

To Whom It May Concern:

SoooJJ Beauty Salon is the key work in Vivian Han-Tat's solo exhibition, *Bowl Cuts and 爆炸裝 (baau3 zaa3 zong1)*, first presented in 2022 at Soft Gallery. This work was chosen for publishing online through CBC's Creator Network in February 2023, and shown in-person alongside the Edmonton premiere of *Big Fight Little Chinatown* by Karen Cho, at the Edmonton Chinatown Multi-Cultural Centre during the "Storytelling in Chinatown from Within" Event in May.

SoooJJ Beauty Salon, is a 3D rendered piece that remembers Chinatown's beauty salons through her childhood self. In the render, we see a child wearing blue shorts and white velcro shoes sitting atop a small brick building named the "SoooJJ Beauty Salon". The Salon advertises on white cardstock in the window, in three languages: hair-cuts, perms, colour treatments, gel nails for \$45, and 50% off permanent make-up. To the right, is a bright pink lollipop outside of its wrapper. And to the left, a red-painted lamp post signifies where in the city these memories live. The Salon sits on a black-and-white checkered tile, reminiscent of the checkered interior at the actual salon where her mother worked in Chinatown. But the white building is unwithered and dream-like, floating on the canvas. Asian salons are a palimpsest of immigrant stories; of first-generation kids running through stinging clouds of perm solution in the air, of after-school care while waiting for their mama to clock out; and of Asian beauty rituals linked to prosperity. The story, like many immigrant lives, is layered and contextual.

Bowl Cuts and 爆炸裝 (baau3 zaa3 zong1), is a multimedia exhibition with photography, 3D render, and installation art. *爆炸裝 (baau3 zaa3 zong1)* is cantonese slang for the tight perms popular throughout Asia in the 70s and 80s. This story starts with the home salon, double-stacked with Yellow Pages as booster seats, where growing into your Asian identity begins with a bowl cut. And then bang trims, tight perms, and DIY hair dyes.

At Soft Gallery, the exhibition is a total sensory experience of the home salon. A bright blue salon chair sits in the centre of the gallery space, ready with a pair of plastic, red slippers (to avoid socks getting stuck with hair), and two thick Yellow-Pages. Next to the hanging red and gold calendar, there are a mix of vintage posters, of famous Asian celebrities in the 80s, portraits of mama at work, and recreated self-portraits of the artist. Opposite this space is a large render, printed and plastered to fit the length and height of the wall. Pink boxes line the image, each to the scale of a typical grocery-store box dye, showing a young smiling girl of different hair colours. The box reads "SoooJJ Hair Dye with Rice Extract", each with unique colour names referencing popular foods or snacks Chinese kids would remember growing up eating: Milk Tea Brown, Jujube Red,

and Porcelain Blue. A small display shelf with dye boxes of the same brand invites visitors to “shop” and read the colour catalogue details in hand. Chinese hits of the 80s play in the imaginary aisle with faint sounds of hair shears snipping away more than the requested 2 inches.

The work has become a point of discussion for many first-generation children of immigrants, with the exhibition as a space to reminisce on how this vibrant community has impacted our youth. From haircuts to grocery shopping and favourite restaurants, *Bowl Cuts and 爆炸裝 (baau3 zaa3 zong1)* has sparked more reflection on how Chinatown has changed rapidly especially during the pandemic.

“The ethos of Soft Gallery is to showcase emerging contemporary artists, typically through a solo presentation. We have a unique space, a small floating cube about ten feet by ten feet in width and about six feet high. When you enter the cube there is a feeling that the work surrounds you. Vivian’s conceptual framework for Bowl Cuts and 爆炸裝 (baau3 zaa3 zong1) was what we look for on paper, but it was in the physical realization of her work that Vivian’s multimedia installation really stands out. The specificity of the objects (the yellow pages, the salon chair, the dye boxes) are all set-pieces that help the audience feel connected to not only a time period, but a place. A place that is both familiar for many of us that grew up in Edmonton, but also completely unfamiliar for those of us who have only passed through. Vivian’s exhibition and the artifacts she curated and created imbue a tenderness and authenticity that pays homage to her past, while still trying to progress and lean in to contemporary means. For instance, Vivian’s ability to make digital work, to combine her past and future, is a really important entrance into the work for a new generation. Her work is inviting without pandering and when you are inside the exhibition there is a sense of comfort and belonging. Bowl Cuts and 爆炸裝 (baau3 zaa3 zong1) holds space for what could be competing elements with grace and care, and it is was privilege and honour to debut this work at Soft Gallery.”

- Dan Zimmerman (Founder and Curator, Soft Gallery Edmonton)

With the popularity and increased exposure to 3D art, this work was chosen to be presented in a style that is more in tune with younger, digital viewers learning about the history of Edmonton’s Chinatown. The project brings some lightness to a very complex evolution to our city. Hopefully it encourages those to continue spending time in the neighbourhood and finding ways to explore their own culture, to find their version of sitting in the salon chair getting a bowl cut.

Vivian Han-Tat is an interdisciplinary artist whose work exists between 2D and 3D, bridging where our world and the digital lasso meet. Her work often combines elements of photography, graphic design, 3D render, and built installations with themes that transport viewers between nostalgic in-real-life memories to surreal futures of the digital space. More recently, Han-Tat’s work has explored her Asian-Canadian identity and

West-East upbringing through her projects *Say It With Fruit*, and *License Plate with An*
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