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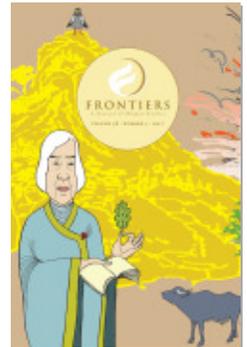
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Artist Statement: Ode to a Muse, Ever-Present

Audrey Chan

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# Artist Statement

## Ode to a Muse, Ever-Present

AUDREY CHAN

A few years ago, I was fortunate to accompany Ahma on her return visit to her village of Dongwan outside Shantou, Guangdong Province, China. The well and the rice thresher were still there, practically untouched since she was a young widowed mother during the early years of the Communist Revolution. To me, she was my ever-present grandmother, Soolsin Chan-Ling (1922–2014), who helped raise me from birth in Chicago. To all her nieces and nephews, grandnieces and grandnephews in China, she was a noble goddess from afar become flesh, to be worshipped and doted upon, riding in a wheelchair as her sedan chair. Due to her old age and health, she would not be able to return again. But she would visit home often in her mind as her dementia progressed in her final years and every day would ask to be taken there, by car, ship, or plane. I came to understand dementia as the mind's way of preparing for the transition between life and death. It loosens time, deep memory slides into the present, places and people long buried become visible.

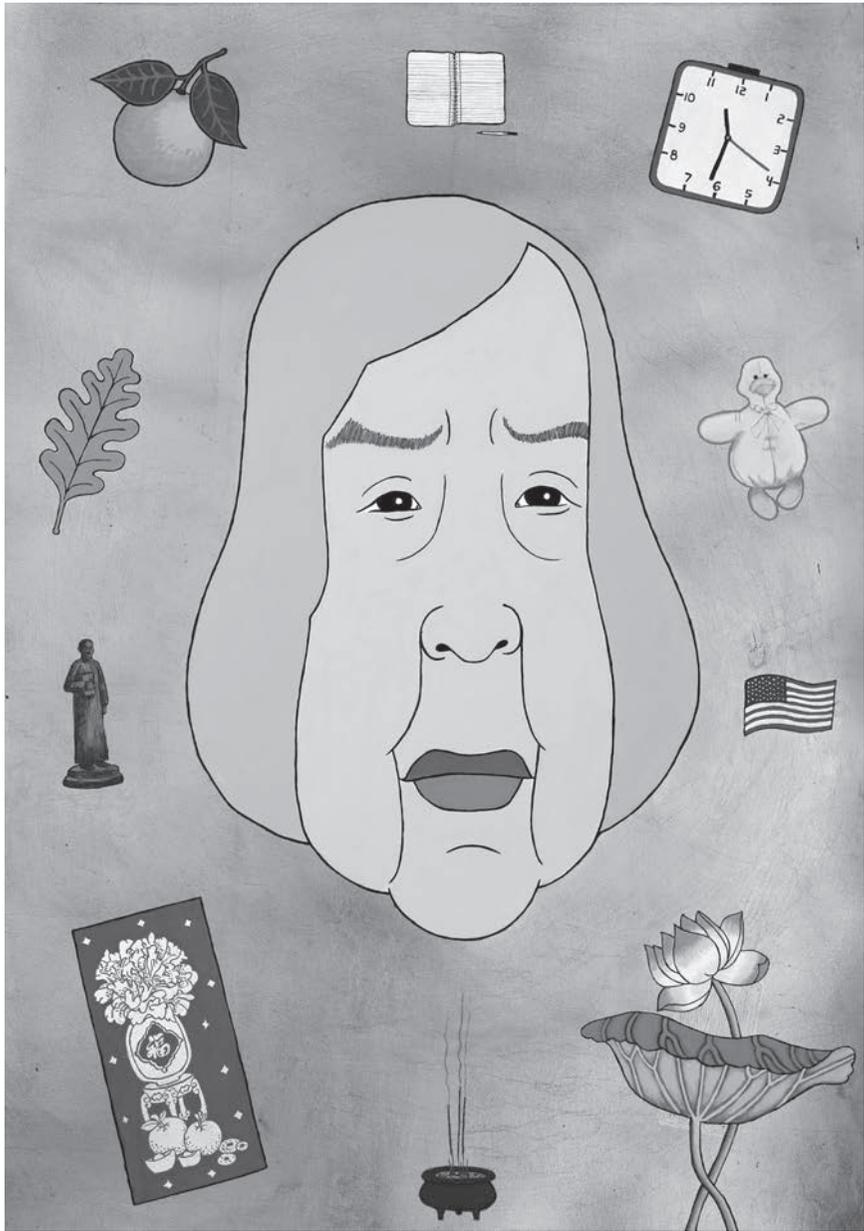
“Center of the Universe, Ahma (detail)” is a fragment of a larger whole and acknowledges that the “center of the universe” shifts with each individual's axis and point of reference. Our shared inner lives as grandmother and granddaughter composed an allegorical landscape made of the stories my father would tell me about Ahma, the lullaby she would sing to me in her Chaozhou dialect, the stories she would read every day in the *World Journal* Chinese-language newspaper. In this scene I wanted to portray Ahma as I knew her: monumental in her importance though slight in stature, philosophical, and bearing witness to the upheavals of history and culture in China and America. There remain gaps of memory, loose threads, and missing pieces. “A Few of Her Favorite Things” was painted after her death as an offering and a medium, an image for contemplation and worship that serves as spiritual intermediary between the realms of the living and the dead. These works render visible an

unspoken bond, making a place to meet each other again that transcends the physicality of our bodies or this passing world.

Our relationship was made of quiet gazes, the beginnings of greetings, expressions of gratitude, promises to return. Over the years, Ahma would firmly grasp and turn my hands and admire how soft my skin was, comparing it to hers, parchment-thin and finely pleated. In the final weeks, days, and hours of her life, our gazes were held longer and her grasp, while still firm in one hand, grew weaker. She told us not to cry when she was gone. Ahma taught me how to live and how to die. She did both without fear, holding onto a stillness and calm in this turbulent world.

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AUDREY CHAN (b. 1982, Chicago, Illinois) is a Los Angeles-based artist, writer, and educator. Her research-based projects articulate political and cultural identities through allegorical narrative and the feminist construct of “the personal is political.” Chan’s solo and collaborative work has been exhibited at the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego; Chinese American Museum; Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery; Ben Maltz Gallery at Otis College of Art and Design; Luxun Academy of Fine Arts (China); Galerie de l’École Régionale des Beaux-Arts de Nantes (France); Parc Saint-Léger (France); BKS Garage at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (Denmark); and other venues. She has been commissioned by LA Metro to create a large-scale public artwork for the Little Tokyo/Arts District Regional Connector subway station, opening in 2021. Chan received a BA with honors in studio art and political science from Swarthmore College and an MFA from the Program in Art at California Institute of the Arts.





*A Few of Her Favorite Things*