



Xpace Cultural Centre
2-303 Lansdowne Ave
Toronto ON M6K 2W5
416 849 2864
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6
www.xpace.info

How To Find A Palm Tree

Justine Wong & Jasmine Gui

May 27th – July 16th, 2022

Essay by Sanna Wani

1.

A poem can only be answered with a poem. A world can only be entered by worlding.

2.

*Even so, you are afraid that the place you've left won't be forgiving.
Even so, you want to turn around. Even so, you won't return.*

—Jasmine Gui, "How to Find A Palm Tree"

Even the sea needs slits for the wind to get through. Call it waves, so the morning can get in. The morning is another word for new day, for time. The seascape like space, like the crushed and colossal arrangement of stars. You are and I am and we were, disappearing. Are. You, afraid of the next step but unable to stop moving. That the night is a long sorrow

is not new to you. Place your hand in mine. You've nothing to lose but embarrassment. Leave, leaving, left is our direction. Wandering is not aimless. Shed doubt, fracture knowing. We won't lose conviction except to say that the hallmarks of hesitancy won't be compelling. Forgiving. A circle. An end. One wet body ties another to this place. Even so, desolation is a silence. Sit with me. Plant a seed, the heart of a palm. It is bigger on the inside because it grows. Listen to the xylophone of our becoming, imprinted on this sand, every tree ungrown. You and the endless day. The music of shorelines. Distance. Everything I want is a window. An hourglass looking for an echo. Turn back to me, timeless one. Turn away from the faith of faces. Follow the edge until it folds. Around nothing there is something that scares us, more than what we want. Forgiveness, forevering. I have never felt closer or farther away from a now. Look away. Don't return. Remember.

3.

I first encounter Jasmine Gui and Justine Wong's *How To Find a Palm Tree* in the open air of Jasmine's studio. Jasmine, who I've known for years but never met in person, is welcoming me so warmly into the space, with tea and slippers and coconut biscuits. By the left window, which is her corner of the space—Justine is a secret fifth member of the studio, she tells me—are the portals, gently whispering in the air. The seeds and bones of the installation are in a box by the window. She shows me the stones pressed with ginkgo leaves, says we made this because of you, the first draft of what you're now reading. That's the kind of attentive collaboration at work here, that's how alive this exhibit is, how ready to meet the world. The window looks out onto Dundas street, onto a summer storm that is blistering and brewing. Jasmine tells me about a stubborn mama pigeon, roosting in the crevice without eggs. There is tape on the floor to mark the size of the space the display that *Palm Tree* will mold into. Site specific means a practice of feeling. An honoring of transience. First we start by emptying everything out, she says and I remember being a child. A box of toys, a friend, play. Jasmine tells me how she thinks of the portals like

spokes of a wheel, how she and Justine move together and know something about the other that they can't name but feel. Maybe this work is born of that. The wind whistles and we all spin inside it.

4.

But beautiful things, as Matisse shows, always carry greetings from other worlds within them... The requirement for plenitude is built-in. The palm will always be found.

— Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just*

When I roll a dice, what am I letting go? What am I letting into the air? This is the question that appears to me when I read Jasmine and Justine's artist statement and when I see their work for the first time on my computer. In pixels, Justine and Jasmine's arrangement, there is a sense of falling. Not just into place but away. The category of chance, its cultivation.

The ecology is palpable. Coastal terrain. Left ashore, we wander. I wonder, *Why am I brought to the water again?* What do our remnants need? This collaboration exists in the pendulum of collection and debris, spillage and storage. Everything ripples, restless, hungry, following a feeling until we are submerged in our smallness. Revive the gift of focus, the choice and river of what we see or for how long. And in this many-ed smallness, our ability to feel heightens. We are part of a gathering, in a community of thing. To feel, to see, to move, together.

This art is alive. This art comes up to meet you. This art knocks on your door, the limits of language and imagination. This art gathers all its friends, stones, sculpture and story. This art hands you instructions, a quote on beauty. This art says, *I see you* and disappears. This art says, *I'm leaving you* and stays.

5.

While beginning this essay, I learned that in the evolutionary ancestry of trees, the ginkgo sits completely on its own. Unlike most trees, the ginkgo is in a species, a class and genus of its own. Most of its ancestors lived 40 some million years ago. Only the ginkgo we know survives today.

I remember the ginkgo when I sit down with the palm because, in this collaboration between Jasmine and Justine, in my opportunity to write this piece altogether, is relationship. In relation is life. And it is when the relation accumulates affect, or is layered with bodies in time, that we open ourselves to receive experiences too big for words. We break barriers of space and time. We make portals.

That is one of the things Jasmine tells me too, that, as a poet, she needed to go beyond words. She needed the materiality, the tangibility, of the thing in the world—in a body—to do the kind of alchemy she is trying to do with art.

In the spirit of this embodiment, as my body meets this page meets this art meets this friendship, the collision and constellation of energy, I end this essay by asking what the ginkgo might ask the palm tree. This is an awareness of time. I imagine their conversation is a lot like mine and Jasmine's, where she laughs, pulls up her sleeve, shows me her ginkgo tattoos. A familiarity, a shared joy, connection, alignment. If it is the story of the sojourner we embarking on—the protagonist of this world/story Jasmine and Justine are building—then perhaps I remember the ginkgo, as a companion to the palm, because of the profound loneliness of their survival. It reminds me of the sojourner. Loneliness of time, of continuing on in other bodies even as you fold back into the nothingness we were born of. *What is that like?* The palm tree who is not born yet asks the ginkgo. *I want to see a tree at the shoreline again,* says the Sojourner to the palm. *What will I do without you?* says the ginkgo a million years ago and today, who is not yet alone and already is.

6.

Call the keepers of silence with their feet in the river. Call the river that used to spill over the rocks.

—Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*

Here is my hand, another frond. Open my palm. I have kept this seed, just for you. Come plant it with me. I'm not sure if it will grow. Mourn and celebrate with me under a silent sun. Come see what was, never will be, is. I am waiting for you. I always will be. I have been here, all this time.

- Sanna Wani