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LETTICIA COSBERT
HELEN CHO AT TRINITY SQUARE VIDEO
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You Remained Dismembered, a multimedia exhibition by Toronto-based artist **Helen Cho**, features a single channel video and a collection of sculptural pieces (very neatly) scattered across **Trinity Square Video's** gallery space. My thoughts about the show were more or less solidified by the time I left the gallery, until I got the idea to search for the origin of a quote I had screenshot from the exhibition. It is from Korean American writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's *Dictee*, a novel I own but never got around to reading until now, which is shameful because, as it turns out, it encompasses all the things I love. A tour de force if I've ever read one, *Dictee* manages to weave prose and verse with mythology and history, detailing the lives and loss of women across genre and doctrine. Suddenly, it became difficult to separate the artistic ambition of Cho's exhibition and the literary ambition of Cha's novel.



Helen Cho, *So Many Wind*, 2018, video

I began my tour of the exhibition with Cho's newest video work, *So Many Wind*, an installment of the *Tai Lam Trilogy* – a series documenting the life of Tai Phuoc Lam, who arrived to Canada in 1986 seeking refuge from the Vietnam War. I took a seat on the low wooden bench (known as *pyeong-sang*, and usually found outdoors) in an area of the gallery sectioned off with a blackout curtain as the video began and these words appeared across the bottom third of the screen: "You remained dismembered with the belief that magnolia blooms white even on seemingly dead branches and you wait." Lam begins narrating the story of his journey from Vietnam, what became of the family he left behind, and his life here now in Toronto. His English is broken and will be difficult to comprehend for the uninitiated, especially with the neverending floor creaks and sound pollution of 401 Richmond. We don't see his face until the end, but throughout Lam tells a disjointed story punctuated with jovial conversations in his car (signaled only by the sound of his turn signal synched perfectly with Vietnamese traditional music playing from his stereo), small talk with customers at the pizza shop where he works, and tearful revelations at his home with his bird chirping in the background.

Accompanying the video work in the second half of the gallery is *Materiality Reconstructing a Desire for Auspicious Life*. Pale pink and blood red vinyl petals are assembled into free standing flowers (magnolias?) atop another *pyeong-sang* – this one gilded in gold vinyl. Rocks anchor some loose "petals" that have "fallen" from the magnolias, clinging to the edge of the *pyeong-sang*. The rocks appear again on the other end of the room, here wrapped in Korean newspaper and flanked by two plants potted in yogurt containers. Cho creates and stages objects that are ill matched: synthetic with the natural, interior with the exterior, and private with the public.



Helen Cho, *So Many Wind*, 2018, video

I first came across Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's work through *This Bridge Called My Back*, an anthology of writing by radical women of color. In it, there is a photo of Cha squatting on a sidewalk dressed in all white. She wears a white blindfold with the word *VOIX* printed in black, and just below her face she holds taut another strip of cloth with the word *AVEUGLE* printed across it: Blind Voice. I have it on my desk as I am writing this review, and I'm reminded of Tai Lam's voice, which we heard without seeing him, and when we did see him, he did not speak. I also think of Cha herself, who was murdered one week after the publication of *Dictee*; she suffered unspeakable violence, not unsimilar to the women in Lam's story of home. As he tells this story, the last words Lam speaks are: "A lot of people die, you need to accept it. You don't know where you go."

Helen Cho: *You Remained Dismembered* continues until July 28.

Trinity Square Video: <http://www.trinitysquarevideo.com/>

The gallery is [accessible](#).

Letticia Cosbert is a Toronto based writer and editor, and is currently the Digital Content Coordinator at the Koffler Centre of the Arts. Letticia studied Classics, earning a B.A. from the University of Toronto, and an M.A. from Western University, where she specialized in erotic Latin poetry. Her writing and editorial work has been featured in *Ephemera Magazine*, *Sophomore Magazine*, *The Ethnic Aisle*, and publications by Katzman Contemporary, Younger Than Beyonce Gallery, Xpace, and Trinity Square Video. She can be followed on Instagram [@prettiletti](#).

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