

True Romance

Lin Wang

September 5 – October 25, 2025

Opening Reception: Friday, September 5, 6–8 pm

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HB381 is pleased to announce *True Romance*, a solo exhibition by Oslo-based ceramicist Lin Wang (b. 1985, China). Wang is especially known for her production of large-scale still life installations and sculptural assemblages which investigate the corporeality and historic resonance of porcelain. Over centuries, porcelain's combination of a kaolin-rich white clay body with deep cobalt glazes has registered the ongoing effects of contact and trade, as well as the phantasmic projections of a long-standing dialog between East and West. Working between China and Norway, Wang's interest in this interchange holds personal significance, tinged by her own wanderlust, homesickness, and experiences of cultural discovery.

Fine china, originally imported along the Silk Road's overland trade routes and maritime corridors, has been notoriously difficult to reproduce throughout history, a Gordian knot which confounded European chemists who termed the mystifying substance "white gold." One thread of Wang's ongoing project on the topic, *Exotic Dreams and Poetic Misunderstanding*, investigates Europe's quest for Chinese porcelain, exposing deeply-held forms of looking and longing. At the same time, Wang often amends this perspective on alterity with her personal impressions; recalling the children's fairy tales she was told as a young girl, she teases out the West's own romantic mythos.

The hallucinatory scene of Wang's exhibition is introduced through a pair of two-meter-wide metal screens which take the form of a mountainous coastline. These screens, titled *On the Other Side of the World*, are inset with thousands of minute porcelain plates pigmented in the evocative blues and whites of Delftware. Produced in Jingdezhen, China, Wang's hand-painted plates scintillate, reflecting light like the fragmented surface of the ocean. As with her previous work *The Silk Roads*, presented at Kunsthall Grenland in 2019, the diminutive plates combine *en masse* to form a rippling abstract field. The enumeration of cobalt-glazed porcelain rounds gestures to the ebb and flow of tides, currents, and waterways; its form might also be seen as coin-like tokens of exchange or the scales of a vast sea creature. Inevitably, the work touches on themes of landscape and national borders, trade routes and continental rifts. The vibrant fields of color draw the eye through nebulous gyres and into uncertain terrain, much like the clouded mountain scenes of traditional Chinese scroll paintings.

Moving further into the gallery, the viewer discovers *Porcelain Flesh Table*, a rigid steel structure supporting 72 porcelain bricks with imagery of crashing waves. Wang has long been interested in sailors and their experience traveling between countries and cultures; theirs is a lifestyle situated on the periphery of society, yet which allows them to take up the mantle of

cultural ambassador and myth maker, returning home not only with fine porcelain wares and spices but extravagant tales as well. Of particular interest to Wang, sailors carried back a visual record of otherness embedded in their skin via the elaborate tattoos they acquired in foreign ports — sometimes bawdy and profane, at others poetic or expressive of religious reverence. *Porcelain Flesh Table* interweaves the iconography of traditional blue-and-white “export ware” patterning with these images of sailors’ tattoos to startling effect. Other images appear like reflections tossed about by the waves, including mythic Buddhist and Christian deities and the fantastic creatures populating the *terra incognita* of early maps.

A semi-transparent paneled silk screen further divides up the gallery, concealing a number of porcelain vessels that appear to crack and splinter. As their blue-and-white surface falls away, a wrinkled underlayer resembling skin is revealed. Wang has developed a deft technique for imprinting texture into porcelain which gives it the appearance of actual flesh. Intercut with her sculptures’ sinuous blue-and-white imagery, stretches of skin are revealed as grizzly reminders of the human cost of the globalizing project. Throughout, the delicate materiality and translucence of porcelain — which itself summons comparison with bone and skin — is refigured not only as canvas but as a quasi-corporeal body, marked by the ambitions of commerce and the aftermath of empire.

Both *Porcelain Flesh Table* and *I Never Saw the East Coast until I Moved to the West* function as piecemeal ossuaries, still lifes in the rich tradition of the Dutch Golden Age, with porcelain bones, internal organs, and fragments of tatted and crinkled skin. In these scenes, reminiscent of the work of artists Adriana Verajão, Tishan Hsu, and Robert Gober whose critiques of bodily autonomy, subjectivity, and the advance of technology fuse subject with object, Wang proffers the ultimate collision between fantasy and reality. Hers is a gothic display of our entanglement in romantic fictions, a fragmentary sculptural tableau serving as evidence for both humanity’s brutality and its transience.

In *True Romance*, the intermingling of symbolic forms produces a third space in which the expanses of distance linking Eastern and Western pictorial traditions are collapsed. The resulting works point to the human predilection toward myth-making, invention, and misconception. In her elaborations on desire, Wang engages porcelain’s varied histories and their oceanic echoes, building upon her own experiences as ceramicist and tattoo artist, traveler and immigrant, fantasist and materialist to show us the enduring power of images.

Wang received a bachelor’s degree in sculpture from the China Academy of Art and a master’s degree in fine art from the University of Bergen. Her central research project *Exotic Dreams and Poetic Misunderstandings* consists of an ongoing series of exhibitions over the past decade. In 2019, as part of the research for this project, she produced two solo exhibitions at the Kunsthall Grenland and the Vigeland Museum. Wang has completed numerous public commissions, including for the Hammerfest Hospital, Sarpsborg Library, and Tønsberg Courthouse. Her work is included in the collections of the Nordenfjeldske Kunstindustrimuseum, Oslo Kommune, Porsgrunn Kommune, and the National Museum, Oslo, Norway.