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Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Courtesy of Rourou Ye

Dreaming of Home on Lunar New Year

by Kristi Yeung

On Feb. 12, the first night of the Year of the Ox, I watched the moon dance. Starting as a brilliant beacon, perfectly round and full, it gradually narrowed into a crescent, then disappeared, only to reappear and repeat the sequence in reverse order. Waxing and waning, the moon continued cycling through its phases, at times speeding up, at other times slowing down, until suddenly, it darted off like a shooting star.

You may have guessed that this performance didn't take place in the night sky. It played out on my computer, as the first scene of a new work by choreographer and visual artist [Rourou Ye](#). Made in collaboration with musical duo [Southeast of Rain](#), the film premiered during Ye's Lunar New Year show on Zoom, hosted by the Brooklyn and Hudson-based [Jonah Bokaer Arts Foundation](#). Attracting an international audience, the show was conducted in both English and Mandarin with the artists taking turns translating. Greetings of "???" (Happy New Year) populated the chat as I entered the virtual room.

Ye was born in Wenzhou and is now based in New York City. Her film, *I Followed the Moon to the River, My Far-Flung Home*, is about her experience as a foreign artist living in America. Through shadow play, projection, and the layering of cultural imagery, Ye takes viewers on a moonlit, riverside path from China to New York and back.

The film is transportive, and I am in awe of having felt so geographically moved while confined in my own home. And even more in awe of Ye for having created this experience while confined in her own home. Working within the restrictions imposed by the COVID era, Ye inventively uses household items—a flashlight, a bedroom wall, old video recordings, rice, and a bathtub—to evoke images of Chinese culture and New York City life.

The merging of these two cultures is echoed in the music, composed and performed by Southeast of Rain's [pipa](#)-player Sophia Shen

and vocalist Lemon Guo. Though both musicians are originally from Fujian, they met at the University of Virginia as students in the music department. Today, Shen and Guo live in San Francisco and New York City, respectively. Combining Chinese folk songs with field recordings, they marry traditional and contemporary elements in ethereal, nature-inspired compositions. In the film, their music is the pulse propelling Ye's multicultural vision, harmoniously melding together old with new techniques and Eastern with Western influences.

Screenings of Ye's earlier works preceded the film's premiere. *Wafting to Depart* takes inspiration from the poetic line, "Where will you waft when wind and rain abate?" by classical Chinese poet [Su Shi](#). Carried by the sounds of wind, a trio of dancers circle the stage and each other, like leaves getting separated then tangled together. *To Be* is set to a chant by Nepalese Buddhist nun [Ani Choying Drolma](#). Moved by the melodic incantation, Ye twists her fingers, arms, and torso into elaborate curves from Tibetan and Dai folk dances.

The show also featured pre-recorded performance videos from Southeast of Rain. The video for "Tn? ?o'?o" starts with Shen calling Guo on FaceTime. After a quick greeting, Shen plays her pipa against a sunny sienna wall in California, and Guo sings as she walks along packed snow framed by bare branches in New York. They perform a Hokkien folk song from their hometown, embellished with thunderstorm audio recordings captured during a prior visit. While this arrangement presents a contemporary twist on a traditional song, their cover of "I Want You" by Fan Chong, from the 2016 movie *Mr. Donkey*, showcases their classical training on a modern tune.

In the post-show panel, the artists discussed their shared experience of missing home. This wistfulness resonates across their works. Created in different times, set in diverse locations, and inspired by various cultures, Ye's enchanting imagery and Southeast of Rain's meditative soundscapes are invitations to dream about far-flung homes.

[Rourou Ye and Lunar New Year \(???????\)](#), Jonah Bokaer Arts Foundation Presents: RECESS, Zoom, Feb. 12.

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February 20, 2021