



Beyond this Promised Land

Stephanie Wu & Danika Kimberly So

Curated by Belinda Ho-Yan Kwan
February 4-14, 2017

COVER IMAGES

LEFT: Crop of Stephanie Wu's *oregon pool* (2014). Image courtesy of the artist.

RIGHT: Crop of Danika Kimberly So's *Cloud* (2015). Image courtesy of the artist.

Preface

Fitting in. Commuting. Family homes. My house. Mom & dad. Too far, you forgot I don't drive? Going to church. Going to Kristy's house down the street. How do you say sex in Cantonese? Empty streets. Shoveling snow on the big driveway. I heard your daughter was dating girls. Open garage doors. I heard there was no word for it. Playing on the street. Subdivisions. Spread out. Residential neighbourhood. Suburban dream. Racism is still that bad? Driving everywhere. I'm concerned about her. Let's go for Dim Sum. Thank god I'm going on vacation, away from all this godforsaken snow. Didn't see you at church today. Why do you need to move out if you haven't gotten married yet? Our neighbourhood is clean and quiet. I'll get my daughter to talk to yours. Heard it through the grapevine. Where'd she get accepted to university? Oh she's going away? 叻女 (translation: good/independent/intelligent girl, or slang for lesbian). Honey, we're middle class. Oh my god, Starbucks is the classic Markham hang-out spot. You're the suburban queen. I'm at my friend's downtown, I can't stand being in that suburban apartment. I can't. I don't understand people who stay at home - I need to fucking move out. I live my own life now. 性 (translation: sex). Oh shit, that's my vibrator on the table, sorry.

Beyond this Promised Land presents the work of Stephanie Wu and Danika Kimberly So, two queer-identifying Asian artists from the suburban neighbourhoods of Markham and Scarborough. As first-generation Chinese-Canadians, So and Wu refuse the cookie-cutter expectations placed on them by heteronormative settler-immigrant dreams. Instead, their works break up the right-wing, conservative suburban environment into imaginative and heterogeneous places by conducting physical and visual interventions into mundane motifs of everyday life in the 'burbs.

So's practice emerges from a desire to reject norms and carve out special places for personal belonging amongst mundane and given expectations. She documents the intimate expressions of everyday objects and Canadian suburban landscapes - sometimes photographing them as is, and sometimes arranging them into visualizations of female kinship and sexuality. The work provides a perceptive reflection of her experiences with blending in and being straight-passing, while also struggling to come to terms with the implications of her racialized appearance. Meanwhile, Wu self-critically examines the concept of escape, reflecting on her past attempts to get away from Markham, Ontario, to vacation-inspired sanctuaries (subtropical San Francisco, California became Wu's ideal place of escape, as well as the place of her coming-out). Wu's current body of work marks her return to Markham and a coming-to-terms with her religious, heteronormative upbringing in the quickly transforming suburb. Wu works mostly with household, storage, and construction materials in pointed references to the private domesticity, accumulation of belongings, and processes of winterization and home improvement she

associates with Markham. At the same time, she incorporates distorted motifs of subtropical escape (palm trees, swimming pools) into her work.

Significantly, So and Wu's desires for belonging exist beyond typical (white) narratives of queer kinship. Instead, they are tied with up memories and fragments of Chinese culture and social norms passed down from their nuclear settler-immigrant families. They inherit and experience frictions with the remnants of their parents' migration and eventual distance from Hong Kong; their notions of belonging and place oscillate between seemingly disparate facets of race, citizenship, ethnicity, immigration, filial obligation and sexuality. The notion of 'promised land' can be used to describe these projections of desire and self identity onto geographical surfaces.

In the context of these intersectional experiences, this exhibition seeks to make space and time for queer first-generation Chinese-Canadian folks from Toronto and GTA suburbs, and open up possibilities of queered East Asian expression and kinship on the fringes of the city. However, by focusing on the specific and detailed stories of two distinct artists, it also gestures beyond given categories (such as urban, Asian, Chinese, queer) to the manifold processes of individuation uncontainable by taxonomy.

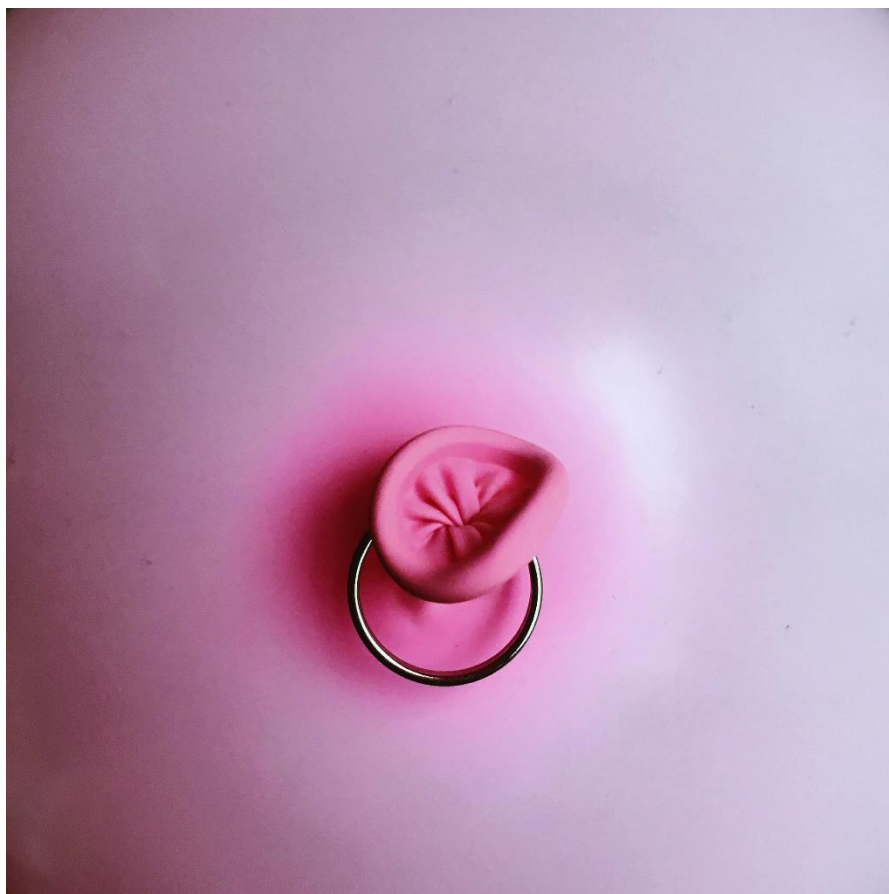
Belinda Ho-Yan Kwan, *Curator*

Acknowledgements

As settler-immigrant curators and artists, we would like to acknowledge that the land on which this project occurs is the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee. The territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, an agreement between the Iroquois Confederacy and the Ojibwe and allied nations to peaceably share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. This territory is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. Today, the meeting place of Toronto (from the Haudenosaunee word Tkaronto) is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island. The establishment of our communities is built on Indigenous labour and care for this land. We stand in solidarity with the work towards Indigenous sovereignty, which continues to fight for the wellbeing of Turtle Island and those who live off it. It is our hope that our work can foster environments of interdependency and care in order to refuse the colonial settler attitudes that perpetuate slavery and genocide.

Lastly, we'd also like to thank the founders of Y+ contemporary – Tiffany Schofield, Dorica Manuel, Danièle Dennis, and Daniel Griffin Hunt – for supporting this curatorial project; it's always a pleasure to work with you.

List of Works



1. Danika Kimberly So
Nipple Ring, 2017
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

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2. **Stephanie Wu**
i am not sorry (tennis court), 2016
Site-specific installation
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
12x8"
3. **Stephanie Wu**
Tarp series (tennis court), 2016
Site-specific installation
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
8x12"
4. **Stephanie Wu**
getting to know you (park, back), 2016
Site-specific installation
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
8x12"
5. **Stephanie Wu**
getting to know you (park, front), 2016
Site-specific installation
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
8x12"
6. **Stephanie Wu**
getting to know you (mirror in the snow), 2016
Site-specific installation
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
8x12"
7. **Stephanie Wu**
predators in tropical clothing (gallery object), 2016
Mixed media tapestry
6x4'
8. **Stephanie Wu**
meditate in a pool with my demons (schoolyard), 2016
Site-specific installation
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
8x12"

9. Stephanie Wu

meditate in a pool with my demons (backyard lounging), 2016

Site-specific installation

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

8x12"

10. Stephanie Wu

oregon pool, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

12x8"

11. Stephanie Wu

you make me so sad, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

12x8"

12. Stephanie Wu

you give me anxiety, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

12x8"

13. Stephanie Wu

meditate in a pool with my demons (schoolyard, close-up), 2016

Site-specific installation

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

14. Stephanie Wu

parkview, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

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15. Danika Kimberly So

Love Stinks, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

16. Danika Kimberly So

Private Thoughts, Public Space, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

17. Danika Kimberly So

Pray, 2015

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

18. Danika Kimberly So

Cliterature, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
10x10"

19. Danika Kimberly So

Cloud, 2015

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

20. Danika Kimberly So

Danger: Men, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
10x10"

21. Stephanie Wu

nothing left to say (screenshot), 2016

Screenshot of digital moving image
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

22. Danika Kimberly So

You can see right through me, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

23. Danika Kimberly So

That's Hot, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

24. Danika Kimberly So

Chainsaw, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

25. Danika Kimberly So

Showing Skin, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

26. Danika Kimberly So

Rainbow, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

27. Danika Kimberly So

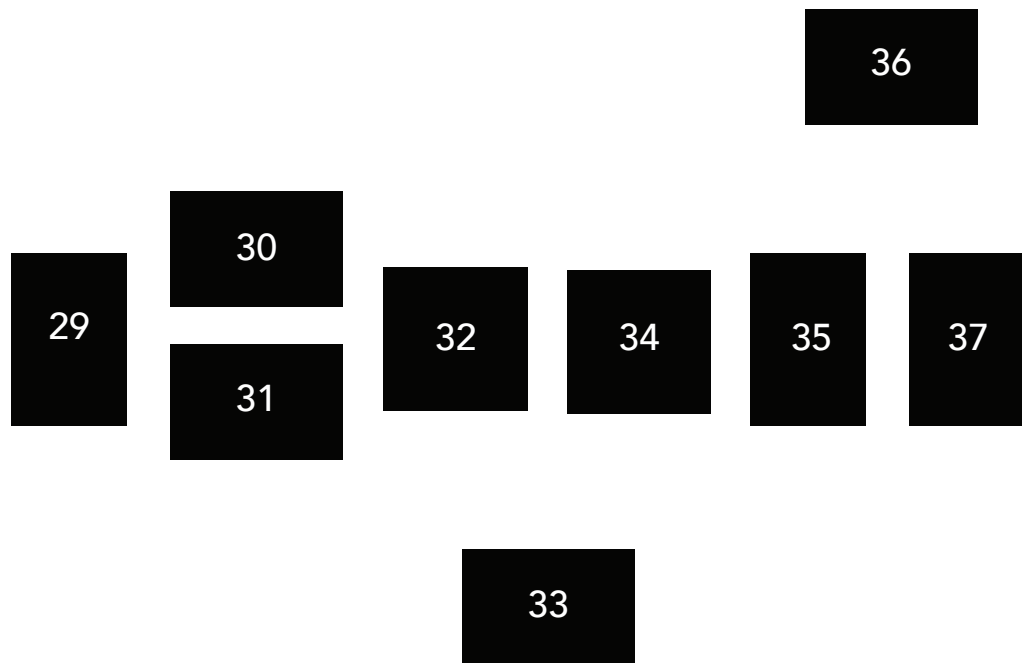
Grow Your Grass, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

28. Danika Kimberly So

Gr(ass), 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
10x10"



29. Stephanie Wu

jesus (gold), 2013

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
6x4"

30. Stephanie Wu

yucca valley, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
4x6"

31. Stephanie Wu

billy goat hill, 2015

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
4x6"

32. Stephanie Wu

neighbours, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

33. Stephanie Wu

valley of temples, 2015

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
4x6"

34. Danika Kimberly So

Push the button, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

35. Stephanie Wu

motel room, 2013

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
5x5"

36. Stephanie Wu

salvation mountain, 2014

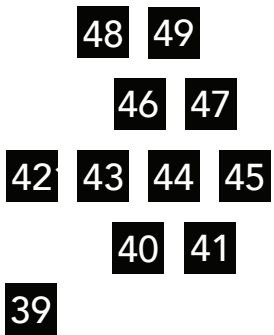
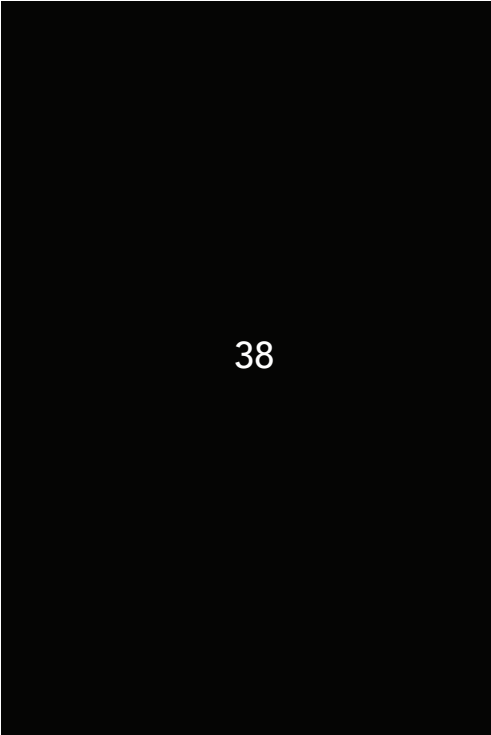
Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper
4x6"

37. Stephanie Wu

mary, 2013

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"



38. Stephanie Wu

your identity concerns me (gallery object), 2016

Mixed media tapestry

6x4'

39. Danika Kimberly So

Cheese, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

40. Danika Kimberly So

No, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

41. Danika Kimberly So

Corporate Tears, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

42. Danika Kimberly So

Fruitility, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

43. Danika Kimberly So

Vandalized Candy, 2014

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

44. Danika Kimberly So

L(one)ly, 2015

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

45. Danika Kimberly So

When you get hurt then remember you're flawless, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

46. Stephanie Wu

silverthorne, 2017

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

47. Danika Kimberly So

Food Pom, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"

48. Danika Kimberly So

Raincloud, 2015

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

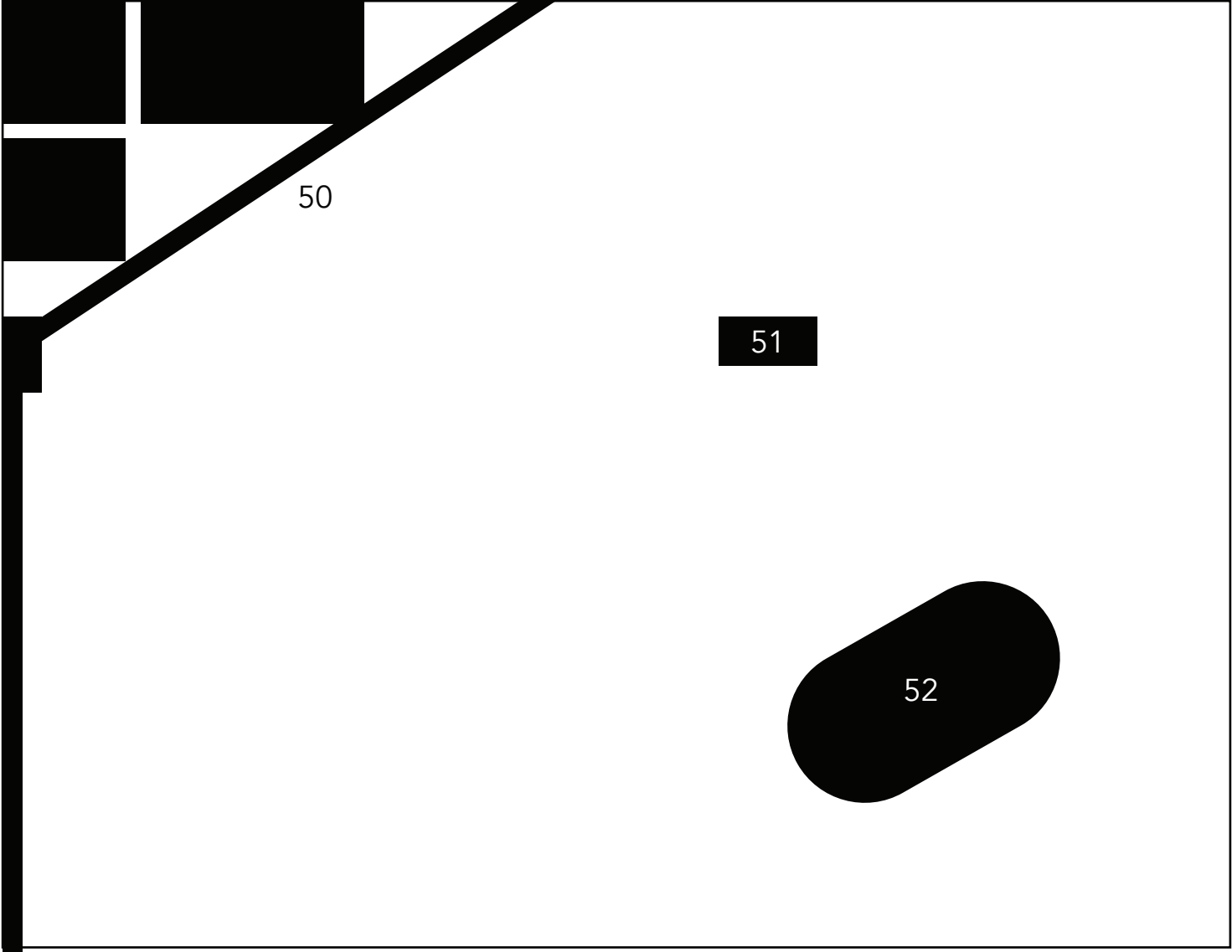
5x5"

49. Danika Kimberly So

Get me out of this machine, 2016

Inkjet print on archival lustre photo paper

5x5"



50. Stephanie Wu

I'm Not Sorry (gallery object), 2016

Mixed media banner

9.5'

51. Stephanie Wu

getting to know you (gallery object), 2016

Mixed media installation (swing & mirror)

Dimensions vary

52. Stephanie Wu

meditate in a pool with my demons (gallery object), 2016

mixed media sculpture (deflated kiddie pool)

35x72"

Events

Opening Reception // Sat, Feb 4 from 2-5PM

During this alcohol-free, family-friendly event, the artists and curator will be in the space to answer any questions about the work.

Creative Journaling Workshop // Mon, Feb 6 from 5-8PM

Can words, pictures & shapes ground us when we feel placeless? When our bodies make marks on surfaces, and when we transfer our feelings onto objects, are we also carving out places of belonging for our selves and loved ones? We may be ephemeral, but our words and traces seem to cling just enough for us to sustain and birth new relationships – to ourselves and others.

Creative journaling constitutes a core element of **Stephanie Wu's** artistic practice – for her, it acts as a process of self-validation and place-making when traditional notions of kinship and home are not enough to foster self-care. Drawing from her own journaling processes, Wu will lead a workshop that uses journaling, drawing, and collage activities to encourage self-expression and reflection. Materials, food, and drink will be provided.

Artist-to-Artist Conversation // Sat, Feb 11 from 12-2PM

So, Wu, and Kwan will discuss their and exhibition-making processes in relationship to *Beyond this Promised Land*. Together, they will reflect on personal topics such as identity, place, and memory.

Neighbourhood Scavenger Hunt // Sat, Feb 11 from 2-4PM

Danika Kimberly So's photographic work derives materials and content for her work from her immediate environment. By revealing elements of humour and truth in everyday objects, she examines the transformative power of the mundane.

Equipped with a camera, So will lead workshop participants throughout the neighborhood to gather miscellaneous objects and make images with them. Everyone's creations will be documented and then posted on the Y+ contemporary website and Facebook page. Participants are welcome to bring their own cameras to document personal works.

Closing Reception // Tues, Feb 14 from 7-10PM

Drinks, refreshments, dancing & fun, punchy queer art! What better ways are there to celebrate your February 14th ♥? This community-oriented closing reception of *Beyond this Promised Land* will open up the space to folks searching for an LGBTQA+ friendly and social place to enjoy their February 14th evening.

All public events at Y+ contemporary are FREE.

Biographies

Stephanie Wu, Artist

Stephanie Wu (b. 1993) is a queer-identifying new media artist and curator with a BFA in Studio Arts from Concordia University, Montreal. Her practice in the past few years has critically examined the role of escape and distraction in North American contemporary culture. Using computer software, installations and projections, Wu constructs satirical utopias of overindulgence and overstimulation. Her current body of work moves away from digital material, into physical and geopolitical investigations of queerness - especially as they relate to Scarborough and Markham, Ontario, the suburbs of her adolescence.

www.stephanie-wu.com

Danika Kimberly So, Artist

Danika Kimberly So (b. 1993) is a queer-identified mixed-media artist and photographer from Scarborough. Her work examines the transformative power of the mundane by revealing elements of humour and truth in everyday objects. So's work illustrates the virtue of disruption in playful and surprising ways. She derives materials and content for her work from her immediate environment, and as much as the content of her work draws on everyday objects, her art process is also woven into everyday life.

So is currently pursuing her JD at Osgoode Hall Law School at York University. She holds an Honours Dual Degree from Western University and Ivey Business School, specializing in Political Science and Business Administration.

www.danikation.com

Belinda Ho-Yan Kwan, Curator

Belinda Ho-Yan Kwan (b. 1993) is an emerging art historian and curator. She attends York University, where she is in the process of completing her MA in Art History and graduate diploma in Curatorial Practice. Kwan's interests centre on the role of art in civic movements toward social justice. Her writing explores the relationship between sub/urban infrastructures and socio-political ontologies. With an emphasis on post-critical theory and intersectionality, Kwan's current research investigates the reproduction of carceral and penal logics in art. Belinda's engagements with intersectionality and critical theory are inspired by her personal experiences with sub/urban adolescence, queerness, disability, and racism. These experiences inform her engagements with social justice, and her desire to engage in practices that contest stigmatizing and oppressive constructs.

www.belindakwan.com