

Li Zeng

*the good order of certain localities*

April 15 - June 10, 2023

*I like to start with a theoretical framework following a period of research. This framework initially forms a structure for an exhibition, as well as determines how the material behaves. For this show, I have in my mind the potential for recalling a marketplace where migrant labor, ecology, and economy intertwine with personal and collective history. California is a predominantly agricultural state, and many immigrants of color have contributed to that area of labor. I think of this often erased, migratory workforce, and its relation to the stabilized locality as a juxtaposition of the verticality of the body against the horizontality of the landscape.*

*The title of this exhibition is from the original text of the Chinese Exclusion Act from 1882, and although it was ended, its impact as a kind of American narrative is still playing out. There's a highly articulated sociopolitical structure that confines Asian existence, which is rooted in the long history of Asian emigration to this country. That structure changes, and I'm interested in how it situates and politicizes the body, how it projects onto the mundane.*

*Using rice comes from my interest in hunger. I grew up on a farm in China's most poverty-driven province. In my village, many hunger stories were passed down from generation to generation as retellings of survival. This inherited oral history of famine became part of who I am. It also shaped my understanding of the phenomenology of telling and showing art. Hunger is often the driving force for migration, and dyeing rice in the context of hunger is of course a violent action, in that the rice's sole purpose is negated. I would never dare to say it is a medium—to me the dyed rice is an oath to historical trauma.*

Kristina Kite Gallery presents the good order of certain localities, an exhibition by Li Zeng. Combining autobiography and theory, Zeng's work investigates the history of migration, hunger and trauma, political history and art history. Long scroll-like strips of burlap serve as staging areas for dyed rice and plaster sculptures. Casts of the artist's body, fruits and vegetables, balloons and plastic tubs, dyed in colors both toxic and vegetal, appear grotesque, swollen, and alien-like.

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Embroidered canvases render bodies and other anatomical details from art history into scar-like lines, floating on fields of raw or colored canvas. The compositions reference works by Louise Bourgeois and Rodin, transforming and digesting their imagery through the labor intensive process of sewing into the beginnings of Zeng's own visual poetry. In the back space, the installation I LIKE AMERICA / AMERICA LIKES ME refers to Joseph Beuys' well-known 1974 performance and presents a collection of historical images that question how the collective past of Asian Americans has been constructed. A wallpaper of mirroring photographs and dyed rice suggests the possibility of reconciling this history as a reconstruction.

Li Zeng (b. 1982, Henan, China) lives and works in Los Angeles. She received her BFA from School of Visual Arts, New York, and her MFA from ArtCenter College of Design in Pasadena. This is her first exhibition with the gallery.