Patty Chang (b. 1972, San Leandro, CA) is a performance and video artist known for probing taboos, stereotypes, and cultural myths. In her earlier works, Chang's humorous and sometimes unsettling work mocked exoticized and diminutive depictions of Asian women in Western popular culture. Chang frequently appears in her own work, investigating complex aspects of Asian identity by impersonating contortionists and legendary street fighter Bruce Lee, while other earlier notorious performances tested the boundaries of social acceptability. She marked a shift in her practice with Shangri-La (2005) by moving behind the camera to direct a video work which she later exhibited in a sculptural installation. A chronicle of a real journey to an imaginary place, Shangri-La examines the mythic utopia in the collective imagination in her pilgrimage to the rural Chinese village of Zhongdian, one of several places that claimed to be the "real" magical city from James Hilton's 1933 novel Lost Horizon, and the subsequent film by Frank Capra.

Chang received a BA from the University of California, San Diego in 1994. Her work has been exhibited nationwide and internationally at such institutions as The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Guggenheim Museum, New York; New Museum, New York; BAK- basis voor actuele kunst, Utrecht, the Netherlands; the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Fri-Art Centre d'Art Contemporain Kunsthalle, Fribourg, Switzerland; Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, England; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago; M+ Museum, Hong Kong; the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; and the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden. Chang has received grants from Creative Capital, the New York Foundation for the Arts, Louis Comfort Tiffany Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, Tides Foundation, and Guggenheim Foundation. Most recently, Chang participated in the 2016 Shanghai Biennale. She lives and works in Los Angeles, CA.



Above: Patty Chang, (detail) Glass urinary devices, 2017. Installation of 32 hand-blown borosilicate glass, plastic, tape, and cardboard sculptures with brass mounts on custom foam, plywood, and metal table. Courtesy the artist and BANK/MABSOCIETY

Below: Patty Chang, Configurations (Aqueduct), 2017. Vinyl print, 108in x 168in. Courtesy the artist and BANK/ MABSOCIETY



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Patty Chang The Wandering Lake 2009–2017

Cover: Patty Chang, Installation view, Invocation for a Wandering Lake, Part I, 2015. Projection, 12:49 minutes, sound, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and BANK/MABSOCIETY. Photo by Hai Zhang



Patty Chang, *Configurations (Bread)*, 2017. Inkjet print, 28in x 40in. Courtesy the artist and BANK/MABSOCIETY

The Wandering Lake, 2009-2017 is a project by American artist Patty Chang, comprising a personal, associative, and narrative meditation on mourning, caregiving, geopolitics and landscape. Chang is best known for her video and photographic work of the mid-1990s in which she performed highly charged psychic conditions expressed through intimate and eccentric acts. While Chang's earlier work focused on the artist's performing body as a vessel for complex inner states and their projection into the public realm, her work since 2005 blends elements of documentary, performance, and sometimes-esoteric references that involve research and travel to locations of political, cultural, and personal significance.

For the multi-year project *The Wandering Lake*, Chang took cues from her unique and diverse performance practice and returned to her body as performer in order to set up parallels between corporal and geographic symbolism. Working in the space between realism and abstraction, she examined the way narratives develop through geography, history, mythology, fiction and personal experience. *Patty Chang: The Wandering Lake, 2009-2017* presents a form of storytelling through a combination of video, photography, sculpture, drawing, and an artist's book. Drawing inspiration from *The Wandering Lake: Into the Heart of Asia* (1938), a book by turn-of-the-century colonial explorer Sven Hedin about a mysterious lake in a perpetual state of flux in the desert of Western China, Chang explores how the instability of geography can mirror and rupture our sense of reality, place, and self.

From Sven Hedin's The Wandering Lake: Into the Heart of Asia (1938): The Tarim in its different stages, like most desert rivers, resembles human life. First an infant streamlet, babbling among the mountain mosses and lichens; but this grows into a youth, a rushing, roaring torrent, which breaks its way with irresistible force through the hardest rocks. Then, in the prime of life, it leaves the great mountain barriers behind it, and flows out over more level regions a more sober, placid stream. The river ages; its course grows ever slower and quieter. The strength it has developed is no longer increased, it diminishes. The river has passed the noon of life, as man does. Now it struggles no longer, it has become passive, begun to vegetate; it gradually decreases in size, and at last it dies and falls forever into its grave, Lopnor, "the wandering lake."

The project began in 2009 with the artist's first visit to Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Western China, the location of the body of water that constantly shifted its location as described in Hedin's book. Arriving after rioting related to conflict between local Uyghur and Han Chinese, Chang's travel to the Lake Lop-nor was prevented by the uneasy geopolitical conditions of this region and the lack of established transportation to the remote Lake.

Chang's project continued on Fogo Island off the coast of Newfoundland, Canada, the longtime home to a major fishing fleet where there is now a moratorium on cod fishing. There, upon encountering a beached whale corpse, Chang, prompted by her overwhelming sense of mortality, performed a ritual washing of the dead animal's body. The resulting work, Invocation for a Wandering Lake, Part I (2015), captures the artist performing a reparative cleansing of human harm. Found in many religions,



such rituals are, in the artist's words, "a way of caring and connecting and at the same time letting go".

Art-making as a grieving of living as opposed to a fight against it: Is it a sign of acceptance or giving in? How could it be an exploration of how the human body and mind may function together?

In 2011, during the early stages of her pregnancy with her son, Chang visited the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan--once the world's fourth largest inland sea, significantly shrunk due to Soviet and Russian irrigation projects. She photographed the dramatic sight of a "ship cemetery" and visited the Museum of Local Lore in the township of Muynak, once the largest fishing port on the Aral Sea. Contending both with the melancholic historical and political climate of the region and her morning sickness symptoms including frequent nausea and hyper-sensitivity to smells, Chang performed a rituallike wash of a deserted fishing boat. Letdown (2017), an installation of photographs, chronicles Chang's second visit to the Aral Sea in 2014. Unable to film the outdoor infrastructure because of government restrictions, Chang, in the process of weaning her son, photographed her breast milk which she had pumped and deposited into random receptacles after meals. "A sympathetic loss of flow," these photos stood for her inability to represent and are meditations on waste, excess, and dislocation both in unfamiliar landscapes and her own body.

Since the sea shrank and receded, Muynak is in the middle of a desert. The thousands of miles of pipelines and canals that irrigate water away from the Aral Sea are proof that the sea still retains its power and volume. It was just circling and weaving and lacing the landscape in intricate patterns probably not visible from space but possibly from an airplane. Human Innovation had misguided the water into holding patterns of absentmindedness. But if it is true what they say, that water has a perfect memory and always returns to where it came from, then the invocations will call them back home.

In the final phase, Chang followed the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, the longest aqueduct in the world, which brings water from southern to northern China including the capital, Beijing. Along the way, she collected her urine in plastic bottles to draw parallels between Patty Chang, Still from Invocation for a Wandering Lake, Part I, 2015. Projection, 12:49 minutes, sound, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist and BANK/MABSOCIETY



Patty Chang, Still from *Minor*, 2010. Single- channel video, 24:09 minutes, sound. Courtesy the artist and BANK/ MABSOCIETY

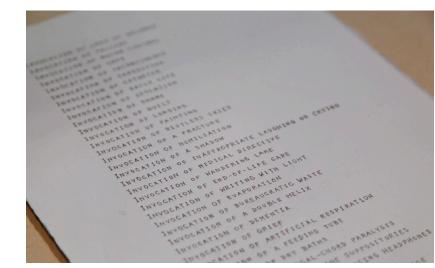
controllable and uncontrollable "flow" as commentary on the scale of infrastructures in relation to the human body.

The exhibition as a whole weaves together strands of narrative with visual feedback and poetic analogy. In the galleries, projected onto the fractured planes of staggered free-standing cardboard panels, Invocation for a Wandering Lake Part I and Part II evoke the vast landscapes of Newfoundland and Uzbekistan where Chang performed; the photographs from her second trip to Uzbekistan, Letdown (2017), are sparely mounted on wooden partition panels in a grid-like formation, forging an unexpectedly intimate encounter between the viewer and the images. Configurations (2017), a three-channel video work, documents a lecture-performance, edited with footage from her research and journey along the South-to-North Water Diversion Project, urinating and ruminating on the historic flooding of the Yellow River and Chinese imperial history in relation to the human body. Organic and prosthetic at once, delicate hand-blown glass sculptures are modeled after the plastic bottles that Chang fashioned into urinary devices on her journey.

Chang's first artist's book is an integral part of Patty Chang: *The Wandering Lake, 2009-2017.* A first-person photo-travelogue by Chang, it includes over eighty images from her travels and research, both her own and found. Her writing is deepened and extended through excerpts from a wide range of authors including Jill Casid, VALIE EXPORT, Herman Melville, Rosalind Krauss, Alice Walker and many others treating subjects such as the forced sterilization of women in Uzbekistan, Japanese ama deep sea divers, the concept of abjection, and water management in China.

Throughout both the exhibition and the artist's book, Patty Chang refers to water—its flow, presence, and absence—as an all-encompassing metaphor for life. In all its complexity and abstraction, Chang invites us to find a place within it, to draw parallels between her thoughts and aesthetic expressions and our own experiences.

All quotes are excerpted from Patty Chang, *The Wandering Lake* (2017), published by Queens Museum and Dancing Foxes Press, Brooklyn.





Patty Chang, Image from the series Letdown (Milk), 2017. Inkjet print on custom plywood panels, 4½in x 6¼in. Courtesy the artist and BANK/ MABSOCIETY



Above: Fontana di Sant'Andrea, Amalfi, Italy, inkjet print, 4 ½in x 3 ½in. photo: Austin Keys, Wikimedia Commons

Left: Patty Chang, A List of Invocations, 2017. Letterpress, 16 ½in x 11in. Printed by 10 Grand Press. Published by the artist and 10 Grand Press. Courtesy the artist and BANK/MABSOCIETY. Photo by Hai Zhang