

February 14, 2020

Re: Yong Fei Guan Nomination Eldon + Anne Foote Visual Arts Prize

Dear Jurors,

With pride, we nominate Yong Fei Guan's sculptural public art installation, *金猪 Golden Pig* for the 2020 Eldon + Anne Foote Visual Arts Prize. This artwork was exhibited during The Works Art & Design Festival on Capital Plaza, on the Alberta Legislature Grounds, June 20 to July 2, 2019.

Standing at 7 feet-tall and 5 feet in diameter, *金猪 Golden Pig* is exemplary in its transformation of found materials. Guan's treatment of the surface of the work, composed of thousands of plastic 6-pack drink rings, renders the materials into an alluring texture, unrecognizable from their original form. Painted gold, the sculpture iconizes the ubiquitous golden piggy bank, a common item in Chinese homes and businesses.

*金猪 Golden Pig* is coded with dichotomy of cultural meanings. On February 5, 2019, we entered the year of the Earth Pig. According to Chinese horoscope theory, the Pig is a positive symbol for a year of good fortune and luck. Conversely, the Western idea of "pig" is often embedded with negative attributes like fat, greed, gluttony and uncleanliness.

To connect the materials to the form, Guan followed two disparate paths to their intersection. One path is the global issue of plastic waste. The second is the often devalued, misrepresented stories of Chinese immigrants in Canada. For Guan, these ideas intersect at a historical moment in 2018 when China stopped accepting large volumes of recyclables from Canadian municipalities. This garbage crisis recognizes a need for collaboration between all countries and made visible the crucial role China played in recycling and waste management.

In a way, the flow of goods and waste highlights the codependency between countries and the apparitional nature of borders. Products manufactured in China make their way to Canada, to be used, and returned, with an exchange of value at every step. The differentiation between "immigrant" and "Canadian" is also arbitrary, yet exclusivity and discrimination are felt amongst newcomers.

Adding further layers to Guan's deceptively simple figurative sculpture, is the role capitalism plays in our waste production, connecting wealth (evoked by the piggy bank as a symbol) to excessive production and consumption, and therefore waste (the main material used in Guan's sculpture). Where the Pig as a golden piggy bank diverts, however, is that it imparts ideas of careful savings, appreciation of wealth, and sharing. The Golden Piggy bank may be a mass-produced item, but it bears cultural reverence.

Guan's ardent community engagement should also be considered. Born in China, where she was raised with waste-nothing values, the artist moved to Edmonton in 2007 knowing very little English. Her own experience of isolation nostalgia motivates the artist to organize and activate positive community building, facilitating workshops and events targeted at Edmonton's Chinese community that expand to thoughtful dialogue around racism, reconciliation, and gentrification. Throughout 2019, *金猪 Golden Pig* served as a gathering place, for meaningful collaboration and engagement, travelling to venues throughout Edmonton and as far as Fort McMurray Alberta. Each location brought a different political context, highlighting the artwork's thematic plasticity.

*金猪 Golden Pig* is a rare artwork that balances nuance, craft, and gravitas with the usual public art cues: scale, accessibility, and colour. Its burdensome messages are palatable, layered, and constructive, speaking to the Eldon + Anne Foote Prize' aim of rewarding artwork based on artistic, historical and social merit.

Regards,



Susan Winters  
Curatorial Supervisor  
The Works Art & Design Festival