

Interviewee: Lynn Liang Hai

Interviewer: Ann Shi

Interview Date: May 15, 2021

Transcribed by: Ann Shi

Reviewed by: Katherine Wu

Track Time: 1:06:44

Background:

Lynn Liang Hai was born in Tianjin, China in 1990. She grew up in a family of urban planners, and a family of ethnic minorities in China, the “Hui” minority, where her ancestral roots are in the vicinity of East Europe. Her parents, both embracing freedom and travelling, took her on road trips frequently in her childhood, which became her fondest childhood memories.

Lynn found her path and passion in art through education and career experiences, which she pursued in Hong Kong, the UK, and finally the US. She holds a Bachelor in Architecture from the joint program of University of Hong Kong and Tianjin University, her first Master’s from the Architectural Association in London, where she developed her interest in contemporary art and space; and later gained her second Master’s in Design Studies from Art, Design and the Public Domain program at Harvard University. Now active as a curator and art writer in New York, she is also a partner and art director of Fou Gallery. Her curatorial experiences includes: *Chen Dongfan: Long Past Dawn, Pirates and Poets Whistle in the Dark* (Fou Gallery, 2020); *Michael Eade: Past is Present is Future* (Fou Gallery, 2019); Harvard Club *Dwelling At the Present Interior Design Exhibition and Forum* (Harvard Club, New York, 2019); *Flow Fields - Confluence* in Urban Picnic (Matedero, Madrid, 2013) and *Flow Fields - Dilution* in 2013 Lisbon Triennale (Sinel de Cordes Palace, Lisbon, 2013).

Lynn lives and works in New York.

Setting:

The interview was taken in person at Fou Gallery, in Bed-Stuy Brooklyn, during a solo exhibition of Renqian Yang (who was also interviewed by the Archive) curated by the interviewee.

Key:

LH: Lynn Liang Hai

AS: Ann Shi

—: speech cuts off; abrupt stop

...: speech trails off; pause

Italics: emphasis

(?): preceding word may not be accurate

[Brackets]: actions (laughs, sighs, etc.)

Interview transcript:

AS: Today is May 14, 2021. My name is Ann Shi, I'm with the Houston Asian American Archive. I'm interviewing Liang Hai today for the "People of Art," special collection of the archive. Thank you so much, Liang, for joining us today.

LH: Thank you.

AS: To start, can you tell us when and where were you born?

LH: I was born in 1999 in Tianjin, China. [Editor's note: 1990, not 1999, as corrected by Interviewee.]

AS: Can you tell us a little bit about your childhood memories and the neighborhood you grew up in?

LH: I actually didn't really spend much time in Tianjin, the city. Because when I was very small, my parents has a pretty busy job, so they were both urban planners. So my mom used to work in Xiamen, China for two years. So I remember when I was like, around three or four, I was together with her; and my dad was in Tianjin. And I was kind of like, fly, I flew between Tianjin and Xiamen at that time. But most— most of the time, I spend with my mom in Xiamen when I was before, like four years old. And then after that, I also go to Dalian, sometimes, because my mom is from Dalian. And my father is from Guizhou Province, so I also visit Guizhou when they have vacation. And after I was five, I began the primary school in Tianjin. So I think after that, I became spending like more time in Tianjin.

AS: Yeah. And what was the kind of favorite childhood memories you had? Are they in Tianjin or Dalian?

LH: Most favorite or most impressive? [AS: Yeah...] There's like my favorite memory was like the road trips in China. Not specifically in any of the cities, but mostly, my parents would drive. And I would just sit in the back of the car, enjoy the sceneries passing by the window. I have a lot of memories like that, in my mind, just because I think besides school, besides a kid spending time at home, that would be very impressive for a little kid in China at that time, just to travel around with parents and to experience beautiful sceneries and things she has never seen before when she was at such a young age, so yeah.

AS: I guess that builds up your appreciation for beauty and, at, at a very young age.

LH: Yeah, and curiosity to the world itself. Because I can feel like when I was stayed at one place, that place will be so familiar and I will be just know, almost like everything about the place. But every time I go to another place, everything seems so strange and everything, like a lot of things that I don't know, maybe I have seen them from books or from some kind of like journals, newspapers before; but when I can really experienced them outside, it's, it's really different from what you just learn from the text. So I think that was the beginning, I build up my curiosity to explore and to do research. Because sometimes you really need to get a lot of information before you go to a place, then when you really see the things with your eyes, you get the structure, like a sys- systematic structure of all the information that you have seen before.

AS: So fascinating. And can you tell us a little bit about your parents and whether they shared some of their own, like childhood memories or their families, kind of, history with you?

LH: Actually, they don't really talk much about themselves [laughs]. And I sometimes don't really want to ask because I think even though it's between the parents and the child, but they also have their own privacy. So I sometimes I'm not sure if it's proper for me to really ask about very private things of them. But we will just talk about like generic things, and we just spend time together. So and they spend much of their time working, and sometimes they take me to their companies. I started to become interested in architecture when I visit their companies, because I can see the — like draft models and blueprints, because that was like back 20 years ago, there was no computer at that time, so all the architects and urban planners, they do the, like the very big, large scale paintings with the blue paper and some specific technique— I think that's called cyanotype— to make construction drawings, yeah. And by, I think, by late 1990s, they started using computers instead of the blueprints. So I started to know about computer kind of like, softwares and computer drawings pretty early. Yeah.

AS: That's fascinating. And can you tell us some of the family values that your parents emphasized during your upbringing?

LH: Yeah, being honest, and always being curiosity— always being curious to the world. And don't judge other people, and also build up, build up in our confidence. I think that's the four most important thing that my family taught me.

AS: Wonderful. And what were some of the defining moments in your childhood?

LH: Defining moments, I would say... maybe it would sound a little bit negative, but when I was small, I wasn't a healthy child. So I went to hospital for many times. And for I think, three, at least for three times, I lived in ICU for two or three days. You know, ICU is that kind of isolated room in the hospital that the patient cannot really see their family. So I was all alone with myself, and other little patients, and the nurses and doctors. So spending some time in the hospital, I began to think about the value of life. And what is the true pursuit as a child to really achieve in the future, in the future decades of years. I think it's its pretty unique experience for the little child, because not every kid has this moments of between death and life to really think about what he really want. But in a hospital, I sometimes would think about the possibility if I would die now very soon. Then what I feel how, how I experienced my life at that moment. And my answer would be, it would be a great pity if I die at a very young age. But that also helps me— helps me a lot to see the world more consciously, and to focus on every detail of what appeared in my life. And I also begin to really focus on my own health and, and want to live a wonderful life instead of just spending days without knowing anything. So I would say even though, like living in hospital is not a happy experience, but that's precious memories for me and helped me build up a lot of the, like, the values, a lot of my understanding of the world. So I would say those are like pretty defining moments in my early life.

AS: So existential problem and thinking has been pretty, I mean, it has been in your life pretty early on. [LH: Yeah.] And can you tell us about your name, so Hai Liang is not a very common name. Is there any meaning or metaphor behind it?

LH: So I quite like my last name, because it's a very rare last name in Chinese culture. Hai means the ocean. And I also liked the image of the ocean, being peaceful and being profound, sometimes mysterious for people to explore. So I like my last name, I like my last name a lot. For my first name, I think my mom gave me this first name. It means good, but it's not the top good. It's like almost the top good, Liang, this character in Chinese. Because I think in East Asian culture, a lot of people believe that if you do things right, you have to leave some blank space when you really achieve it. Because it's always good for you to have some space and without doing everything perfectly 100%. So she gave me this name and hope me can be maybe like 90% or 80% healthy, and 9% like has been smart. Always like, not the 100% in my life, but, but it could be more consistent to live like a longer, better life.

AS: That's wonderful wishes for your life. Very wise one, too. [LH: Yeah.] Can you tell us a little bit about your school life, moving on to your early education?

LH: Primary school and middle school? Before undergraduate, right? [AS: Right.] Okay. I think my middle school is really important for me. My experience in those years, were wonderful. Because when I was in primary school, I admire one of the Chinese leaders in old times, in older times, Zhou Enlai. So he is like... he, I think, he used to be like the famous icon for a lot of last generation people. I was influenced by my grandmother. Because she— she— she... I could say she's a big fan of Zhou Enlai. So I read a lot about this leader, this Chinese leader. And I really admire his ability and his smartness. And also his personal, his personality of being really gentle, and always understanding other people. So it's, it was very simple thinking, just because I see, I regard him as, like my idol. So I want to go to the same school with him. So he attended the Nankai Middle School. So my goal at a time when I was in primary school was to enter Nankai Middle School, and then I did.

So this middle school experience was like an achievement for me. It was also a very good school that has a lot of programs other than the regular courses in China, like early education. So I had the time with my classmates at the time to be in the, for example, fine art group, or theater group. And also some different sports groups like badminton. Yeah, things like that. So I was also in the chorus class, when I was in high school. So we sometimes go out of school go to, for example, go in the city competitions and province competitions. That was more like, you know, you can just imagine how those basketball, like basketball or football players, they spend some time together and fight for pride fight for honor. We had that experience in the chorus class for a really long period of time. And I also gained a lot of good friends from that time, a lot of my high school classmates, we were still we're still very good friends now. Yeah.

AS: So did this kind of fascination and curiosity about the different variety of life and aspects of it kind of shaped you as who you are today?

LH: Yeah, of course, I would say it was very important because we are a part of what we met; and what we met, also became a part of us. So that's like interactive, and you cannot say which is more important for which one, but it's just you're important for both.

AS: So when was the moment that it happened for you, that you kind of that curiosity and pursuit of art became very prevalent in your life?

LH: I don't think there was a turning point of this. Because I think that's a very gradual process. I began studying of architecture, when I started undergraduate school, and then I got the Bachelor of Architecture. And then I realized, okay, because doing architectural practice means you will be able to handle a lot of different skills of architectural design from very small ones— as small as a, for example, bus stop, to as large as a mass building a very large scale residential building. But my interest, I would say, I figured out, when I was almost graduated from bachelor, my interest was to do, for example, like, small residentials, or gallery space, which is more interrelated with the scale of human body. Because I don't like mass production. Like you can just do thousands of rooms all the same. Even though that's also a kind of significant contribution to the society; but for me, I would enjoy something that is closer to human themselves. So I realized, okay, I would better do something that kind, that can just... hmm... I don't know, make my interest, more specific?

Yeah, so I started looking for things other than architecture. Because it's like when you start working as an architect, you cannot really avoid doing different scales of projects. If I only want to do, for example, galleries, it's better to find another job or just jumped into another field. So after I graduated from the bachelor degree, I just went to the Architectural Association in UK in London, to study a program called Spatial Design Performance. That's a program that's— that combines spatial design, and installation design, installation structure, and performance and curatorial practice. So during that time, like two years, when I was in UK, we actually did three programs, three real exhibitions in London, Madrid, and Lisbon. So that was the first time that my, my exhibition really sells tickets. And the real audience, they're not from school, they're just from the public, they can visit the exhibition and say something to ask the creators. So I began to figure out, "Okay, so my interest would be this." So I would prefer to do something with art or fine art, or installation or performance, well, I can just do it interdisciplinarily. But that is the scale that I want to deal with.

And also, I think you will have the same feeling that when you start practicing something, as you go deeper into this field, I think you will ultimately start to do research about its history, its— for example, like background, its theoretical literatures... you will just naturally get to know more about those. So I started studying architectural history and art history when I want to do more research in the field. So I think that my interest is rather than saying veered from architecture to fine art, I would say it's more like narrowed down. So yeah, this is how I got to this field.

AS: So you kind of broadened your sca- scale— scale of interest, and then kind of narrow it down.

LH: Yeah, yeah.

AS: That's, that's really interesting. And can you tell us a little bit more about your experience, like being displaced from your hometown and going and going to the UK to and then travel around Europe? How did that feel for you? And what was there, was there any kind of memories of how you tackle those challenges?

LH: Hmm... So before that master's degree, before that master's program, you just basically do architectural design school. I was in Hong Kong at that time. And after that, I went to London, so it was like a brand new place, even though, yet, I- I've always been like dreaming to go to England because I love reading English novels, like English literature when I was small; but still, I got a lot of cultural shock at a time. I also need to adapt to how like European people work and how they deal with different cultures, and also their ways of living a life. That was like the one aspect that was difficult for a person, when you just traveled from one culture and circle to another. And then the other thing is doing exhibitions are really, like they are real challenges. Because as an unexperienced student, you have to begin to study how to deal with your sponsors, and how to deal with people who come to see your show, how to deal with people who will potentially collaborate with you. Because I'm not really good at socializing, I would say, "I don't like talking to people." I feel that's really difficult for me. But still, if I want to get the project done, I really need to find a way to communicate with them, being friendly and being professional, to get what I want. And also to make each other understand what is happening now. So that's like the second biggest challenge for me at the time.

And other things are, like smaller challenges. But I would say, they finally just made me very happy living, living your life there. Because a lot of difficulties when you come through, when you just get over, you will find, okay, every time your world, your personal world are broadened to some extent, because you have adapted to and you have absorbed more things than you than your past experience. Yeah.

AS: Were your parents supportive of your decision to leave your hometown and home country?

LH: Yeah. They're very supportive just because they think themselves living a lifestyle like that. Because, you remember I mentioned, when I was very small, my family had road trips very frequently. Because my- both my parents, they love living a free style of life. So they would go to a lot of like other cities, they would be curious to a place that they've never been. So for me, if I really want to go to another place or another country, they're very supportive, because they think it's important to explore the world. And it's important to, for an individual to become a... like someone with a broaden horizon, something like that. And also, because we exchange opinions a lot, so they also enjoy me talking about what I've been experiencing, what they have never seen and what they have never heard about.

AS: Wonderful. And I'm also curious, were there any significant mentors during your, kind of, experience of finding your passion and been going along in the pursuit?

LH: Yeah, my ex-professor who was the director of the program of the school that I entered in London, I think he is a very important mentor for me. He is actually a practical architect in Berlin. But at the same time, he teaches in Architectural Association, and he teaches Spatial Design Performance, not architecture. So for him, actually, he's doing different things at the same time. So besides his own architectural firm, he will do interdisciplinary practices with filmmakers, film producer, and performers, musicians, dancers. Yeah. He has a lot of overlaps with people from different backgrounds and different fields. So I began to pick up the working style from him. Because I never imagined that people like an individual can just work with so many different people before I met him. Yeah, and he is also very diligent, because he sleeps— I remember he sleeps only four hours a day. So that also—

I got to know, Okay, so this is limitless. You can always work hard. You can always push yourself. It's not like your ability has a limitation. If you really want to do something, your potential can be just endless.

AS: It's fascinating. And moving on to your life coming to the US, can you tell us how you went and how you came to the US?

LH: Just after the school in London, I think my studies not, would not be ended, because I feel I still need to learn a lot of things. So I don't want to end the school at that time. So I applied for some schools in the US, because I think, okay, the experienced in Hong Kong, and of course, China and, and the UK, was a very good experience. But still, I want to live in other countries to see more possibilities of my life. So US is the choice of the time, I decided to come to the US for further study. So I only applied for schools in US. And then I got admitted by Harvard, the program of art design public domain. And so I just came to the US in 2015. And I ended— the program was ended in 2017. Yeah, so I spent two years in Boston.

AS: And how about coming to New York?

LH: Was just simply because I was looking for a job at the time. And I got admitted to be an art manager of an artist, like a studio manager for an artist. That artist was one of the critics I have at university of my program. And, and he lives in New York, his studio is actually in Soho. So I just promised coming to New York after I graduated and continue working for him. Yeah, but like after one, after over— over a year, this began to know Fou Gallery and started the job here.

AS: And I'm also curious, since you have explored, almost like all the continents, and to come in such a long way from China and being this, as a person in diaspora, like, how would you compare the way that as a Chinese person in different countries and different cultures, like what was the experience like?

LH: I think of course, when you go to the environment of another culture, you are just naturally realized, so many things are different. And you will be shocked and begin to think of your own identity and whether— how you define yourself and whether you would accept things or refuse some of the things. But I think as I traveled to more countries, I, more and more realize myself, could be, like, a world resident. Like, I don't really need to define myself by country, but I am just a human being living in the earth, experiencing different groups of people, different groups of cultures. And so it just doesn't bother me anymore after I first got the culture shock. And also, I think, because I grew up in China mainland. So the Chinese culture or East Asian culture outside of course, it's the most important influence on me. And I also love that because I think Asian culture is really a wonderful culture. It has such a long history, and amount of histories, you can see how— how some cycles goes around, how peoples' similar thinking appear once and once again; and you can also see how a civilization rise and how it can be attacked and collapsed in the end, and how the new— like a new generation can just rebirth from the old times. It's very wonderful that we experienced this history. Of course, I believe, like people from other cultures can, they also enjoy their background; but I just I naturally become— I am naturally a Chinese person, and I love my identity being that. And I also enjoy the process that I absorb, things from other cultures. I think it's just a very natural process without... I don't have any pain on that. And no struggle. No... I don't know how to say, but it just doesn't really bother me and I enjoy traveling.

AS: Have there been any moments that you realize your cultural traits, as a Chinese person has become more prevalent when you're kind of going into a new environment or culture?

LH: Sorry, can you just repeat the question?

AS: Yeah, sure. So were there any moment that you discovered more about the, kind of the Asianness or the Chineseness about yourself, when you're in a new environment, that you weren't aware of before?

LH: I think almost every time, almost every moment. It's not only, I would say, this kind of consciousness or awareness, it's not only about how you realize you're from China, it's also how we realize you were yourself, like how your personality was already built on. I think that happens at almost every moment in your life. For example, if you think something would be dealt with in some specific way; and then you realize over others, actually doesn't really look that way. And then you realize, okay, this is something personal, it could be culture, or it could be just from your own past experience. This has been different. And also, it's very acceptable. Yeah.

AS: Thank you. And next, I'm also curious about as we are moving on to the career part of your life, can you tell us what were some of the most memorable or the work and exhibition that you're most proud of, in your career?

LH: The first exhibitions when I was in Europe. Because you know, when you just first doing something for the first time, it's really shocking, because you... it's the first time you ever experienced, something you have imagined or never imagined before. And that kind of memory will become memorable in your life. And the first time I did the three exhibitions in London, Madrid and Lisbon, we sell tickets and the audience who are, as I said, just now they are critics from the public, or they are just local people, they're local residences. And they come here having like spent a weekend with the pro—the project, and they communicate with us, the creators of this project; and then that's it, and you will never see each other again. This is how you become connected with random people with people you will never see in the future.

So that's the first time I feel I am open to the world. I'm not protected in the bubble of school anymore. I began to see how my project, how my career, how the thing I do become meaningful for other people, how I can put some impact on them, and how they interact with me and how they would have some influence on me. So that's why my first three exhibitions became really memorable for me.

AS: Can you tell us a little bit more like what were some of the main pieces in the exhibition?

LH: So those three projects has a common theme that is to focus on environmental issues. So our projects were called, "A journey of water". So we put the journey from London and to Madrid and finally to Lisbon and let the water just disperse in the air. So the first time it was a river in London, then it became a confluence in Madrid; and at last, they just became vapor in this one. That's like the whole process of the three projects, the whole concept, development of concepts.

And then we used a lot of like multimedia techniques besides the installation, because I made wood structure domes with fabric draping down as the screens for production of moving images. Because I choose different transparency of the fabric from the most transparent to opaque, so the projection can actually be see through to the whole space. So our practice was pretty advanced at a time, because the audience come here, and they would experience projection, structures, spatial performance, like dancing, and improvisation of music. Yeah, by the artists that we collaborate with. And I really enjoyed seeing how the audience would interact with our project. And because you can also, this is also a way you see different cultures.

Because in London, I remember there was an old lady, she was really elegant. And when she came here for a full experience, also a part of our project. She refused to go through the structure that has the fabric dripping down, just simply because she doesn't want her hairstyle to be... Yeah, she- she doesn't want her hairstyle to be... to get a mess if she goes through those fabrics. But in Madrid, at the last day, there was a couple that—I think they were like very young, maybe students. They just came here, right before we closed the exhibition. But still, they became very happy, and they started dancing with our music. And yeah, this is like very wonderful experience, just seeing people in Spain, being so lively and being so energetic, they can just—they can just start dancing, like immediately. That was like pretty surprising for me at that time. Yeah.

AS: Well, that's surreal to hear your experience, to hear you describe that experience. And also, I'm very curious about how you define yourself, although we kind of roughly categorized you as "people art"; but through the way you— you describe yourself, you kind of worked with artists or as curator, you organized the exhibition, how would you kind of define your role in the art world? Like, would you introduce yourself as... hmm... what kind of, what title?

LH: I'm right now, a curator, but at the same time, I'm trying very hard to become a scholar. And I'm also planning to pursue a PhD degree. So I— I want myself to become an art history researcher in the future; and I'm also writing stuff for like media. And so I would say maybe sometimes I'm also a writer. But most spontaneously, my answer to this question would be, because you can see right now we are having the Yang Renqian exhibition on view. She chooses some words to describe emotions, to name her individual works in this exhibition. There was a title of the words, it means "the feeling when you find out, you cannot be put into any categories of human beings." This that is the moment when you find you're different from other people, or when you find everybody is different; and we don't want to be categorized. I think to— that's my, that would be the spontaneous answer to your question how I define myself, because I cannot be defined and I don't think it's necessary to find out an answer for that.

AS: We are all fluid in terms of identity. [LH: Yeah.] That's fascinating. And I'm also curious, with like, what do you see yourself in the, in the future, like, as a scholar? What kind of direction do you plan to engage more, or what kind of topics in this world you're trying to...?

LH: I always think learning would be a ever-going thing in your life. Of course, sometimes you need to take a break. So for me, it's like I attended school. And I continued school years for a long, long time. And sometimes I started working, get a job. And maybe after that, I want to be in the school again. So after I graduated from Harvard, I've been working for four years now. So I feel it's a break from the school, it's a break from when you're like doing research without any, like, disturbs or without any trifles. But I already feel it's enough time for this break. So I would prefer to learn some more stuff. That's why I have the plan to pursue for a PhD program. But I think at the same time, it's very important to just open yourself to the whole world. So I would preserve my job, and my PhD program at the same time. I mean, when I do the PhD in the future, I will also work at the same time. Just— I think both sides can just interact very well and give each other a lot of inspiration, also making your own identity more critical and profound. Yeah, so I would say like, in a recent future years, I will be doing a PhD program and running the gallery continuously. And of course, I hope both can get a better result than now because I always want to have a better life than now than before.

AS: Yeah, definitely fascinating to be, to be looking forward to that future. And also, I'm curious, what topics are you working on? Like what research fields that you're interested in, in engaging in your PhD?

LH: I think my first choice would be contemporary Chinese art, but not many institutions do their research in this field. So I would say to just to broaden, to broaden at 20th century, or like modern and contemporary art would be my focus.

AS: And what other sources besides visual art, and art or architecture— since you studied architecture before, what other sources of inspiration do you, do you get inspired by? For example, like literature or poetry or...?

LH: Yeah, I think two most significant significant things are classical music and literature. Because I enjoy listening to classical music, I go to concert for many times. At the same time, I also do a lot of reading. So they're also very important sources to get inspirations. It's not like you borrow some kind of forms, or you borrow things directly from others, the older masters, but it's, it's more like you try to learn how they think, how those masters from different views, achieve their works, and how they see and explore their world and their times. It's just very wonderful to, like, see how those like rich people's how they think and how they deal with their lives. Yeah.

AS: That's fascinating. And also curious, who are some of the artists on your radar as a curator?

LH: I don't know, I feel I'm always trying to avoid. Because I'm already in the field, so I try to avoid, like, masters in this field, like some specific masters to influence me too much. Because I think it's very important to see or to do research, to do research without any judgment. If you have your inclination, sometimes unavoidable to have your preference, like, maybe I like this style, or like, I like this genre better; and that genre, maybe I'm less interested in. I really want to avoid that. So I'm trying to suppress my personal preference, like the artists or art scholars, because I really want to take this field as my career.

AS: Yeah, definitely, very, very, totally understandable. And what do you think a good curator— what makes a good curator?

LH: I think there are many different kinds of curators. It's such a wide range when you talk about, when you talk about the word curator. Because as a curator, you can just simply had the ability to achieve an exhibition. So you can be just like a social animal, you can just be, you can just have very good connections with artists and your clients. And maybe you don't have to have very good academic background. That's what kind of the curator. There are also curators that will like maybe make money or something like that. I would say, I will become an art scholar first, and doing exhibitions would be how I practice my research and how I find out the output of my study. That's how I become a curator.

AS: And what are some of the most memorable, or art visits or exhibitions that you have been, that are, like curated by other people? What are some of the, or some of the artists visit— art studio visits, sorry?

LH: Other artists, studio visits or other exhibitions? Hmm... It's a difficult question. Because, you know, as an art professional, you'll always need to regularly go to bigger museums or art fair or like biennale and regularly visit other artists. It's also related to a question before that, how I try to suppress my personal preference when I see all the works. So I have a lot of memorable moments, but they're almost parallel. So I really cannot say which ones are more important, or, more important, more important than others. Yeah.

AS: And also curious having been in the New York art scene as a professional in, in New York for four years, how have you felt or how have you experienced the New York art scene? What do you think it has been representing Asian American artists or Asian artists?

LH: I think the art world has been really greatly impacted by some bigger trends— like political trends. For example, maybe in the recent four, five years, African Americans are very greatly promoted; and female artists, they got more important status— status than before any time in history. So you can see those kinds of trends very apparently, when you are in New York. Because this place, I think it's the most advanced all over the world. So of course, if people here become to do female artists, projects; other place will just kind of like follow it a little bit. I think is a very diverse environment. So the most important thing is to find a path for yourself. I'm not that kind of person that can just grab, grab like everything little by little. I think I will just choose like one way and I will give up other things. That's how I feel.

So, so living in the New York environment is also a process that you at the beginning, begin to broaden your field, you begin to broaden your knowledge base; and ultimately, you will find everything has been narrowed, it's like gradually being narrowed down. You still want to get like maybe to accept like less information, when you only want to focus on what is the most useful for you. And for the other tempting things, actually, they're not tempting anymore, because you know, you really don't need them.

AS: As we are moving on to the discussion on the Asian and Asian American artists, I'm curious to hear what you think. What are some of the misrepresent— misunderstood or misrepresented aspects of Asian and Asian American artists?

LH: I wouldn't say that's misunderstanding or like misrepresentation. Because from, from '80 to '90, the 80s to 90s in the last century, you know, quite many Chinese artists moved to the US because they want to have a better reputation internationally. Also some art scholars, art historian helped them to do exhibitions, to do shows and to introduce them to the Western market, to the Western art world. That generation has their pursuit. And for the Western scholars, a lot of like Western people, or Western clients, they would see Asian art artists, together with some bigger backgrounds. For example, like the political environment in Asia at a time, or the bigger Asian culture, how they are related to those individual artists. I think that's natural, I wouldn't say that's a kind of misunderstanding. It's not accurate understanding. But it's- it just naturally happened. Because for a complete list, I think for the Western audience, artists from a different culture, from Asian culture, they are completely estranged for them, just like from another world. So how they got to know them, there must be a process beginning from zero. So they started from getting to know the background, getting to know the history of Asian countries. So that's why I think in that generation, for contemporary arts- artists, they need to study what happened at that time in China and see there's any bigger picture of influence on those artists. So that's why they always relate the individuals together with the political environment, or like the culture environment.

So that's why you can see, quite a lot of Chinese artists or Asian artists are being tagged. Sometimes here in the US in the Western market, they are kind of... maybe a lot of people think there's a stereotype for them. And I think now, it's also our responsibility to make things better. So I would say if, if I will be an art scholar in the future, I also hope to work with pioneers on how to break the tags of Chinese artists. How to make people understand, we're just saying individuals as them? So how do we look at each other as— in our, like, real in ourselves, instead of just simply tag them into... put them into bigger categories? And, and that's it, and instead of like digging deeper into how the individuals are thinking. Yeah.

AS: Yeah, totally understand, like, also following on, do you think it's okay to categorize artists— not just Asian American, but any artists— like with the prefixes such as an Asian American artist, or an African American artists, with their race or ethnicity?

LH: I mean, it's always, they're always critical sounds, like critical opinions on this, when you categorize different artists by their regions by their cultures. But I would say, if you are starting from zero, if you just started learning something, this might be the most efficient way that- who you can rapidly get to know them. So I think for the beginning, at a very low level, it's okay to understand them by this categories. But if you really want to have a deeper understanding, then these categories might not really work anymore. Yeah.

AS: What is your vision for the Asian American art scene in the next, say, decade? What do you think it will become?

LH: I think to answer this question, maybe I need to have a better understanding of a bigger environment like, like the international trends like how the political environment would change, but it's very difficult to say so I don't really have a vision or prediction of how Asian artists would be like in the future. But I can see a trend now with the younger generation of Chinese artists, that they have more struggle in defining themselves; they think more of themselves rather than a bigger environment. So a lot of the artists, they really focus on their personal and individual experience, instead of speaking out, or like manifesto of like political or society like social issues. I think this is a little different from the last generation. Yeah. Because our, this generation is becoming more individual, they're becoming more personal.

AS: That's what we're also talking about the wave of political and socially engaged art, do you think this is a trend that will last?

LH: I think, yes, I think yes. There are, there will always be people who are interested in this issue, there will always be artists who create products based on their understanding of those bigger issues. How we got to know them? The thing is, there are two aspects: one is how many people are looking into that; the other is, how many people want to get to know those topics, which means how many people want to make the voice to be heard? So I think still, for the Western culture, in the Western culture for maybe a Western audience, they're still pretty much they will pay attention to political issues, and to see how artists understand those issues. So this will still be a very important part of the art world of how— I would say, of contemporary artists, and contemporary Chinese artists.

AS: If you were to kind of leave a message or a time capsule for the future— alien attack on the earth, what would you tell them about, about you, or about human beings, about mankind, or about art?

LH: Just, just to leave a capsule for aliens in the future? How many, how many years later, you have to let me know like, this time capsule is for how many like years in the future? Because for 10 years, 100 years, it will be very different message I guess?

AS: Just like a very kind of, like imagine that a scenario. For example, if it's post-apocalyptic times, where we got discovered with a time capsule, what would you tell— what would you want the alien to know that human beings have left the earth, but the world in terms of either yourself or your art, or mankind in general?

LH: This is a very big question. Maybe just very simply saying, "Human beings as wise creatures, we're here." "Creatures with wisdom, we were here." Because I think for human beings, we are different from other animals from other creatures, because we really have high level of wisdom- wisdom. So if, if all creatures on the earth have died, if we just, we can only be discovered so many thousands years later by another group with wisdom, then maybe it's just better to let them know. There have been a group with wisdom appeared before.

AS: Wonderful. And moving on, as we are still in the kind of pandemic era, how has your COVID-19 pandemic time been?

LH: Just staying at home. Staying at home and work remotely. Try to reduce the chance to connect with other people as much as possible. I feel that's pretty, to some extent, comfortable way of living life. Because a lot of social behaviors I found out they're unnecessary. Yeah, because of the pandemic, you have to reduce the chance that you see other people, and to maintain connections, you have to adapt to different ways. And I think for me, I just spend it— I just spent less time chatting with people like those meaningless chattings. And at the same time for people who are really you who really deserve to be chat with, we have more time to get to like more topics. So it feels like your— your range of social connection has been decreased, but at the same time the depth has been increased. So I think that's actually a better experience, because I just mentioned I don't like a lot of social behaviors.

AS: And the pandemic, like the quarantine lifestyle, has it changed? Do you think it change your habits permanently?

LH: No, not really. I just, I was pretty struggle with when to travel. Because I love to fly to different places. I love to see different things. So being at home without any opportunity to travel, this is like a pain for me. Besides that, I don't- I don't feel anything uncomfortable.

AS: Thank you. And also, since we're on this topic, and we are, we had experienced, especially last— since last March, and also lately, the rising anti-Asian hate crimes. I'm also curious, have you personally experienced any kind of racial prejudice during your entire time, outside of your home country?

LH: Outside the home country?

AS: Yeah, since you left China. [LS: The experience?] ...and experienced any kind of prejudice, either it's a microaggression, or kind of outright- kind of attack during your time outside of China?

LH: No. Nothing really serious, because I can see those kind of news pretty frequently. But in my personal experience, maybe New York is very open. That doesn't really happen to me. I think there was one time when I was having a discussion with an artist. Beside Hudson River, there was a man shouting out some, shouting at us, saying something like "Chinese virus," [laughs] some- something like that. But I think that's just common. That's very common, because you know, for now, 'cause the variant- variants of the virus is being really serious in India. So we also sometimes say like, the Indians, how they can just make things better and are really afraid of, if there's anybody just who just traveled to India. So I understand like why people sometimes have hostile to China, and I really dislike it. So just in my personal life, I would say if anybody wants to listen to me, explaining something or just to listen to what I think about, I would appreciate that. But this, this doesn't really bother me too much.

AS: What would you like to say to the kind of the people who might be or who might be encounter such scenarios?

LH: I would say if they can start a conversation. I mean, if they are willing to listen to different opinions, of course, you can just start communicating with understanding. But if they are just, if there are some people just simply spreading hate, I don't think it's necessary to reach out to them, because they would refuse any of the opposite opinions.

AS: I guess that's all of my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add before we close?

LH: Hmm... I don't know.

AS: Do you think there's any period in your life that we can discover more about?

LH: I'm a really generic person. I don't know how other people see me, but I really see myself as a very, very common person. So I just enjoy living my life. I love eating and traveling. And I watch Japanese animation till now. Because you know, there's a— there's an animation called "Detective Conan". I started watching it when I was in primary school. Story has been continuous for over 20 years, and I'm still watching it now. I'm like doing this kind of same thing. If I enjoy it, I will just do it, like once and once again, I would just do it for so many years. And I think everybody in this world is very special because each one has their their own past experience, which is not copyable, which is really unique. So I don't see myself better than others. Also, I don't see others better than me. We are just different. But at the same time, we enjoy communicating with each other. I think that's it.

AS: Yeah, that's what we're doing now. Yeah, yeah. Has the— actually I'm curious, has the animation impacted any of your work? The way that you're...

LH: I think not, directly my works, but- but a way of thinking. Because I find sometimes doing research is kind of similar to a detective, how a detective work, because you'll find clues, and you're trying to connect them together in your mind to find a better truth or to find out what can be pushed forward. I think doing research also for people with an academic background, just to keep exploring, keep absorbing knowledge and build up your own

system of knowledge base, and to connect things that is discoverable and to have some, like progress with the research. It's very similar progress because you're always observing, and thinking, and exploring.

[Interview concludes]