

CHERRISSE ALCANTARA BIO

Cherisse Alcantara (b. Philippines) is a painter from the San Francisco Bay Area and currently an MFA '21 Candidate at the *Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA)* in Philadelphia. She received her B.A. Art Practice at the *University of California-Berkeley* (2013) and the recipient of the Sussman Prize in Painting. She has shown in numerous galleries and art centers including Vessel Gallery (Oakland, CA), the Berkeley Art Center, Arc Gallery (San Francisco, CA), Pence Gallery (Davis, CA), the Piedmont Center for the Arts and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts Museum. Her most recent residency award is the Jentel Artist Residency (Wyoming). In her ongoing and parallel series, *Portal* and *Borderspace*, Cherisse reflects on belonging, identities, and the shifting concepts of home through liminal spaces and landscapes.

RUMINATIONS

What is Asian America in 2020's?

In 2020's, I optimistically think of Asian America as a diverse and inclusive community of people from all walks of life and background, who takes pride in the Asian American heritage, history and movement; who supports not only the diverse and multiple individuals and groups within the Asian American community but all minorities and marginalized people; who welcomes and works in solidarity with other communities while recognizing the strength in unity. I'd like to think that the Asian American spirit celebrates differences and shared experiences and humanity.

What is Asian American art? Does such a thing exist?

This is an important question I am deeply thinking about especially while in a graduate MFA program. What I can say is that Asian American art is not singular. I hope that all artists, regardless of race and gender, be allowed the freedom to create and develop their true and unique artistic voices and visual languages. Instead of defining what is Asian American art, let us forego expectations and categories which only place limitations, and lastly, let us support different voices, approaches and ways of making.

Q & A

Does a racialization and racial formation of the US affect your work as an artist?

Yes, racial but also social formation of the US affect my work as an artist. Because my paintings explore concepts of identities, belonging and home rooted in my lived experiences of migration and diaspora, post-colonial history, intersectionality, and history of and current issues of people of color in the US, one cannot help but think of the historical, the post-colonial, race relations and the power structures that perpetuated and which continue to maintain oppressions and marginalization.

Are you responding or adapting to the political landscape, social landscape? Is this directly or subconsciously expressed in your art?

I would say the rhetoric originating from our leaders during the pandemic in regards to AAPI correlated to the increased anti-asian violence have only made me reflect further on the importance of hearing the multiple voices and perspectives from the diverse communities of AAPI.

What in your work comes from your own culture? Heritage?

My art introspectively explores what is it like to think from the mind and body given my intersectional identities, for instance, as an immigrant who has lived in California for over two decades, and as an Asian and Filipina-American woman in diaspora coming from a post-colonial country. It is about making sense of these overlapping experiences as I think about the shifting concepts of home, identities and the liminal spaces inhabited. It becomes a non-linear remembrance and about memory—where everyday and familiar places, childhood and ethnic memories from my native country, and projected feelings all intertwine as I re-imagine spaces. They are psychic and transitional spaces I locate myself in which can be alienating but also where a new consciousness is possible. For instance, the negative spaces in my most recent paintings containing landscapes with openings or portals are inspired by native amulets. This way of creating allude to the kind of synthesis and the weaving of the past and present, personal and collective memories. It is as a way of making sense of identities and home while creating new meanings and forms of expression. This also alludes to the transformations that happens in migration, adoption, or the interaction of cultures and languages.

In what ways do you think representation of BIPOC and LGBTQ artists is shifting in the art world today?

I think the recent events such as Black Lives Matter Movement have generated interests in certain artists of color. The demands for authentic support and allyship have brought up conversations of tokenism, representation and diversity as not enough, and institutional critiques within the art world to name a few. My hope is that these are not merely trends but a continued path towards changes in the art world and institutions towards support of all kinds of artists and workers in the art communities. Furthermore, my hope is for curators and curators of color, museum directors and etc. to help normalize the presence of BIPOC and LGBTQ artists where they are not only shown during “themed” exhibitions.

Is your work immune to social political context like hate crimes or demonization of Asian Americans?

All of these made me have a greater belief on the need for the multiple stories and lives of Asian Americans to be heard and made visible. This is where art, literature, cinema come in. Humanization of Asian Americans are one of the many things that can counter the demonization and objectification of AAPI.

Do you have thoughts on rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans?

I have many thoughts on the rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans. I am deeply mourning the loss, the violence, the hate and the rhetoric. I also mourn history and the often unknown and forgotten historical past of anti-asian hate crimes in America, of the colonial and imperialist past towards various AAPI and BLPOC communities, and of the objectification and hyper-sexualization of AAPI women to name a few. I believe in building allyship within our communities and other communities for our struggles and towards actions in order to dismantle white supremacy; in educating the general population about the AAPI community with its issues, diversity and history, and demanding this.

Do ideas about the model minority myth perpetuate and influence your life and/or artwork?

I am not sure if my works directly responds to the critique of the model minority myth which I most definitely think is dangerous. It also creates hierarchies, and internal and external conflicts within the AAPI community to name a few. However, by asserting my agency as an artist and by living the life of an artist, which meant rebelling against this myth and against familial expectations, then I believe that is a response to the model model minority myth.

As anti-Asian hate speech makes its way into media, what effect does this have on AAPI identity?

Do perceptions of silencing or amplifying play a role in your identity and voice as a contemporary artist?

I believe that by searching for a unique artistic voice and communicating my stories, lived experiences and perspectives, I am in a way breaking the culture of silence.

Most importantly - all please answer how are artists (you personally) going to respond to these occurrences and communicate with viewers with optimism, or as a path forward with resilience and vision?

I believe that AAPI visual artists, poets, and writers are especially needed during these times because they bring us stories that can counter the master and colonial, and singular narratives we often only hear. They can potentially offer multiple voices within communities of color and marginalized groups. My art is very much invested in the hope to contribute to these multiplicity and in finding meaning, beauty and positivity within and amidst these complex and complicated spaces we occupy.