*, a new solo exhibition from Montréal-based artist, **Karen Tam**.

The exhibition opens with a free public reception on **Thursday, January 23, 2019** from **7 to 9 PM**. The **Koffler Gallery** is located at **Artscape Youngplace**, 180 Shaw Street, Toronto. *the chrysanthemum has opened twelve times* is open from **January 23 to March 29, 2020**.

Montréal-based artist Karen Tam creates immersive installations exploring the way physical experiences of spaces and objects can provide a deeper understanding of specific places, histories and communities. Her recent projects investigate the spatial aesthetics of early 20th century North American Chinese restaurants, opium dens, karaoke lounges and curio shops as sites of cultural interaction. Playing with notions of authenticity, Tam reimagines venues and their material culture, fabricating detailed sets and fake antiques with everyday methods and ordinary materials, bringing them to life.

At the Koffler Gallery, Tam creates a new series of immersive installations to evoke the early Chinese Canadian and other historical photo studios that served Chinese communities in Canada. Her intricate recreations of portrait studio settings and backdrops integrate found and fabricated objects, archival images, 1940s vinyl recordings of Cantonese opera, and *mookyu* song performances, revealing layered experiences of immigration, displacement and longing.

Tam's personal impetus for this project is a photograph of her great-grandfather Wong who had migrated to San Francisco in the early part of the 20th century. Like other immigrants at the time, Wong had his portrait taken to be sent along with letters to his family back in Toishan, China. Prompted by this portrait, Tam investigates the emotional and documentary significance of such photographs in revealing the realities of immigration through the implicit tensions of a wishful, reassuring image meant to alleviate separation anxieties by conveying the health and prosperity of the sitter.

Early Chinese Canadian studio photographers and their subjects actively shaped the representation of Chinese identity in North America. Retracing their overlooked existence and restaging the physical environments of these portrait studios, Tam's installations attempt to piece together and embody absented historic narratives. Furthermore, they seek to evoke similar personal experiences in viewers, positioning these small constructed settings as sites where memory is both encountered and created.

Listing Information

Karen Tam: *the chrysanthemum has opened twelve times*
January 23 – March 29, 2020
Koffler Gallery | Artscape Youngplace, 180 Shaw Street, Toronto
Curator: Mona Filip

Public Programs

Koffler Gallery Winter Opening Reception: Thursday, January 23, 2020 | 7–9 PM | FREE
Artist Talk: Sunday, January 26, 2020 | 2 PM | FREE

Regular exhibition hours: Wednesday to Friday, 12 PM to 6 PM; Saturday and Sunday, 11 AM to 5 PM. Closed Mondays, Tuesdays and statutory holidays. Admission is free.

For more information and a full list of the Koffler's Winter 2020 programs, please visit kofflerarts.org

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Karen Tam lives and works in Montréal and holds an MFA in Sculpture from The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and a PhD in Cultural Studies from Goldsmiths (University of London). Since 2000, she has exhibited her work and participated in residencies in North America, Europe and China, including the Deutsche Börse Residency at the Frankfurter Kunstverein (Germany), Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal (Canada), and CUE Art Foundation (USA). She was a finalist for the Prix Louis-Comtois in 2017 from the Contemporary Art Galleries Association and Ville de Montréal, a finalist for the Prix en art actuel from the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec in 2016, and long-listed for the Sobey Art Award in 2016 and 2010. Her works are in museum, corporate, and private collections in Canada, United States, and United Kingdom. Tam is a contributor to Alison Hulme's (ed.) book, *The Changing Landscape of China's Consumerism* (2014) and to John Jung's book, *Sweet and Sour: Life in Chinese Family Restaurant* (2010). She is represented by Galerie Hugues Charbonneau.

ABOUT THE KOFFLER GALLERY

The Koffler Gallery is a forum for the presentation and development of contemporary visual art that reflects diverse cultural, material and aesthetic perspectives, generating critical discussions around ideas of our time. Featuring a year-round program of exhibitions, publications, public programs and educational initiatives, the Koffler Gallery fosters new production while equally aiming to expand the visibility of existing work by Canadian and international artists. The program positions the contemporary Jewish experience in a context of comparative discussions of identity, memory and place, promoting ideals of social justice, equality and inclusiveness.

The Koffler Gallery gratefully acknowledges the support of the Toronto Arts Council, the Ontario Arts Council, and the Canada Council for the Arts.

ABOUT THE KOFFLER CENTRE OF THE ARTS

The [Koffler Centre of the Arts](http://kofflerarts.org) is a cultural platform that explores critical ideas and concerns of our time through exhibitions, publications, performances, literary events and digital initiatives. We examine complex issues through transformative art experiences that stimulate intercultural dialogue and position Jewish identity in conversation with diverse perspectives and global voices. The Koffler Centre of the Arts acknowledges the support of the Koffler Family Foundation, Cultural Season Sponsor CIBC Wood Gundy, the Ontario Arts Council through the Community and Multidisciplinary Arts Organizations Program, our patrons and donors.

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For further information and high-resolution images, contact:

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