



A WOMEN'S THING

CULTURE, CREATIVITY

Art in the Age of Instagram: Catalina Ouyang

November 22, 2017 by [Margaret Williamson Bechtold](#)



Catalina Ouyang
Sister, Destroyer, Lover, 2016

Somewhere along the way, “millennial” became a dirty word, or at least a tainted one—shorthand for lethargy, entitlement and fecklessness. All the while, young female artists were getting to work. **A Women’s Thing** spoke to six millennial artists on coming of age at the turn of the century and their own stock-taking of their careers thus far.

“A CROWNING CHARACTERISTIC OF BOTH PLACES WAS THEIR WHITE SUPREMACY—IN ILLINOIS BECAUSE EVERYBODY WAS JUST WHITE, THERE WAS NO DIVERSITY.”

Interview has been edited for clarity.

Catalina Ouyang is a visual artist and self-describeded “child of the Chinese diaspora by way of St. Louis, New Jersey, and an obscure cul-de-sac outside of Chicago.” Her work has been exhibited nationally. She is an MFA candidate in Sculpture at Yale University.

What would most impress a younger you about where you are today?

Catalina Ouyang: Probably that I project confidence, competence, and righteous anger. That I command fear and am resilient. Or so people tell me. The younger me was always accused by white teachers and adults of being too quiet, too brooding, not “smiley” enough. Which were, of course, totally racialized criticisms that almost every young Asian-American girl hears. But in other respects, I was just ahead of the game, because fuck respectability.



Catalina Ouyang



Catalina Ouyang
an elev for Marco. 2016

Do you think about age at all? What about it, if at all?

Catalina Ouyang: Not really, anymore. Growing up, I was a bit of a prodigal child. I was a precocious smartass and really good at drawing for, like, a 12-year-old. I spent a lot of time on internet forums when I was nine to 13 with sad lonely people who were all in their 20s or older. Later in my teens, I slept with older men. So I was used to being the youngest, or younger, person in the room. There was some satisfying novelty to that. Now I'm no longer the youngest person in the room, and I feel much better about (less creeped out by?) this power dynamic.

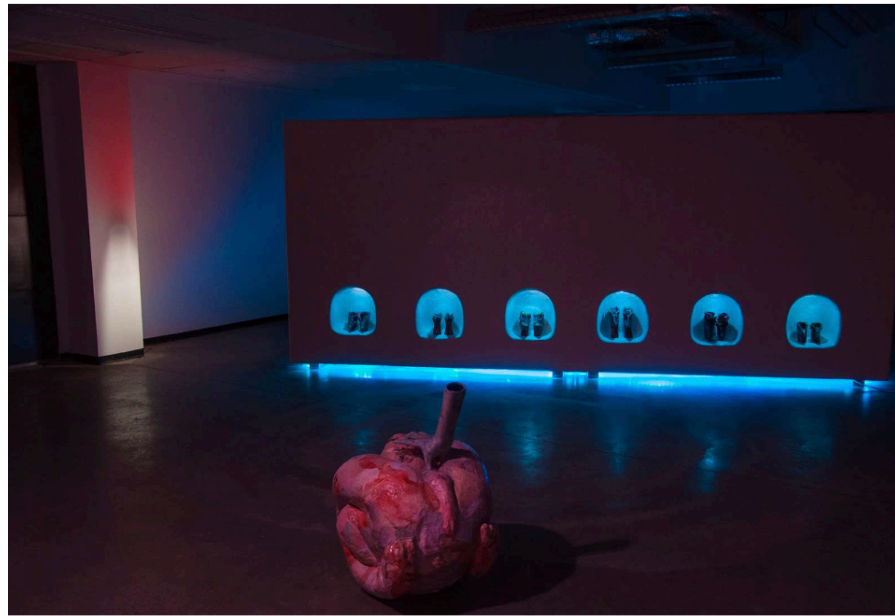
What about when you were born and raised has influenced your work?

Catalina Ouyang: I grew up in a suburb of Chicago until I was seven, then lived in a town in New Jersey called Parsippany until I was 18. A crowning characteristic of both places was their white supremacy—in Illinois because everybody was just white, there was no diversity; in Parsippany because even though it was more diverse—lots of South Asians and a decent population of East Asians—they were all

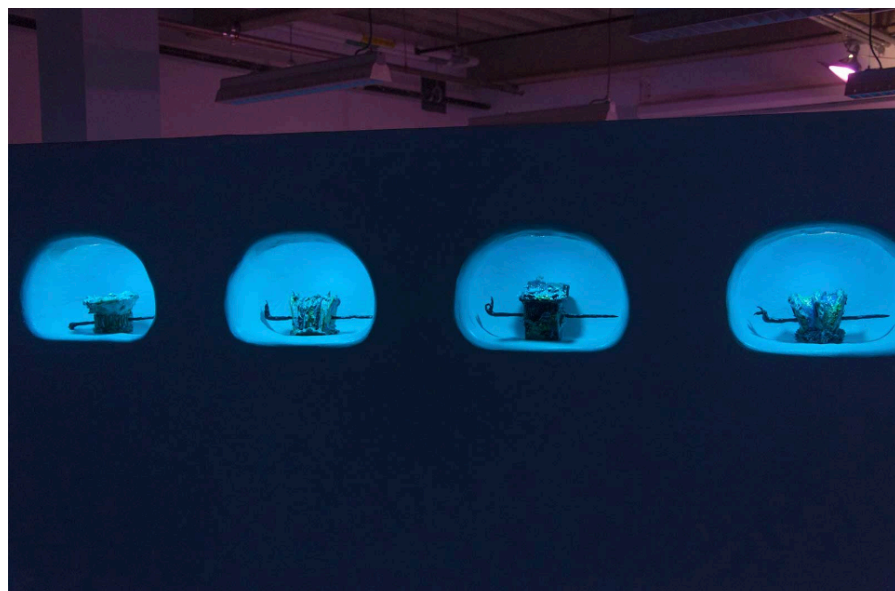
assimilationists and apologists running around throwing racial slurs at each other and [expressing] that “white is right.”

So I grew up really self-hating. I even half seriously identified with Nazis at a certain point, which I have actually never told anyone in my adult life. It was really, really fucked up, and also [scarily] not that uncommon among East Asians to support white supremacist fascism. Look at Chinese-American Trump supporters, and Mitch McConnell’s wife! We’re so complicit—including in less visible, structural racism —and that’s something we need to address and dismantle in our community.

My work is about a lot of things, but one of those things is my own decolonization process—coming back from all that internalized racism, and learning how to redirect my anger, reclaim agency and navigate complicity.



Catalina Ouyang
Warlord in a Minivan, 2017



Catalina Ouyang
A Great Wall!, 2017