

EDUCATION RESOURCE GUIDE

INHERITANCE

WOMEN IN FILM & PHOTOGRAPHY 2021

11 Nov to 19 Dec 2021

The sixth edition of Objectifs' Women in Film and Photography showcase presents works by artists from Southeast Asia, South Asia and East Asia, exploring the theme of Inheritance.

Through rich and varied stories about familial connections and memories, identity and loss, and public and private histories, the works in *INHERITANCE* seek to understand who we are. Combining documentary, reportage, autobiographical, archival, constructed tableaux and fictional narratives, the lines between genres, and artist and subject blur in this edition's showcase. The artists draw from their experiences and encounters, offering us perspectives that are deeply personal yet familiar.

Using This Guide

This Education Guide accompanies the *INHERITANCE* exhibition at Objectifs. The introductory questions invite you to think about the works and some of the themes explored in them. If you are unable to view the show in person, please review the artists' works and profiles here: www.objectifs.com.sg/wifp2021.

A Short History of Objectifs' Women in Film & Photography Programme

Objectifs started the Women in Film & Photography showcase in 2015. The programme was conceived to spotlight artists, photographers and filmmakers who have created works that tell stories with impact, break boundaries and inspire us.

Although much progress has been made in the arts and media industries, gender disparity continues to exist in many areas. For example, women comprised 21% of key production roles in top U.S. films in 2020.¹ 70-80% of photography students globally are women, yet they account for only 13-15% of professional photographers.² UNESCO's *Gender & Creativity: Progress on the Precipice* report highlights reasons backed by data including, "unequal access to decent work, fair remuneration, and leadership positions."³

While the programme offers a platform to elevate talent and present a diversity of voices, the Women in Film & Photography showcase is also about dialogue and connection: asking questions, being open to change, sharing ideas, building community, representation, and making space. Over the last few years, we have explored themes ranging from *Collective Power* to *Remedy for Rage*, sharing intimate yet powerful stories about communities that deal with critical issues ranging from social inequality, gender disparity, the body and self.

¹ From "*The Celluloid Ceiling: Behind-the-Scenes Employment of Women on the Top U.S. Films of 2020*" <https://womenintvfilm.sdsu.edu/research/>

² British Journal of Photography. <https://www.1854.photography/awards/female-in-focus/>.

³ <https://en.unesco.org/news/unesco-reports-persistent-gender-inequalities-cultural-and-creative-industries>

Home Economics with A Stubborn Bloom
A Stubborn Bloom



Home Economics with A Stubborn Bloom restages excerpts from Home Economics textbooks used in Singapore in the 1970s. The film comprises three chapters that outline instructions for personal grooming, housekeeping and entertaining.

Home Economics was taught exclusively to young girls in Singapore until 1998. The syllabus was intertwined with government policies and reflected the changing role and expectations of women—first as homemakers, then as working mothers.

The film takes visual cues from various films that examine girl culture and the experience of womanhood through set design, costume and texture. Highlighting the extremes of feminine performativity through the use of highly gendered texts, the film invites us to reconsider the importance and aesthetic joy of domesticity at a time when most of the world continues to experience stages of pandemic lockdown in their homes.

A Stubborn Bloom is a multidisciplinary collective started by artist Stephanie Jane Burt and fashion researcher Daniela Monasterios-Tan, exploring tropes of femininity through film and fashion.
astubbornbloom.com

Questions to Consider:

- What do the colours and materials in the film symbolise? How does it link to womanhood?
- Observe the gestures that the characters in the film make and their behaviour. What do they remind you of?
- Why do you think personal grooming, housekeeping and entertaining were exclusively taught to young girls in Home Economics?

After Eden
Aakriti Chandervanshi



Located in the southern outskirts of the Kathmandu Valley in Nepal are Khokana and Bungamati, twin villages encompassing an archeological site, Ku Dey. As the fog rises, one begins to see that the sacred land's beauty is tempered by signs of intrusion and degradation.

The locals believe that their land was blessed by goddess Shikali Devi to begin a new settlement. Decades later, the land has been proposed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, waiting for restoration and preservation. But lately it is a site of a socio-political battle, as it is under threat by the State initiated Kathmandu-Tarai Expressway, a 78-kilometre “fast track” road conceived to bring tourists from an unbuilt airport in Tarai to the capital in just 90 minutes — a development that would displace the settlements that remain dotted across the sacred land. The indigenous inhabitants unite to save the last vestiges of their motherland from ecological destruction and unsolicited displacement.

After Eden attempts to mediate between the evocative past and the elusive present in response to landscapes affected by development. The tainted terrains are a constant reminder of how the notion of progress trumps people, continually erasing and overwriting the land and memory.

Aakriti Chandervanshi is a visual artist, curator and designer from India, whose work spans unique geographies and is embedded in the contexts of her everyday in the landscapes of South Asia.
agirlcalledyellow.com

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist use archival images in her series?
- How does the artist reflect the impact of development through her work?
- What does it make you think about development and its impact in Singapore? How would you portray it?

Phase/less

Amrita Chandradas, Aarthi Sankar, Ruby Jayaseelan
Commissioned by Objectifs



Phase/less unearths generational traumas, passed on superstitions, ritualistic practices and the idea of womanhood within the Tamil Singaporean community. Unpacking their own memories, collective understanding and differing experiences, the artists further explore the idea of time and its cyclic nature. Overarching themes of death, rebirth, stillness and femininity are observed and repeatedly represented at different intersections of this film. *Phase/less* traverses myriad emotions such as shame, guilt, pain, loneliness, tranquillity, euphoria and so forth, translated and questioned through distinct movements, expressions and symbolism.

Unresolved queries about one's own ancestry and practices linger. The ability to dismantle certain entrenched ideas, while still shackled to other beliefs is recognised. *Phase/less* is a pause, a breath, a juncture through this timeless journey of life, presenting neither beginning nor end.

Amrita Chandradas is a Singaporean documentary photographer whose work focuses on identity, the environment, social issues, long form storytelling, and reportage on current affairs in Southeast Asia.
amritachandradas.com

Aarthi Sankar is a Bharatanatyam practitioner with 27 years of training in the art form.
Ruby Jayaseelan has trained formally in Bharatanatyam and Yoga, and works in physical theatre, performance art, as well as somatic and experimental movement.

Questions to Consider:

- Why did the artists choose the medium of dance to express the different themes in their work?
- What movements, expressions and symbolism do the artists use in the film? How do you feel when you view them?

Remember Me
Divya Cowasji



“Those are the last words I said to Dinoo, the last assurances she needed from me — that I would love her things.”

What happens when a person dies? Do all their thoughts and feelings die along with them? What of the things they leave behind? Do they count if there is no one around to love those things? What if you are that person? What if everything they left behind was all yours to cherish, and therefore all your burden to bear?

Remember Me is an ongoing project documenting my family history through the material objects that people leave behind and family lore passed on through generations. At the moment, it focuses on the women in my family — my grandmothers, great-grandmother and grand aunt. It is my love letter to the flawed and incredible people who came before me and left indelible impressions on my being.

Though specific to my Parsi-Irani-Indian heritage, this is also a universal tale of family and connection, the desire to be remembered, and the ultimate faltering and failing of human memory.”

— Divya Cowasji

Divya Cowasji is a photographer and documentary filmmaker from central India. Her personal work focuses on the telling of oral histories, on ideas of home and family, memory, place, play and the body.
divyacowasji.com

Questions to Consider:

- Why are memories important to the artist? How does she show it?
- Why do you think the artist choose to make self-portraits as part of the series?
- Do you or your members of your family collect photos or other memorabilia from older family members? Why do you do so?

All That's Left, All in Red
Ennuh Tiu



“Growing up Filipino-Chinese, it’s a family tradition to wear red during special occasions. As a rebellious youth, this tradition started to annoy me a bit. There were times when I wore pink instead.

However, red still found a way into my life. I bought a pair of red shoes before going home, and finding out that my father had passed away. I’ve been conditioned all my life to associate the colour with joy, celebration, and good fortune, and here it is, now a symbol of death.

After a failed relationship, I dyed my hair a brilliant shade of red—a representation of rebellion and change. At this point, I’ve lost all close connections tying me to my Chinese lineage. I neither understand nor speak the language and have no one close enough to make me understand it on a deeper, more personal level.

Recently I began to ask myself, “Why am I finding this colour so hard to let go?” I never realised until then how it has always been present in my life and my identity. How it has become a symbol for many things that have been inherent in me.

These photos provide a glimpse into very specific parts of my life as I try to regain my sense of self after significant loss. Embedded within it are themes of love, loss, and reckoning, among others. It is an ongoing attempt to confront feelings of disconnect and alienation with parts of my lineage, to unpack loss and life experiences, to hopefully understand who I am and how I feel.”

— Ennuh Tiu

Ennuh Tiu is a Filipino photographer whose work explores themes of self-discovery, identity, and personal relationships.
[instagram.com/ennuhchew](https://www.instagram.com/ennuhchew)

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist use symbolism in her work?
- How does the artist convey her story? (e.g. Is it told formally or informally? How is it communicated aesthetically?)
- What is your own family history? Do you feel that you have a strong cultural identity, or one that is mixed, or in flux? Why do you think so?

Lapping Emulations
Hong Shu-ying



“When I was younger, I had a misconception about the Chinese characters for seaweed. My Mandarin pronunciations had always been slightly off due to my Brunei accent. Instead of “purple vegetable” (zicai), I always thought the seaweed was “paper vegetable” (zhicai). In my eyes, the seaweed was always dried and in its black and wrinkly form. It was a mass of black, a mess of black. The seaweed was a large piece of black pastry - thin and crispy, light and fragile.” — Hong Shu-ying

Lapping Emulations adopts a process-led investigation into an unstable and protean cultural identity. Shu’s family was proudly Chinese in ways she could never articulate confidently. Looking at her family histories, traditions and customs, she found they were always near the sea, always eating parmee (a Henghwa noodle dish) and always writing in Chinese.

Through her darkroom and editing improvisations, Shu articulates her rumination as part of Singapore’s Chinese diaspora. This process of looking and relooking was potent for holding onto fluid ideas and analogies. Shu created a space to ponder, wonder, and indulge in imaginative labour by practising abstraction and defamiliarisation. Departing from the seaweed, Shu began to look at the sea as this rich allegory and visual mine. Like the sea, Chineseness is never the same even though it is always present. It is an amorphous entity of shifting, formless bodies.

Hong Shu-ying is a Singaporean artist who explores notions of home and familiarity through her work. Informed by her lived experiences and Chinese culture, she is a keen observer of the traces people leave on and for each other.
hongshuying.art

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist use symbolism in her work?
- How do the processes that the artist has used in her work reflect her search for “Chineseness”?
- As a second generation Singaporean Chinese person, Shu-ying’s project is her way of tracing her family’s roots and journey. How would you describe your own family’s journey, and how might you depict it visually?

Kaufu
Michelle Chan



"I was never close to Kaufu. My only memory of him was of buses.

Kaufu (my mother's brother) passed away in 2019, at age 50. In his flat, I discovered what he left behind – CDs, DVDs, cassette tapes, comic books and a very large collection of bus-related memorabilia. Miniature bus models, books, news-cuttings and photographs of buses filled every corner of his flat and occupied three more mini-storage areas. I began to obsess about his obsession.

Kaufu is a long-term project, a homage to the bus driver uncle I regret never getting to know, and a tribute to his obsession with buses. In Part One of my project, I use collage as a way to explore the meaning of disappearance and loss, and as a form of care towards my uncle's death. Through physical touches and sensory connections with his belongings, I pieced together archival images and first-hand leftover materials of his bus magazines, photographs and objects in his collection to narrate an imagined story of his afterlife."

— Michelle Chan

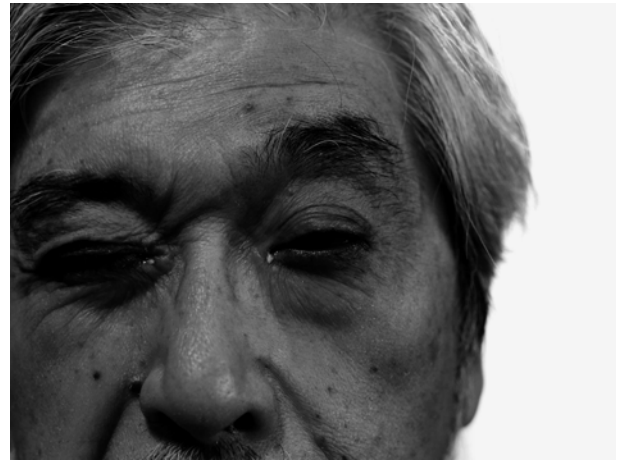
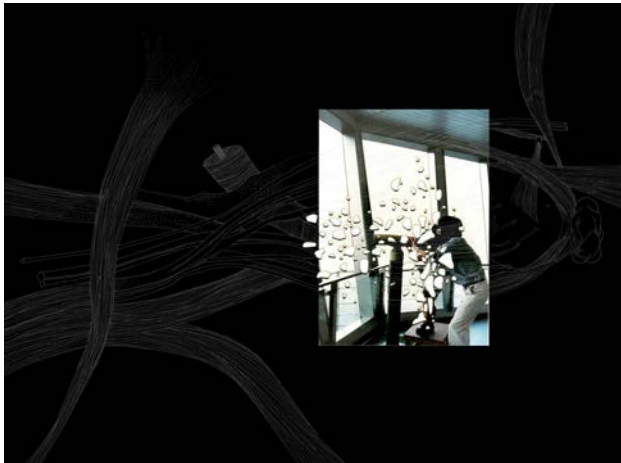
Michelle Chan is a visual storyteller from Hong Kong, whose main interests lie in exploring Chinese mythology, folk religion and philosophy through everyday objects and experiences, and narrating stories that play along the fine line between fact and fiction.

littledotrice.com

Questions to Consider:

- What found objects do you see in the series? What do you think the objects represent, and how does the artist utilise them in her work?
- The artist weaves fact, fiction and mythology into her collages. How are they applied, and how do you feel when you look at them?

Sokohi
Moe Suzuki



“There are moments when I feel as if my family’s memories are gradually fading into the mist, disintegrated and covered by blind spots. My father is gradually losing his sight due to glaucoma. His field of vision is narrowing because of glaucoma, and so he wakes up to a darker and narrower world every morning. My father used to be surrounded by books, his journals and photographs he took, but now, those visual records of him and his family simply lie there, neglected by their owner.

Although I know that invisibility is not the same as forgetting, when my father and I lose the communication through our common vision, it is as if we are gradually disappearing in those old photographs and texts he has kept. There are walls between us: the wall my father builds around himself to protect him from the sympathy of people who can see what he cannot see and cannot see what he sees, and the wall I build being trapped in my father’s past as a sighted person.

This project is an attempt to construct a world which may lay in front of my father’s gaze. I keep looking for the way to connect to my father’s world, one in which he is perceiving without relying on his vision.”

— Moe Suzuki

Moe Suzuki is a visual artist from Tokyo, who works primarily with photography and hand bound art books. She often focuses on topics such as community life, and people with disabilities or spirituality.
banyan-b-i.com

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist illustrate her father’s gradual loss of sight?
- How are archival images used in this body of work?
- What are the different approaches the artist uses to illustrate her own sense of loss regarding her father’s condition? Why do you think she uses these approaches?

A Spider, Fever and Other Disappearing Islands
Natalie Khoo



"A spider, fever and other disappearing islands is an auto-ethnographic docu-fiction on my grandmother's migration between the Riau Islands and Singapore as mediated through the mutable story of a spider spirit.

A web of subjectivities and interpretations of stories adjacent to the spider forms a tender and tragicomic portrait of family history circulating between the islands. Memories of war and sickness, tinctures of empire and tales of spirits - both familial, and strange - continue to simultaneously haunt and playfully reconfigure themselves around the spider story and the media forms they become represented through."

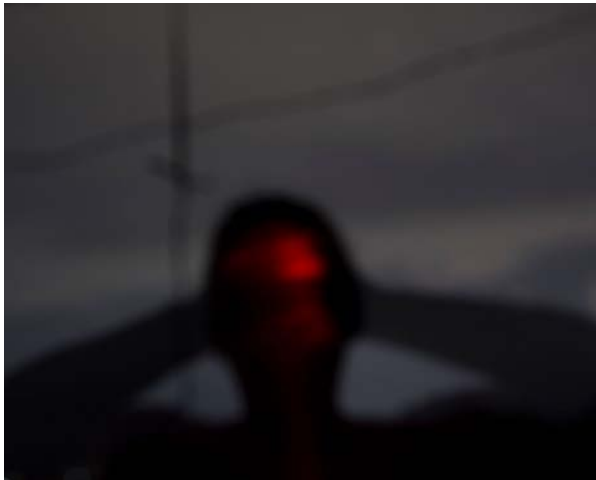
— Natalie Khoo

Natalie Khoo is a moving image artist, filmmaker and film programmer with a background in Archaeology and Anthropology. Her work treads between docufiction, dreams and artefacts.

Questions to Consider:

- Why do you think the artist choose to weave various elements like documentary, fiction and animation into her film?
- How do the symbols in the film present an idea or a narrative?
- What are some of the stories of family history and tradition shared in your family? What do you think about them?

Stay Home, Sisters
Uma Bista



“I was confined for twelve days. Restricted from going out into the sunlight, from seeing any male family members. Filled with fear and uncertainty. I still remember those days and nights, my eyes fixed on the ceiling while rays of light came and went.

This was my first period. It took time to grasp the taboo surrounding menstruation – I’m still trying to understand it.

Despite being outlawed, Chhaupadi is still widely practiced in Western Nepal. Each month, women are subjected to a ritual of isolation. Deemed impure, they are forced to stay in cowsheds. Elsewhere in the country, this oppression takes on other forms.

How my mother treats me is infuriating, as someone who herself suffered under the same patriarchal oppression. It infuriates me to see other girls subjected to the same dark rooms. The fear is so deeply rooted, it upholds these harmful beliefs.

When we get cramps, we can take medicines to ease the pain. But what do we do about the psychological trauma, inherited and passed down through generations?”

— Uma Bista

Uma Bista is an independent photographer based in Nepal who works on visual narratives that focus on issues of gender inequality.
umabista.com

Questions to Consider:

- What sort of imagery and symbolism are used in the work? How are they used?
- The women portrayed in the series are not clearly identifiable - why do you think the artist has chosen to photograph this way?
- The artist works with various NGOs, to provide local communities resources on women’s rights and education. How do you think such a photo project can be used to effect change?

Alternative Imaginaries
Yen Duong



In the age of mass cultural and technological commodification of memories, we are capable of developing an intimate relationship with events we did not experience.

In this ongoing work, Yen Duong examines the relationship between collective memory, private history and political amnesia in modern day Vietnam. Inspired by the concept of "prosthetic memory" coined by Alison Landsberg in 1995, Yen documents the touches of time in her country's changing landscape and juxtaposes images taken in both public and domestic settings with online found images of the American war in Vietnam.

Her approach is a self-inquiry towards the inherited and invented memories that inform her understanding of Vietnam's turbulent history and its connection to the present day.

Yen Duong is a Vietnamese photographer based in Ho Chi Minh City. She has covered many critical stories, exploring themes from women's rights, human trafficking, environmental and natural disasters, to the impact of rapid urbanization on marginalized communities.
duoyen.com

Questions to Consider:

- How does the artist explore the themes of "collective memory, private history and political amnesia" through her series?
- The artist has chosen not to caption her images. How does it impact your understanding of the work and themes explored?
- Visual narratives can shape the way we think about history. Can you think of some local or international images that have such impact?