



Yuhan Zheng, *Round and Full*, 2023. Billboard at 180 Shaw Street, Toronto. 8 x 8 feet. Photo by Shani K Parsons.

Round and Full, 2021 Yuhan Zheng

Exhibition essay by Avalon Mott

As I gaze upon Yuhan Zheng's photograph *Round and Full*, I immediately think of the word *abundance* and how it contains multitudes. Most often used as a synonym for the accumulation of prosperity, affluence, and riches, abundance can also articulate a hoard of chaos, turmoil, and discord. These are meanings that, in most cases, can be found behind the facade of abundance if the context of its display is explored. By encountering *Round and Full* as a billboard located at Shaw and Dundas, the viewer is being offered the opportunity to do just that: to take a moment and question how the sublime of abundance can be born from this dissonance.

Round and Full contains undeniable visual abundance in its subject of lush mandarin orange bushes for sale at a market stall. The potted bushes photographed are of various sizes—a cacophony of short and tall bushes, in various pots and planters, overflowing from the generic white tent where they are being sold. The constant amongst the differing bushes is their heaviness, each brimming with perfectly sphere mandarin oranges, which Zheng notes are symbols of good fortune and luck in Chinese culture.¹ They appear so laden with their bounty that one can almost smell their scent upon spending a prolonged period of time with the photograph: ripe, bright, and juicy. Peppered alongside the mandarin bushes are other various tropical plants in radiant hues of red and pink, with dashes of yellow. On their own, these plants are also articulations of splendour, but alongside the mandarin bushes they seem modest by comparison. A testament to the power of abundance.

As the eye is held by the brilliant display of the market stall, details of the context of the photograph emerge, adding a new layer to the surface of visual abundance captured. Of note are the red envelopes² hanging from a number of the bushes, alluding to the location of the photograph: a market³ in Wuhan, China in 2021.

When the pandemic was declared in March 2020, Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province in China, took on a new context as the first city to experience the magnitude of COVID-19. The world watched as the city and its people went through something unfathomable. Lockdowns ensued and citizens perished. We watched this in real time at first in disbelief, and then in fear knowing that our cities would soon feel these global impacts. The COVID-19 pandemic was the dystopic side of abundance.

¹ Avalon Mott + Yuhan Zheng in conversation, May 2023. Toronto, ON.

² “Red envelopes or hongbao in Mandarin and lai see in Cantonese are small red and gold packets containing money given to children, family members, friends, and employees as a symbol of good luck. In Chinese culture, the color red is associated with energy, happiness and good luck. The red envelope itself is considered lucky not necessarily the money inside.” Kennedy Wirth, “What’s the significance of Lunar New Year red envelopes?” in *The Seattle Times*, January 25 2017: www.seattletimes.com/life/whats-the-significance-of-lunar-new-year-red-envelopes/.

³ A shopping market that is specifically where pets, fish, insects and flower are sold. These markets are different from the Wet Markets in Wuhan which have been linked to the outbreak of COVID-19. Avalon Mott and Yuhan Zheng in conversation, May 2023. Toronto, ON.

Too much of something, in this case a microscopic virus, that changed our lives forever and made us question if life as we knew it would ever be the same.

What Wuhan also demonstrated was the ability to overcome.⁴ During the first days, months, and years of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was hard to imagine that markets or public human spaces in general would ever be able to exist again. This image is a testament to a future we didn't know was certain. It is important to acknowledge that this photograph captures a public space, but that it is also installed as a billboard in another public space. As such, the photograph becomes a portal, one where this market in Wuhan and the corner of Shaw and Dundas become connected. It produces a nonlinear sense of time between places: a connection not only in the present, but in their pre-pandemic liveliness and their futures in our new normal.

All of this—the lushness, the splendour, the unruliness, and hope—contained within the abundance of *Round and Full*.

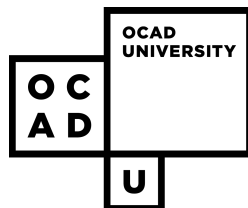
AVALON MOTT
Toronto, August 2023

⁴ China's zero-COVID policy was among the "world's strictest COVID controls. Hundreds of millions of people [had to] submit to daily tests and quarantine for extended periods." In November 2022, "the largest protests since Tiananmen Square in 1989 [erupted] in China, as tens of thousands of demonstrators across the country fill the street to denounce Beijing's strict quarantine and testing policies known as zero COVID." It is important to understand that China's way through COVID-19 was led by this government policy, which was largely denounced by its citizens and global world leaders, as well as the WHO. Nick Schiffrin and Teresa Cebrian Aranda, "Thousands in China protest zero-COVID policy in largest demonstrations in decades," *PBS*, November 28 2022: www.pbs.org/newshour/show/thousands-in-china-protest-zero-covid-policy-in-largest-demonstrations-in-decades.

About the OCAD U Career Launcher Recipients

Yuhan Zheng is a lens-based artist living in Toronto. Yuhan's work is grounded in her daily experiences and her approach mainly involves performance and self-portrait. She is interested in investigating the ambiguity of the boundary between the virtual and the real. Through practice, she seeks to reveal the intricacies of navigating identities and finding a sense of belonging in a diverse, constantly changing world. Her artistic interests also extend to the inter-generational relationships within her own family and the relationship between materiality and spirituality.

Avalon Mott (she/her) is a curator, lens-based artist, and arts administrator originally from Vancouver BC, now calling Toronto/Tkaronto home. She was a Co-Founder of FIELD Contemporary (Vancouver), and is the current Director of Xpace Cultural Centre. A recent graduate from OCAD U with her MFA in Criticism + Curatorial Practice, Avalon's curatorial practice is rooted in supporting emerging and under-represented artists. Her thesis research explores the curatorial methodology of exhibitionary affect and how it can aid in creating moments to feel by encouraging relational experiences between the viewer and the works on display.



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