

COVER IMAGES: VALU CO-OP, House of 9 Dragons, installation (2022). Alt-text: Elder Orville Lim providing tours and interviews of VALU CO-OP's House of 9 Dragons installation featuring video recorded oral history interviews and hanging textured monoprints and calligraphic fabric prints. Detail from Holly Chang, Yellow Red Quilt: Early Settlement (1868-1920), quilting and natural dyeing, 3' x 4', 2021. From the series *Stitching the story of Chinese Canadian Histories: Quilting as an Archival Medium and Research-Praxis*.



WAHC is located on the original territories of the Huron, Wendat and Neutrals, and later, the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabe.



51 Stuart Street, Hamilton, ON L8L 1B5
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Public Hours:

Wednesday - Friday 10 am - 4 pm
Saturday 12 - 4 pm



**IN THE WAKE OF WORK: ASIAN DIASPORAS,
LABOUR, AND LIVING MEMORY**

MAY 9 - JULY 26, 2025

WORKERS ARTS & HERITAGE CENTRE



In the Wake of Work: Asian Diasporas, Labour, and Living Memory

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the Workers Arts and Heritage Centre is located on the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement to peaceably share and care for the Great Lakes region. It is also covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase (Treaty No. 3), signed in 1792. We recognize that Hamilton continues to be home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to live and work on this land. In reflecting on the histories of labour explored in this exhibition, we also acknowledge the ongoing legacies of colonialism, resource extraction, and dispossession that have shaped—and continue to shape—labour relations on these lands.

An exhibition essay
by Curator JoJo Chooi-Harley

Labour lives in the margins: in the calloused hands of our ancestors, in the folded silences between generations, in the gestures we inherit but do not always understand. *In the Wake of Work* brings together the works of artists Holly Chang, VALU CO-OP (David Ng, Jenn Sungshine, Jonny Sopotiuik) and mihyun maria kim to explore the textures of labour and legacy across the Asian diaspora.

Together, these artists unravel the complexity of diasporic work—not only as economic survival but as emotional, cultural, and political endurance. Their practices speak to the multifaceted nature of labour: the labour of migration, of memory, of care, of resistance, of shared dreams.

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Holly Chang's practice brings together research, textile work, and cultural memory. In *Stitching the Story of Chinese Canadian Histories: Quilting as an Archival Medium and Research-Praxis* (2021), Chang uses quilting both as a material process and a methodology, an approach that reclaims domestic craft as both historical record and embodied resistance. Through her collection of photographic material and textual ephemera about Chinese Canadian history from archives, Chang gathers the lived experiences of Chinese Canadian communities, drawing out narratives of exclusion, migration, and quiet perseverance. The quilt, in her hands, becomes an alternative archive: relational, intergenerational, and softly radical within domestic spheres.

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溫哥華藝文工會合作社 VALU CO-OP operates out of their Chinatown Studio at 525 Carrall Street in the historic Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association 林西河總堂九牧公所 building. Originally erected in 1903 by the Chinese Empire Reform Association, the

building has been a central hub for supporting Chinese-Canadian labourers and serving the Chinatown community for over one hundred years.

Three oral history videos from *The House of 9 Dragons: Community, Family, Heritage* grew from an intergenerational exchange between VALU CO-OP and the Lim Sai Hor Kow Mock Benevolent Association. The red banners they are paired with feature monoprints and calligraphic fabric prints created in a community gathering. The environment created by these works invites audiences to be in conversation with living oral histories of the Lim (林) clan, preservations of benevolent associations, and future visions of Chinatowns rooted in the wisdom of ancestors and the shared dreams of generations yet to come.

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mihyun maria kim's visualizes the weight of affective and invisible labour—what it means to carry the grief of others, often silently, while building new lives on

unfamiliar ground.

In Korean culture, *han* is an untranslatable word that encapsulates a deep, inherited sorrow—one rooted in histories of oppression, colonization, and displacement. Kim's work explores and activates *han* not only as a personal and cultural condition, but as a metric of diasporic labour.

Through textile interpretations of bangseok and beosun in the installation, *if only I could have carried you*, kim asks audiences, how do we *honour* the weight of responsibility carried over a lifetime and across generations? Within performative gestures expressed by the artist's own body, in the works, *i feel the weight of a feather and the lightness of stone*, and, *i would carry you all the way there*, kim's embodies gestures hold and extend the *duty* of repeated exhaustion passed from one generation to the next as an act of *respect*.

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Across *In the Wake of Work*, labour emerges not as a monolith, but as something intimate and shifting—at times inherited, at times resisted, always alive and in fluxus. The artists move through the residue of work, illuminating the unseen economies that structure diasporic life: the work of caregiving/ filial piety, of translation, of holding space for memory.

In the Wake of Work insists that these stories matter. That the unpaid, the undocumented, the domestic, the communal—are not peripheral, but central to understanding how diasporic legacies are shaped. And in tracing these legacies, the exhibition becomes not only a site of reflection but of reimagining: what does it mean to honour the labour that made us? What new futures can we build in its wake?

About the Curator

JoJo Chooi-Harley 崔佳怡 is a registered social worker and psychotherapist, as well as a self-taught artist based in Hamilton, Ontario. As a first generation Chinese-Malay Canadian, her practice explores the diasporic impacts of immigration on familial relationships in Pan-Asian migrant families. She investigates how these families navigate intergenerational values, cultural identity, and belonging in the Canadian context. JoJo weaves storytelling, photo-voice photography, and printmaking to share deeply personal, autobiographical narratives that challenge Western dominant singular narratives. Her work is rooted in a commitment to decolonizing stereotypes of Canadian-born Chinese identities by fostering dialogue around family, resilience, sacrifice, labour, and unity in the face of adversity. Her art has been supported by the Ontario Arts Council, The Hamilton Artist's Inc. (*Hamilton: a guidebook from memory*, group publication). Her recent exhibitions have been shown at Centre3 (*Sayang*, solo exhibit), the AGH (*My Back Pages: The Art of Zines*, group), and WAHC (*Personal Narratives*, group). In 2023, she was shortlisted in the City of Hamilton Arts Awards (Creator Category), and in 2024, she received the Hamilton Spectator Reader's Choice Award (Diamond) for Metal Health Consultant.

Outside of her artistic and therapeutic work, JoJo is a proud mama to her two lovable pugs, Boba and BinBin. She is also the founder and organizer of Hamilton Pugs (@hamiltonpugs), a local community group that hosts monthly pug grumble meet-ups, bringing together pug lovers across the GTHA.

Ancillary programs

Join us for a series of ancillary programs presented in support of In the Wake of Work: Asian Diasporas, Labour, and Living Memory.

Opening Reception and Performance

i feel the weight of a feather and the lightness of stone

Performance by mihyun maria kim

Friday May 9, 6:30 – 8:30 pm

Quilting Using Everyday Fabrics

Second Saturday for families with Holly Chang

Saturday, May 10, 1 – 4 pm

Unions and Racism: Asiatic Exclusion League

Virtual program with Jonny Sopotiuik and community facilitator

Thursday, June 19, 6:30 pm – 8:30 pm EST