

Wen-hao Tien: Home On Our Backs is distilled from Boston Chinatown stories learned during the artist's 2020 artist-in-residence at the Pao Arts Center. With much personal reflection, enlivened by Chinese folklore and culture, this interdisciplinary work is a refreshing take on nomadism, and on Asian American stories.



Red Dress, digital print, April 2020



I never miss someone carrying a red plastic grocery bag on a subway ride. They've been to Chinatown," Every red plastic bag holds the familiar taste of home food. While the *Red Dress* is perfect for the party, due to the pandemic, there will be no banquet for an extended period of time.



Home on Our Backs
installation, Chinese vintage animal shaped wooden object, likely a decorative part from roof, lego sculpture, projection on wall

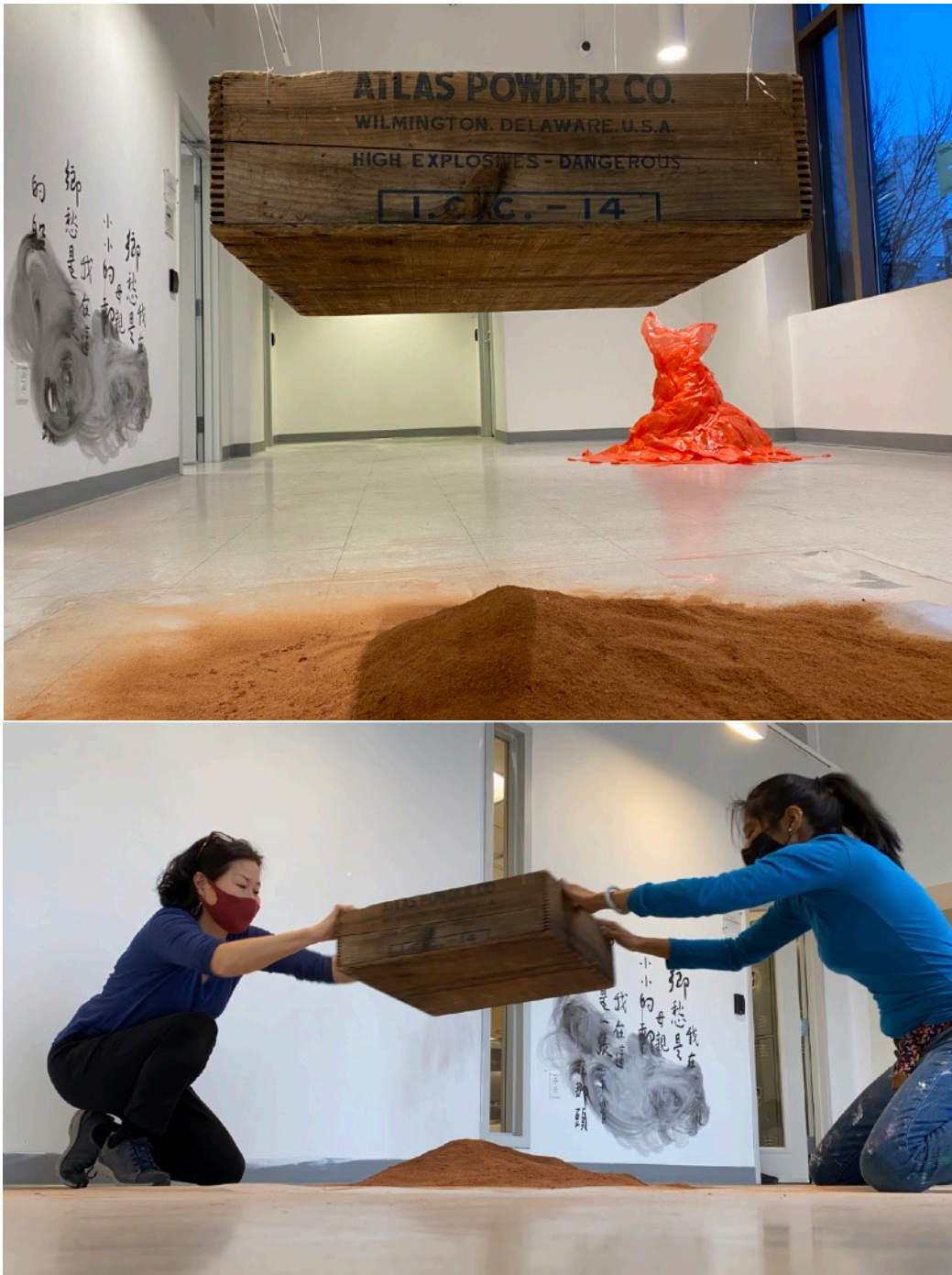


別有洞天， Laundry Rocks
Image transfer and painting on paper



Study of a Chinese laundry
Ink on paper

The Chinese laundries of the 1800s were the first wide-spread business enterprises developed by early Chinese immigrants. Over time, they became a significant part of everyday life for Boston Chinatown families, and a means to send money back home. Astounded by these family histories, Tien reimagined piles of shirts into Chinese “scholar rock”. One can see a world through a rock, and imagine a new world despite one’s current situation.



沙子造山 · *Dust to Mountain*

Vintage crate for explosives, circa 1900, sawdust, calligraphy

Triggered by the harsh environment of the building the Transcontinental Railroad, this work is made out of materials to be found at railroad construction sites. On the wall, 鄉愁 *Nostalgia*, by the late exiled poet, Yu Guangzhong, was written and smeared.

Legend has it that a determined 90 year-old *Yugong* (foolish old man) mobilized his community, and eventually the Lord of Heaven, to move a mountain. Can we shake enough dust to build a mountain today?



關公, GuangGong
Red herbs, thread in resin



Am I Really Here, video
<https://vimeo.com/407844607>

Visiting Mount Hope Cemetery Boston, where many early Boston Chinatown immigrants are buried, Tien sensed the complex feelings of homesickness, pride, and regret. Regarded as a virtue in Chinese social thinking, all things return to their source in old age, much like expatriates returning home. Her video, “Am I Really Here,” pays homage to a class of people forgotten.

About the artist

Wen-hao Tien

MPH (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health)

MFA in visual art (Lesley University College of Art and Design)

Three decades ago, Tien came to the US as a graduate student from Taiwan and a northern Chinese family displaced by WWII and the Chinese Civil War. Her work often addresses nomadism, and being out of place in a “life in-flux.” Trained in biomedical sciences, public health, and Asian studies, Wen-hao’s work merges concerns of art, science and culture.

Wen-hao is also Assistant Director at Boston University Pardee School of Global Studies. In her professional role, Wen-hao builds interdisciplinary scholarly communities.



Installation image @Pao Arts Center, 2021 by Warren Patterson