

FRIEZE

'Scratching at the Moon' Resists Codifying a Diasporic Experience

At ICA Los Angeles, a group exhibition centres relationships and community as cornerstones of what it might mean to be Asian American



In *Poetics of Relation* (1990), Édouard Glissant writes that 'relation struggles and states itself in opacity'. To lay the groundwork for an ethical way of relating across difference, we must first accept the opacity – the fundamental right to remain unknowable – of the other. This interplay is at work in 'Scratching at the Moon' at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, a group exhibition curated by Anna Sew Hoy and Anne Ellegood that brings together 13 contemporary Asian American artists with ties to the city. Spanning sculpture, photography, video, multimedia installation and performance, the exhibition moves beyond limiting categorizations of diverse identities and experiences, instead centring relationships and community as cornerstones of what it might mean to be Asian American. It presents a coming together of identities that are, by definition, diasporic, hybrid and mutable.

The works stage different forms of relationality: between humans and animals (Patty Chang's *We Are All Mothers*, 2022), intergenerational family members (Amanda Ross-Ho's *Untitled Waste Image (Heavy Duty)*, 2023), artists and the ghosts of other artists (Na Mira's *Hotel*, 2024) and diasporic domestic workers and employers (Simon Leung's *Act 2: An Opera* by Luke Stoneham and Simon Leung, 2024).

Infrastructural objects interact obliquely in Michelle Lopez's hanging kinetic sculpture *Correctional Lighting* (2024), composed of a rotating, cast-iron industrial highway lamp held in precarious equilibrium with a crystal-clear, resin-cast cinderblock. The lamp shines a blinding beam onto the transparent block as the two spiral in gravity-defying orbit, the former casting a shadow that recalls the fragile opacity endangered by the bright lights of a society obsessed with surveillance, spectacle and hyper illumination.

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Exhibition review / by Vanessa Holyoak

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