

Steph HUANG

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REVIEWS TAIPEI

Steph Huang

Hong Foundation

By Robin Peckham



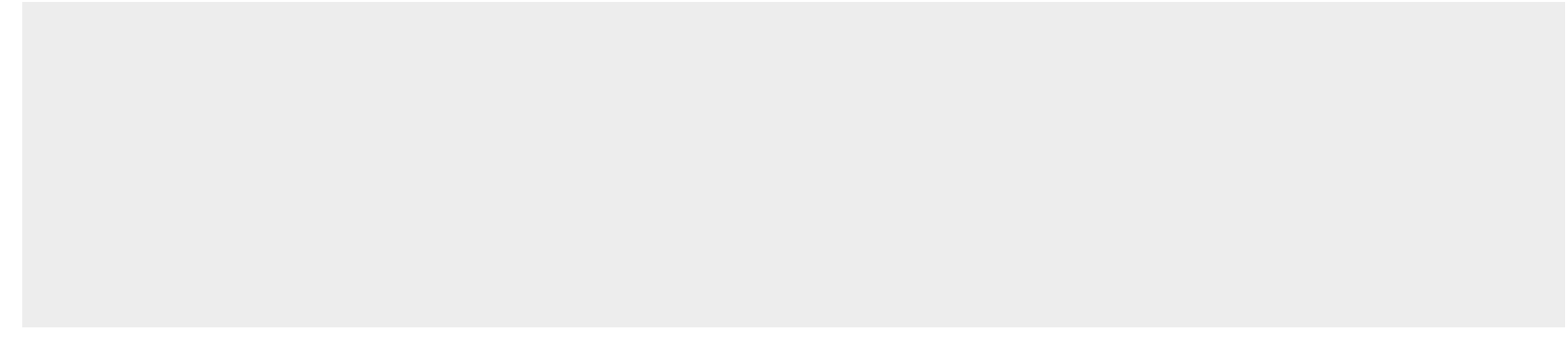
Steph Huang, *Harmonious Family, Elegant House*, 2024, bronze, MDF, emulsion, hand-blown glass, pinewood, 7 1/8 × 11 7/8 × 11 7/8".

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Over the past several years, Steph Huang has created a loose trilogy of installations tied to her unstable relationship to home: leaving it, remaking it, returning to it. First, in 2021, *Escape from Where We Are*, shown at Huang’s MA thesis show for the Royal College of Art in London, established a vocabulary of the domestic environment by adopting and adapting objects from her comings and goings during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. One such space was the Parisian street, where the artist spent carefree days that remain etched in her memory and in the materiality of her sculpture, often appearing as either a baguette or a sausage. Another important pandemic space was her childhood house in Yunlin County. The house had been left vacant until it became her official address for the strict quarantine periods imposed on anyone reentering Taiwan at that time. While there, she collected discarded objects from the house and repainted or restored them, spurred by her belief in the talismanic properties of the things around us. In “Everything and Nothing,” the second exhibition in this series, held at mother’s tankstation limited in London in 2022, many of these elements introduced in *Escape* reappeared in new configurations: Patterns like the ones on the interiors of hinged plywood boxes in the first piece were hand-painted onto boxes bearing blown-glass vessels in the second, while bamboo leaves were mounted on frames reminiscent of dish racks. Early on in her career, Huang has already established herself as a poet of materiality who crystallizes experiences universally shared—growth, loneliness, nostalgia, reflection—with a knack for finding the punctum of particularity that drives home a heartrending resonance.

The third exhibition in this series, “Property for Sale,” found closure by bringing the project to Taiwan. For Huang, the very concept of home always seems to imply displacement; as with many expatriates and migrants operating in the cultural borderlands of multiple communities, she is an outsider wherever she finds herself. But objects in specific constellations may have a ritual power that calls forth a sense of home, sometimes evoking it in memory and sometimes cultivating belonging in the present. It is visible in the tender work of the hand that Huang brings to the prosaic architectural elements of her childhood home: For *A House Filled with Auspicious Aura* (all works 2024), she lovingly restored a set of Japanese-style pinewood sliding doors, which would have demarcated a tatami room, and replaced their original cheap Plexiglas with handblown glass tiles. She did the same for the wall sconces of *Harmonious Family, Elegant House*, turning what would have been uninspired choices for domestic lighting into devices for meaning imbued with the personhood—the bodily touch—of the artist as a grown child. Huang learned to blow glass when she became aware of the craft’s fading status in Taiwan, and now it appears throughout her work as an approach to rematerializing the everyday, drawing attention back to something too familiar. In *Relocation Celebration*, her glass replaces the traditional housewarming gift of decorative bamboo, and in *A Pipe Dream* bubbles of pure breath appear suspended midstream, alternately blocking and flowing through the infrastructure of a home—of a life. Huang’s other key sculptural medium is cast bronze, appearing in *House Filled with Auspicious Auras* as a cluster of peanuts—the residue of a social moment left behind—and separately in *Return Home* and *Fallen Leaves*, as ambiguous forms hanging off branches mounted with surprising sensitivity in the lighting tracks of the gallery. These forms began as seashells that the artist collected for a separate body of work; she realized that their wax casts, when exposed to the warmth of her hand, ended up melting into shapes recalling foliage. This shift in context, like revisiting an old home as a stranger in a strange land, is as psychological as it is physical.



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Sofia Córdova, *Green Is A Solace, A Promise of Peace (where small birds hide and dodge and lift their plaintive rallying cries)* (detail), 2022, taxidermied doves, parakeets, and canaries, hair dye, brass, birch wood. Installation view, JOAN, Los Angeles, 2024. Photo: Evan Walsh.

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