



LiA Reflection

Deliverable 3
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Introduction

My LiA sought to examine the ways art, culture, and identity can and *have* merged in cities like Toronto. There were three components to this: first, a photography exhibit; second, a website; and third, a documentary. Although this was very much an academic venture, it was also deeply personal in that it was inspired by my family’s experiences moving from Hong Kong to Toronto, and helped me process some of my own thoughts about being a second-generation immigrant. Over the course of this LiA, I was able to further recognize and celebrate the diversity in this city I am lucky to call home – while also merging my curiosity in art and culture.

Thinking of a way to encapsulate and extend last summer’s research was a difficult iterative process. I knew I wanted to stray away from controversial politics in China, and instead hone in on aspects of culture and art. After much back and forth – chats with professors, advisors, and friends – I finally decided to explore the phrase “art as a tool for urban change” as a continuation of my ethnographic work in HKSAR. Specifically, in order to engage the community, I wanted to observe and document the experiences of other immigrants in Toronto; this turned into an even more important cause for me after watching isolationist, anti-immigrant sentiment grow increasingly popular in western liberal democracies.

Part I: Some Workshopping

As preparation for the curative work I was going to engage in as part of my photography exhibit, I participated in a 3-day workshop hosted by Tomaso Clavarino and Matteo Balduzzi, in partnership with Italy’s Ministry of Culture and the Istituto Italiano di Cultura di Toronto. Throughout, we were tasked with presenting our work, receiving and adapting to critiques, and photographing Toronto in a 24-hour challenge. Tomaso and Matteo showed me that photography can be used to capture the mundane in a new light. Their advice and mentorship over these three days allowed me to rethink my curation of my exhibit, and demonstrated how an outsider’s perspective and encouragement can allow for bigger-picture thinking. I also benefitted immensely from being given time to focus solely on photography, even if just for a mere three days.

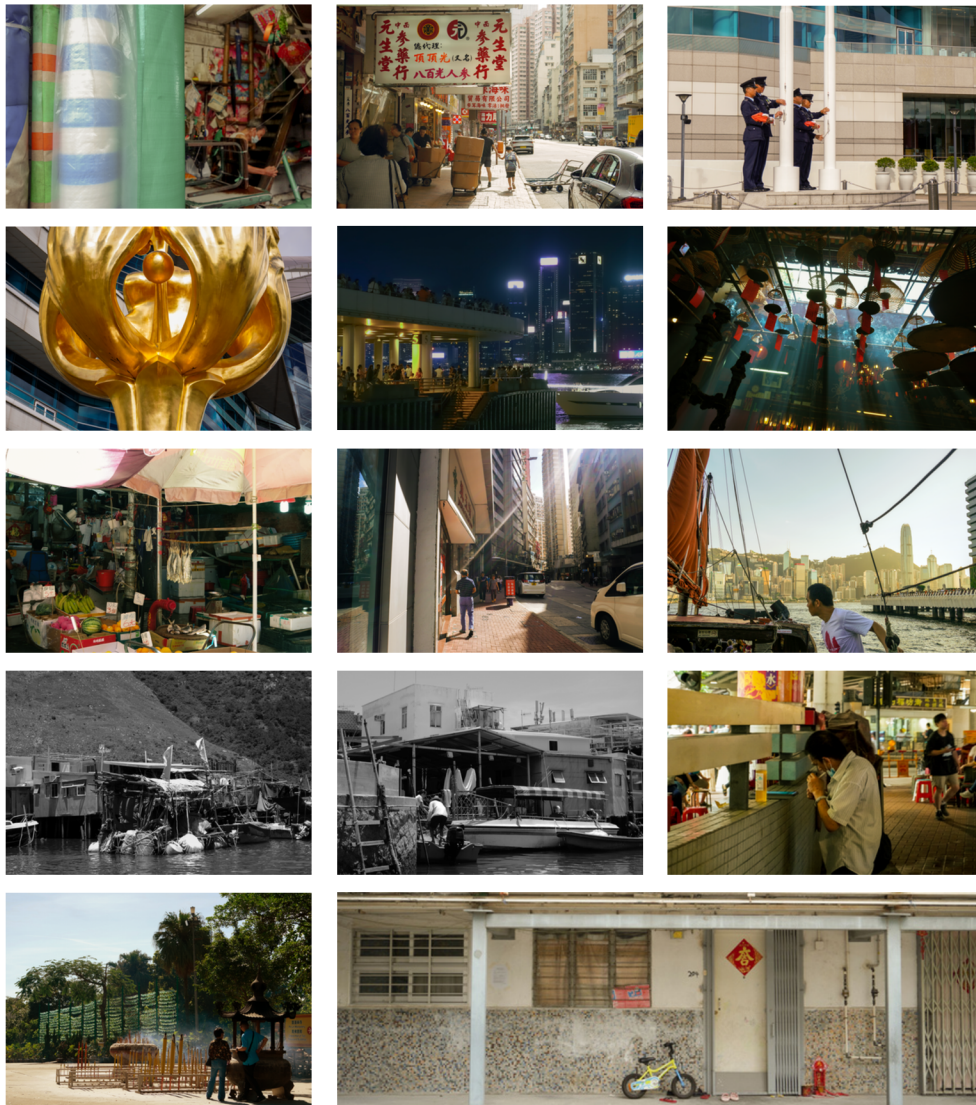


The series of photos I took as part of the 24-hour challenge.



Part II: Curating an Exhibit, and Then Some

I'd like to acknowledge Sophie Disch from the Hart House Art Committee, and thank her for the work she put into making "Hong Kong: Beyond Then and Now" possible. It started off with an email and a prayer that someone on the committee would be willing to take on this project and display it in the halls of Hart House – if not, I would have had to find other venues (potentially disastrous and costly!). The process itself was relatively straightforward, as I had done installations before, but some of the tools (ie. the frames, hooks, display foam board, wires) were slightly unfamiliar. In those instances, I was immensely grateful to have someone as experienced and dedicated as Sophie helping with this, and it highlighted the importance of teamwork and communication: not much can be done or accomplished well alone.



My exhibit, *Hong Kong: Beyond Then and Now*

Part III: Building (or Designing, Mostly) a Website

The website was not entirely successful. However, it presented a good learning moment: once I realised it was not gaining traction nor serving the purpose I envisioned, I pivoted.

Part IV: Heart to Heart

The most rewarding part of my LiA experience was definitely the documentary and interview component. It took me a while to muster up the courage to speak to someone and ask if they had time in their day to be interviewed; however, with the help of a friend, I was able to start my first conversation and build from there. In total, I collected seven recordings, a handful of which I thought were substantive enough to include in near-full in the final documentary. I was especially struck by the story of a medical student named Steven, who told me he had moved from Burma (Myanmar) to Taiwan, then to Canada. He recounted the brutality of the war he had witnessed, how that inspired him to go into medicine, and his connection with his roots. I learned a lot through the editing and recording process of the documentary as well: patience, revising, and reflecting became crucial skills throughout.

Overall, I am sure the conversations I've had, the exhibit I created, and the video that is to be finished and published soon have impacted my community (gauging from feedback from interviews for now). Although perhaps somewhat hard to track tangibly, I know this will bring attention this brings to deeper reflection on immigration and what it means to have a "motherland".



Bonus: I encountered UofT's Class of 2025 graduation ceremony while attempting to gather the courage to interview.