





CANDICE LIN

LITHIUM SEX DEMONS
IN THE FACTORY

CANAL PROJECTS



Contents

- 5** **Foreword**
Summer Guthery
- 28** **Toxicity and Resistance in Candice Lin's**
Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory
Sara Garzón
- 53** **Demonic Desires**
Rachel M Tang



Foreword

Candice Lin's artworks are akin to interpreting tea leaves, with close scrutiny of their materials—their sediment, shape, scent, and behavior—serving as a guide. The exhibition, titled *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory*, weaves a speculative narrative around doomed love, labor, and demonic possession within the context of lithium production. Building on her exploration of commodities like indigo, opium, and cochineal, Lin crafts a fictional tale centered on a lithium battery factory where workers have become possessed. Through a combination of sculpture, text, video animation, and hand-dyed textiles, Lin's exhibition is a hypnotic installation that addresses the politics of extraction, colonial histories, and the rapid pace of globalization with a subversive playfulness.

The project was born out of an interest in experimental practices and untold diasporic stories that is shared between our institution and Canal Projects' advisory board member Sook-Kyung Lee, who also served as the Artistic Director of the 14th Gwangju Biennale. This common interest led to the co-production of *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory* with the Biennale, where it premiered in April 2023. Working closely with the Gwangju Biennale team has been a true pleasure, and this exhibition is the result of a generous and collaborative effort.

This publication includes two essays on Lin's work by Rachel M Tang, a writer and art historian, and Dr. Sara Garzón, Assistant Curator at Canal Projects. Tang explores Lin's portrayal of intimacy, longing, and the transcendence of time, while Garzón interprets Lin's work as a narrative of the demonic, which serves as a method for negotiating the conditions of displaced and dispossessed workers.

I extend my gratitude to Candice Lin and her team, Yotam Menda-Levy, Valeria Tizol-Vivas, and Anna Cho-Son, as well as the various other collaborators involved in making this installation a reality. Special thanks to the 14th Gwangju Biennale Artistic Director, Sook-Kyung Lee, for her vision and support, to Sooyoung Leam, Curatorial Assistant, for her meticulous attention to details across various time zones, and to the staff at Canal Projects, Andrew Lee, Sara Garzón, and Maya Hayda for their dedication to this project.

A notable aspect of this collaboration is Lin's time in Mokpo, South Korea, where she worked with Master Hyangjong Oh on the production of ten ceramic onggi vessels displayed in the exhibition. We express our gratitude to Master Hyangjong Oh for his time, wisdom, and hospitality.

On a local level, we are delighted to have connected with the digital platform Triple Canopy, which published Lin's story, "My Life as a Lithium Sex Demon," coinciding with the opening of our exhibition. Special thanks to the Triple Canopy team, especially editors Rachel Ossip and Alex Provan. We also appreciate the continuous support and contributions of Gan Uyeda and the artist's gallery, François Ghebaly. An immense thank you to Scott Ponik for his beautiful design work on this catalog.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the generosity and support of the Canal Projects Board of Managers and Advisory Board, as well as the YS Kim Foundation, as both play a crucial role in supporting all our endeavors at Canal Projects.

Summer Guthery
Artistic Director
Canal Projects

















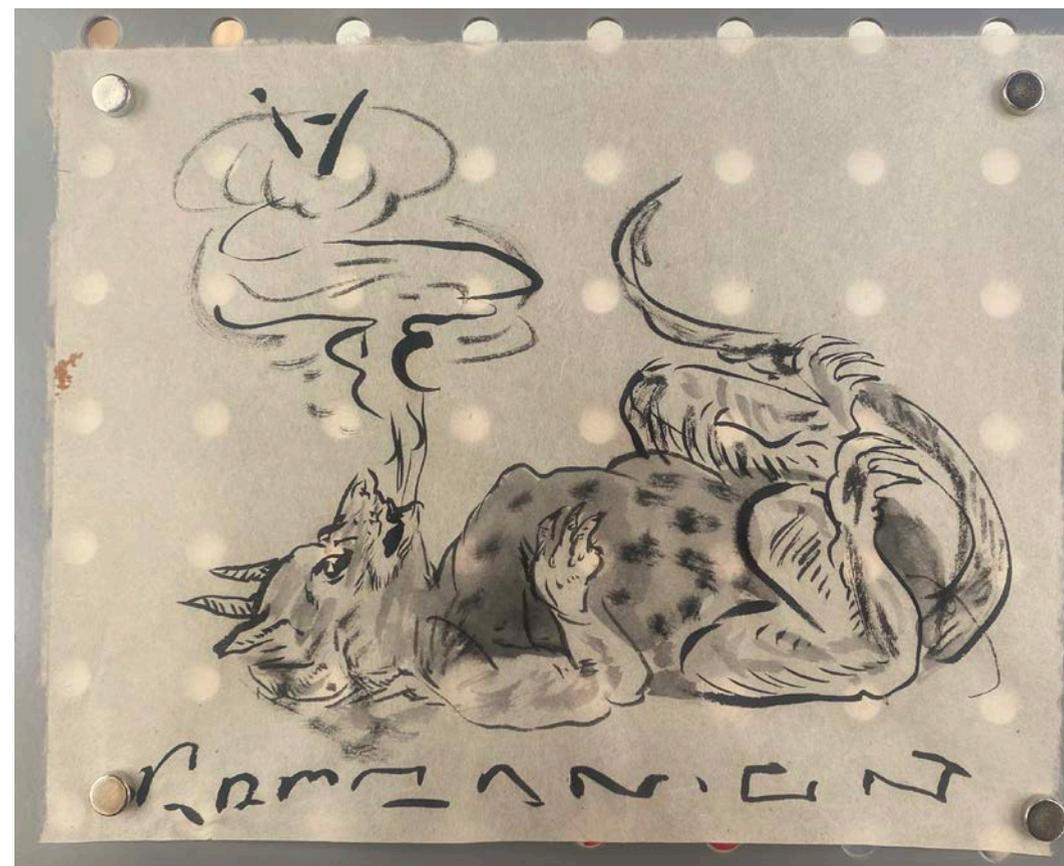
Please look at the system of a fool





Toxicity and Resistance in Candice Lin's *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory*

Sara Garzón



At the center of Candice Lin's newest site-specific installation, *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory* (2023), lies the "manager's office." This elevated platform provides a vantage point from which visitors can take on the surveillance gaze of a factory supervisor. Despite being brightly lit, the office is constrictive. The short ceiling curtails the sense of power that one is supposed to adopt when occupying the space. A window fitted with a one-way mirror looks onto the ground floor of Canal Projects where six industrial workstations imitate the desks of lithium battery manufacturers. Each workstation contains laboratory equipment including glass beakers, tumblers, boiling flasks, and jars filled with liquid concoctions. The liquids flow through tubing that emerge from *onggis*, traditional Korean ceramic fermentation vessels, and cut over the workstations which are filled with time clocks, whirring machines, and bright lights. On top of the gray metal stations, ceramic computers containing video animations narrate the fictional lives of the lithium sex demons—specifically one cat-demon's quest to return from the dead to their lover in the battery factory.

Candice Lin's attention to the materiality of mass production of ceramics and lithium in this installation allows her to weave together many worlds of signification. Her phantasmal lithium factory looks, sounds, and feels, like an *al*-chemical laboratory



where the traditional and the modern collide. Altogether, this collision blurs the lines between the custom-made and the mass-produced, and between mysticism and science, in ways that unsettle how we come to understand capitalism's handling of labor, commodity production, and gender relations. Drawing on both historical and fictional accounts, the project interrogates lithium battery manufacturing through a particular attention to the paranormal where spectral phenomena emerge to fissure the logic of advanced capitalism and its forceful systems of subjectivation.¹

Since the 1970s, anthropologist Aihwa Ong has collected and analyzed a wide range of testimonies related to demonic apparitions, ghostly encounters, or spectral presences that have been primarily reported by female workers employed by electronic factories in Asia. In a seminal study of this phenomena, Ong noted that:

¹ I use the concept of refusal here following the writings of Dixa Ramirez, *Colonial Phantoms. Belonging and Refusal in the Dominican Americas, from the 19th Century to the Present* (New York: New York University Press, 2018); and Audra Simpson, "On Ethnographic Refusal: Indigeneity, 'Voice' and Colonial Citizenship," *Junctures* 9 (December 2007): 67–80. According to them, refusal indicates the capacity to reclaim language in a way that regenerates the social relationships that are negated or disavowed in colonial representations of modes of understanding the so-called *other*.



...workers pointed to the effect of the steady hum and the factory pollutants, which permanently disturbed graveyard spirits. Unleashed, these vengeful beings were seen to threaten women for transgressing into the zone between the human and nonhuman world, as well as modern spaces formerly the domain of men.²

These accounts of demonic apparitions coincide with the harsh, restrictive, and often oppressive working conditions inside the factories. However, as Ong's study also showed, the testimonies are often dismissed as simple expressions of female hysteria or medical malaise.³ And yet, theorists of capitalism, colonialism, and gender relations such as Michel Foucault, Antonio Gramsci, Sylvia Wynter, and others have often discussed the fact that paranormal phenomena can be interpreted as methods for negotiating the ontological conditions of market alienation, as these schematas

² Aihwa Ong, "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," *American Ethnologist* 15, no. 1 (February 1988): 34.

³ Ong, "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," 29.

emerge precisely in scenarios where dispossessed workers have to grapple with the forces of dehumanization.

Candice Lin's installation tackles the factory as a site that contains both the alleged liberties of free market economies as well as their oppressive colonial corollaries. Explored through the subject position of female workers, Lin's recreation of a manufacturing setting allows us to contend with the ways in which factories have historically been sites of contestation.

While the western liberal project of the eighteenth-century sought to build factories under a logic of free-trade and emancipation by that waged labor would equalize society, historian Lisa Lowe carefully describes the paradoxical ways in which the development of industrialized work simultaneously structured the racialization of people under systems of servitude and slavery in Asia.⁴ As Lowe describes in her text *The Intimacies of Four Continents*,⁴ the promotion of liberty would appear to eradicate or vanquish despotic modes of governing, in the nineteenth century liberal



⁴ Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 1–41.



tradition exemplified by [John Stuart] Mill, despotism was discussed not as counter to liberty, but as the very condition out of which liberty arises and the condition to which it's integral and bound."⁵ Lowe further articulates how the liberal ideas of emancipation through industrialization became the preconditions for the continuation of slavery, whereby, "Liberty did not contradict colonial rule but rather accommodated both colonialism as territorial rule, and colonialism as the expansion of imperial trade in Asia."⁶ Lowe's articulations illuminate that while free trade and its labor structures have signified freedom for some, liberal economic aspirations have been historically tied to the dispossession of others, those who are deemed "unfit for liberty."⁷ It is thus not a coincidence that according to Ong the appearance of Taylorism and Fordist-like assembly-lines in south and southeast Asia in the 1970s also altered the social and economic fabric of peasants and rural communities.⁸ Marking both the

⁵ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 15.

⁶ Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, 15.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Ong, "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," 34–35.



time of capital and the disciplining of the subject, the development of factory work rearticulated the relationship between natural resources, commodities, and workers. Under the assembly-line, these entities became inseparable and often interchangeable.⁹ Decolonial scholar Aníbal Quijano termed this paradigm the "colonial matrix of power,"—a logic built on the ever-evolving instrumentalization of race, gender, and economic exploitation, in the service of the expanding mechanisations of colonial oppression.¹⁰

Lin's interest in the symbolism around demons and ghosts within the ceramic

⁹ Ong, "The Production of Possession: Spirits and the Multinational Corporation in Malaysia," 34–35.

¹⁰ The "colonial matrix of power" (*patron del poder colonial*) is a concept elaborated by Aníbal Quijano that explains the various domains in which colonial power operates. According to Quijano the colonial matrix of power encompasses four different domains: "1) The appropriation of land and the exploitation of labor; 2) the control of authority (vicereignty, colonial states, military structures); 3) The control of gender and sexuality (the Christian family, gender and sexual values and conduct); 4) The control of subjectivity (the Christian faith, secular idea of subject and citizen) and knowledge (the principles of theology structuring all forms of knowledge and concept of Reason structuring the human and natural science and the practical knowledge of professional schools." For a detailed discussion on the colonial matrix of power see, Aníbal Quijano, "Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social," en *Cuestiones y horizontes: De la dependencia histórico-estructural a la colonialidad/decolonialidad del poder* (Buenos Aires: CLASCO, 2014); Walter D. Mignolo, "Delinking. The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-Coloniality," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2 (March 2007): 477–478.



vessels, video animations, and tapestries of this installation arises from the aforementioned scholarly study on the subject. In Lin's approach to the demonic, however, testimonies of lithium toxicity become entwined with a fictional story of desire and transformation. The sex cat-demon in Lin's fictional narrative is a composite figure that draws from various Asian myths such as the *éguǐ*—Chinese hungry ghosts, *gaki*—the Japanese shit-eating ghosts, and the Malay *penanggal* that feasts on menstrual blood. In the artist's text titled "My Life as a Lithium Sex Demon," edited and published online by Triple Canopy, the sex demon returns to their estranged lover through toxicity, existentially questioning the bodily and spiritual limits of sex and desire. The story, animated for the installation at Canal Projects, plays inside the ceramic computers found on top of the workstations.

While referencing specific Pan-Asian demonic lores and their engagement with corpses, feces, and blood, Lin's story also recalls the surrealist exploration of eroticism and the grotesque by the French avant-garde writer George Bataille (1897–1962). While perhaps only coincidentally, Bataille's explorations into the ideas of aberrant sensuality resonate with Lin's narrative of eroticism amidst bodily fluids,



death, and transformation.¹¹ Lin's animated story suspends us in the tension between life and death, civility and impropriety, that is similarly proposed in Bataille's own exploration of the grotesque. According to the surrealist author, the confluence of eroticism and the grotesque questions, challenges, and even helps us to escape the strict rules defining human "civility."¹² In Lin's installation, the grotesque is replaced by the demonic, which is presented in the alleged aberrant eroticism of the sex demons. In one instance, the animation showcases the cat-demon contemplating a dead body. Intoxicated by lithium fumes, the demon is aroused and confused by death, proceeding to sensually thrust its hips and growl over the motionless and decomposing body. In the story, a demon recounts that:

The humans use the lithium like oil, to power cars and phones and computers. The lithium steals our energy and gives it to the humans. No demon understands why or how. But we can use lithium like a time-travel device: when we eat

¹¹ George Bataille, *Eroticism. Death and Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986), 11.

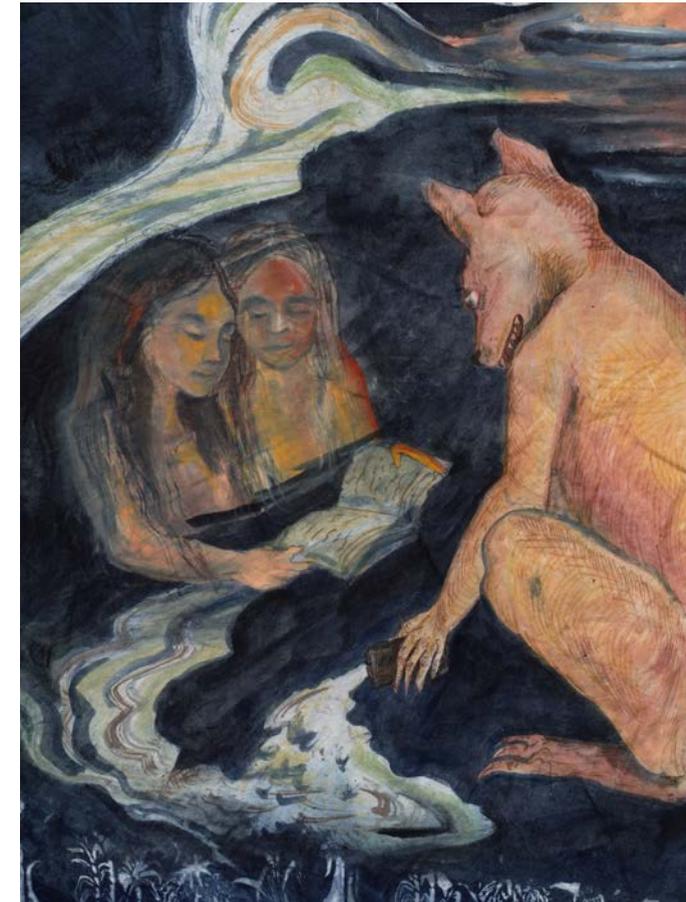
¹² Bataille, *Eroticism. Death and Sensuality*, 11.

the powder, we can slow time and enter the humans' world. We're not at full strength, though. And once we stop eating, the lithium fades out of our bodies; we can't see the humans anymore and they can't see us.¹³

According to the narration, we understand how the demons take on different states of becoming, subsuming every affective and material relationship in their own fungibility. They are transforming and being transformed by the different states of lithium, which changes from powder, to liquid, to energy power. In fact, as stated by curator Lotte Arndt about Candice Lin's 2017 exhibition *A Hard White Body*, toxicity should even be read as "a potential source of pleasure and radical decentering, even as its destructive effects impact bodies unequally."¹⁴ The demon's material relationship with the fumes thus becomes mutually constitutive. The toxicity and the labor of

¹³ Candice Lin, "My Life as a Lithium Sex Demon," Triple Canopy, no. 28, True to Life, (August 16, 2023). <https://canopycanopycanopy.com/contents/my-life-as-a-lithium-sex-demon>

¹⁴ Lote Arndt, "Effective Affinities," in *Candice Lin, A Hard White Body* (Chicago: Reva and David Logan Center for the Arts, 2019), 25.

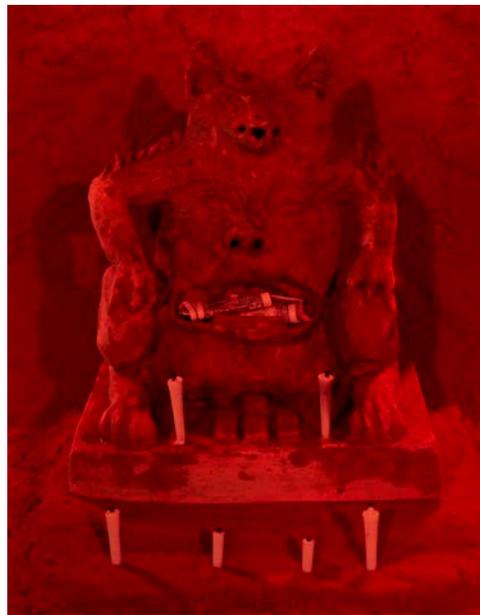


extractive manufacturing cannot be separated from the desires and intimacies of the subject positions that they produce.

While paranormal or mystical activity could, at first glance, be construed as being directly oppositional to the technocratic conditions of "modern" industrial work, the invocation of the demonic is rather one of ambiguity. *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory*, therefore, proposes the demonic as a tool of distraction that signals a persistent interruption of hegemonic narratives.¹⁵ As Aihwa Ong argued, these sites often exude danger from both toxic substances as well as treatment of overseers, generating fear in ways that catalyze violent uprisings, irrational behavior, and fear of wickedness. Yet in the factory, spectrality is not necessarily a mode of resistance, nor is it emancipatory. Lin's installation rests on ambivalence as a strategy that enables the demonic to unsettle the limitations imposed by capitalist-colonial systems.¹⁶ The demonic as an expression of anti-colonial ambivalence transforms not only states

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

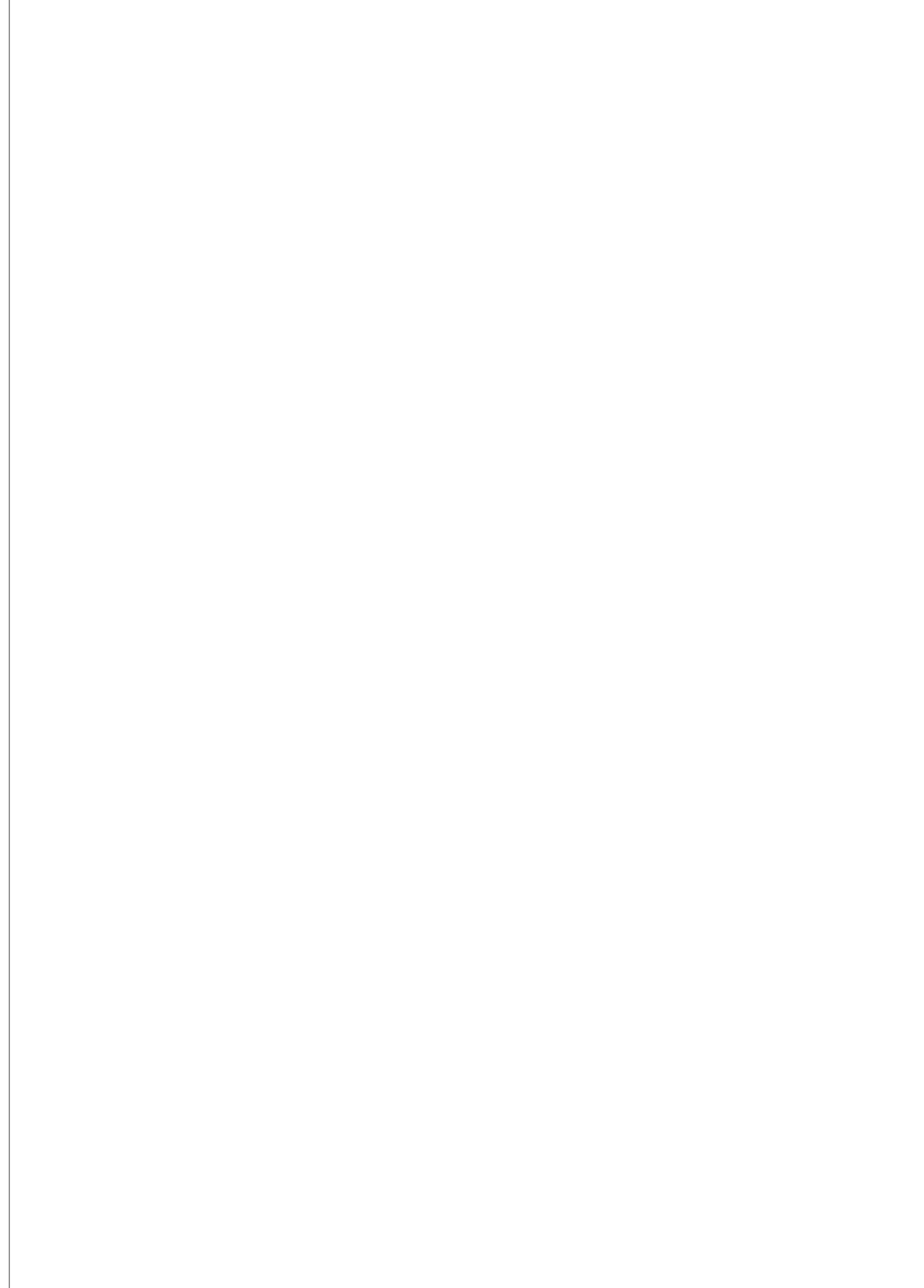
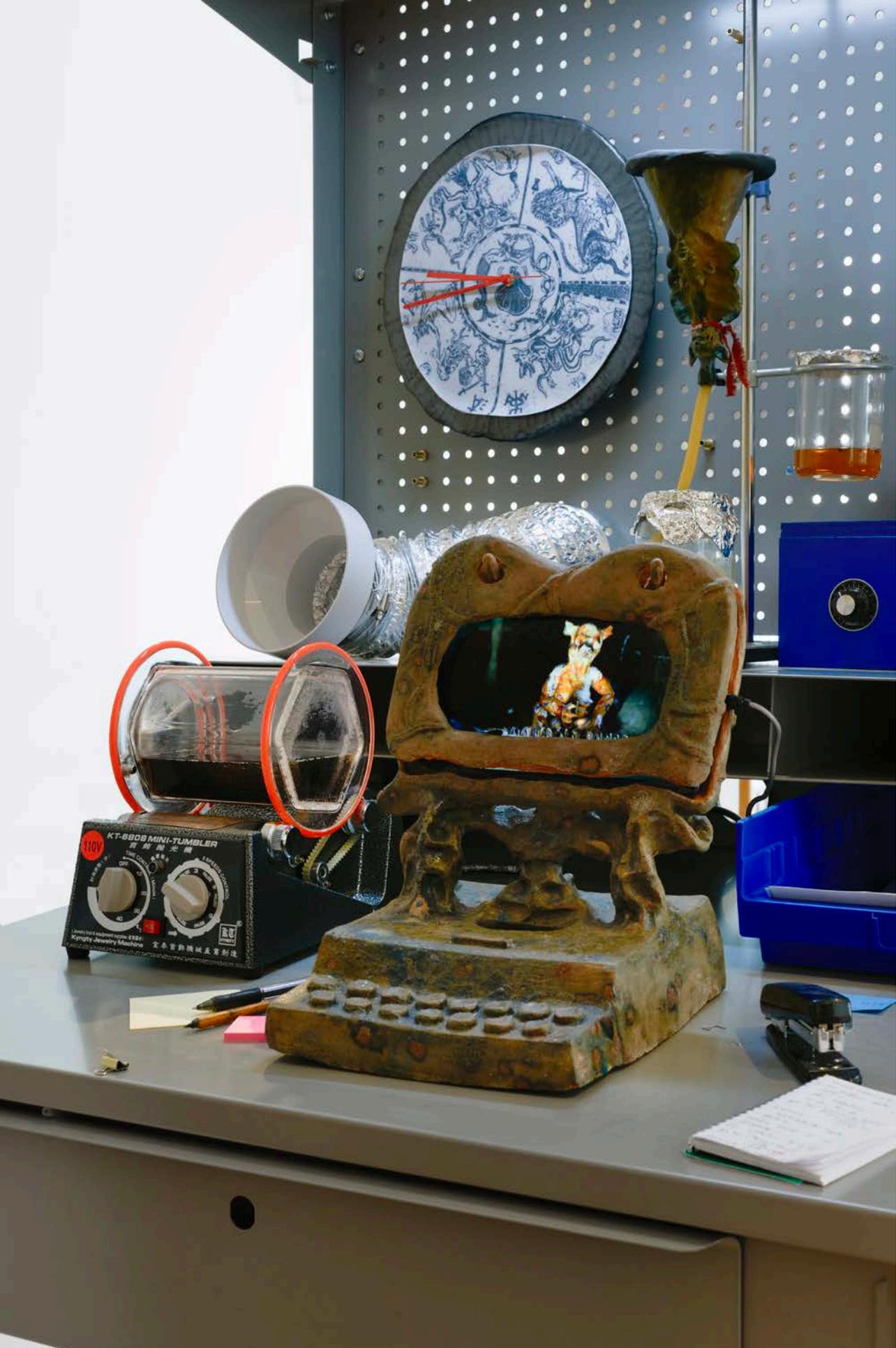
¹⁶ Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), xxv.

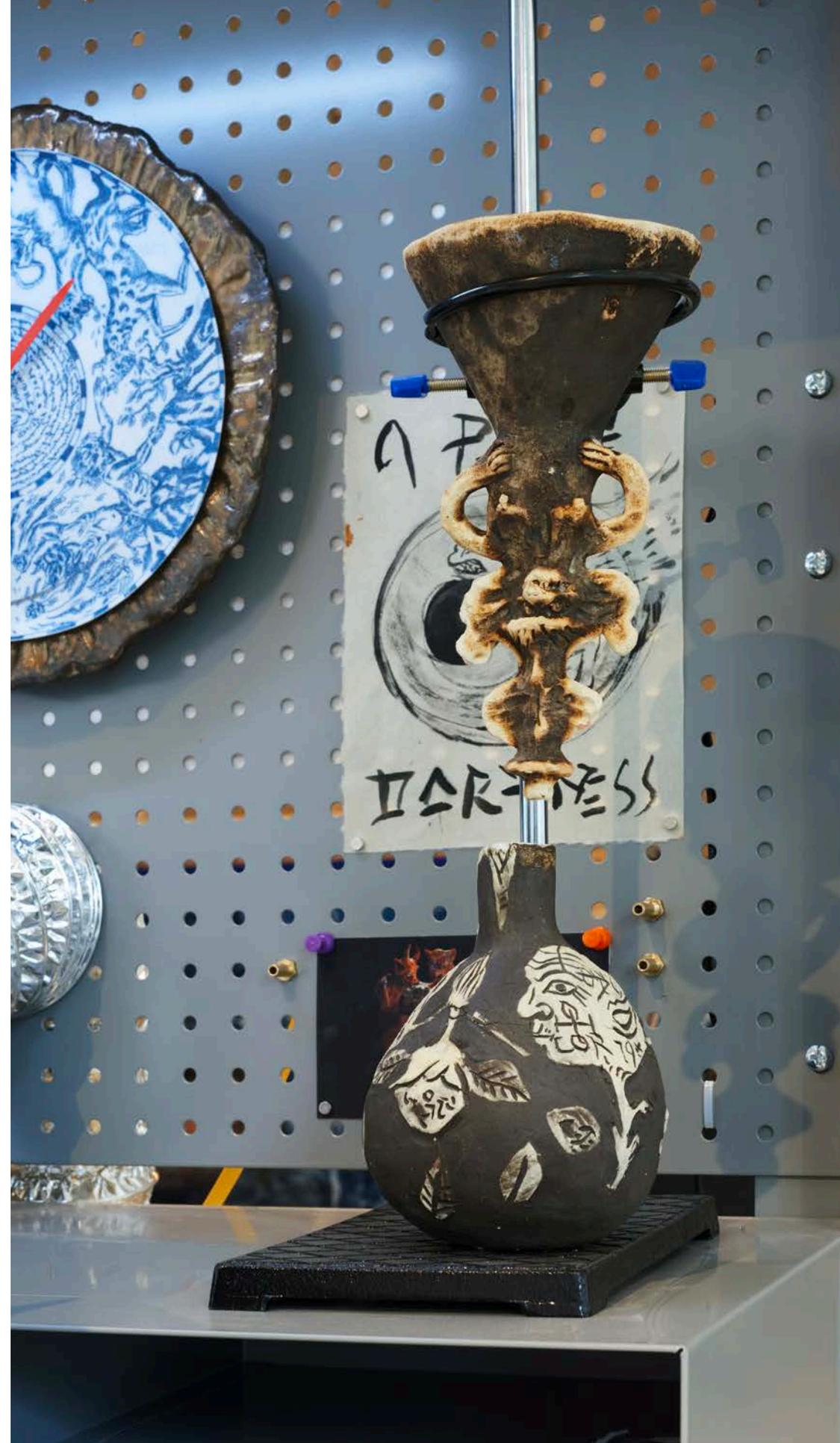


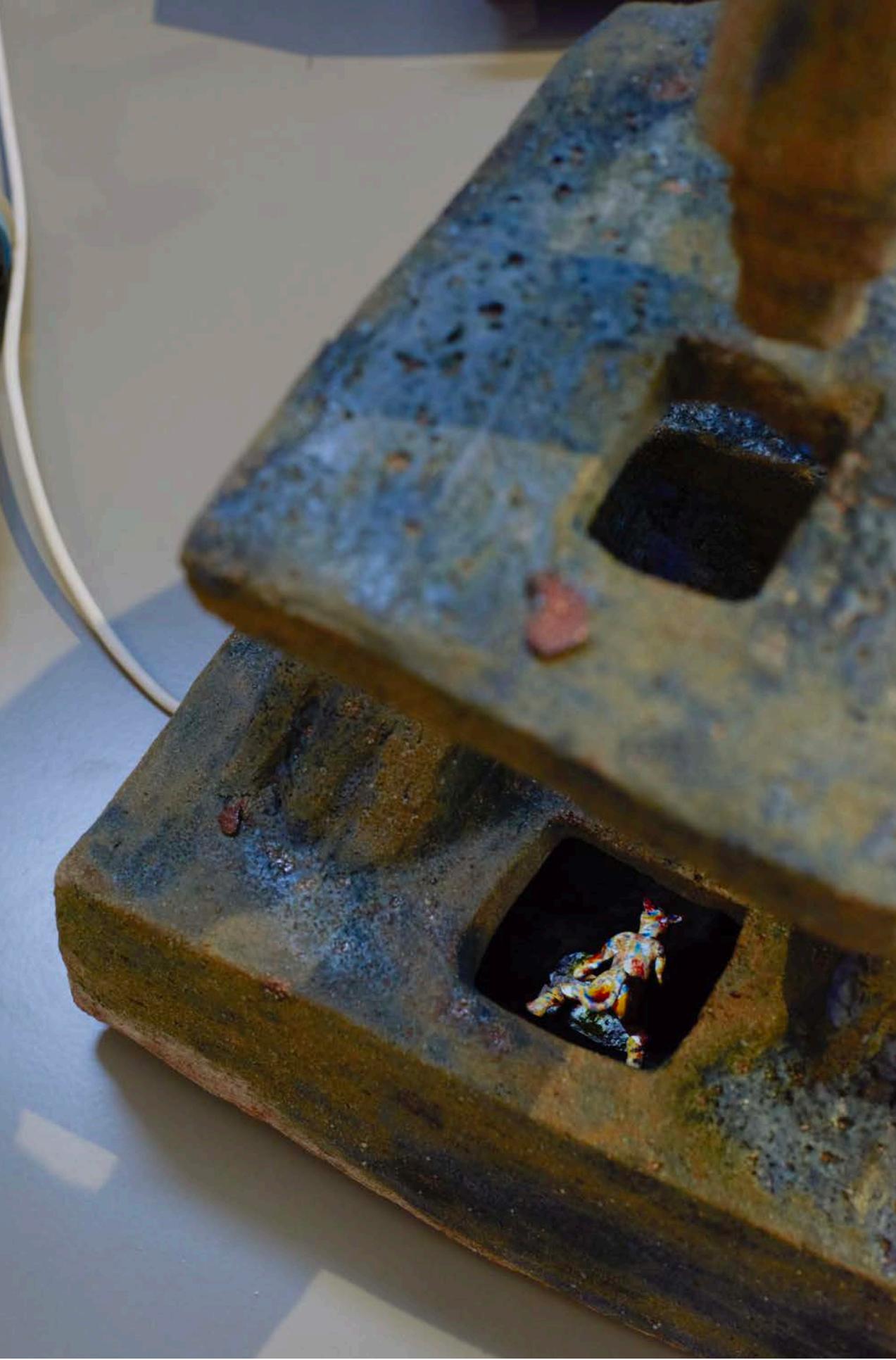
beyond the human, but deploys eroticism in places meant to eradicate all sense of intimacy, affect, and desire, as these allegedly do not belong within the mastery of productiveness established by assembly-line systems.

When Candice Lin indicated to me that the lithium battery factory of her installation was to appear possessed, I understood that the factory did not only host demons, but that the entire infrastructure was in and of itself demonic. The surveilling perspective of the manager's office is designed to make participants complicit with the gaze of the overseer and by default make them witness the demonic taking possession. By way of this vantage point, the demonic is to be contended with, so that by looking down through the one-way mirror onto the workstations, the viewer sees in hauntingly plain sight what nineteenth-century imperial regimes relegated to the margins, to the *Other*. The demonic in *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory* presents us with testimonials of these strategies and struggles, not only in the awareness of the accounts of factory workers, but also in the understanding that the recourse to the demonic enacts a strategy of uncertainty and refusal adequate for the creation of alternative knowledges and intimacies—a knowable world that lies outside the boundaries of western objectivity, science, and mechanical efficiency.













Demonic Desires

Rachel M Tang

Every desire, yearning, and hunger leads us towards another. We constitute each other through our desires for intimacy, enacting it through our passions. Western culture is both wholly devoted to this idea and actively opposed to admitting this fact. In Candice Lin's installation, *Lithium Sex Demons in the Factory*, desire's invisible threads materialize as hybrid objects and queer beings. To trust Lin's weaving of a story, an image, and an object is to become pleasurably entangled in the installation's messy, complex webs of belonging. According to Lin's tale, "My Life as a Lithium Sex Demon," which is the narrative undercurrent of the site-specific installation, the sex demon protagonist, suddenly remembering its past life, begins to fantasize about the women who worked at a lithium battery factory.¹ Its feral, painful yearnings are tempered for a moment by the memory of a possible love. Lovesick, the demon's desires for a body have transmogrified into something different, something deeper than the corporeal, perhaps instead for the soul (or being) inside.

In the installation, we inhabit a ghostly space full of things and sounds, yet empty of bodies. The only traces left of the women at the factory are their empty workstations—haunted, vibrating ceramic computers, pulsating tumblers, bubbling vessels filled with tinctures that send all kinds of communication signals and scents throughout the factory space. Managers in the panoptic office above surveil us. On the workstations, images of dreams and nightmares reverberate against the walls of their virtual containers. Evidence of possessed scrawlings, carefully composed ink drawings, and supply lists on post-it notes lay bare the frayed threads of desire. In the factoryscape, perforated metal workstations are ornamented with etched copper calendars and porcelain clocks, as if dynamic time has been calcified into mineral and metal temporal unfoldings, they clank, hum, and buzz along at a pace independent

of reality. In this space, there is a sense of transtemporal longing instilled in each of us—a desire to reach across time and space to touch others, to fully know and understand the ones who live with us, those who have lived before us, and those who will live after us.

In Lin's life-size factory diorama, the desire for intimate connection animates the demons who haunt the space. The word "intimacy" is a capacious container for meanings beyond sexual and romantic connotations in human-to-human relationships. I take intimacies here to refer to all the ways we tenderly encounter each other and the moments in which we experience any kind of sense of close connection with other beings. As Lin reveals, intimate relationships or experiences can transcend both time and space. We cannot fully know the ways in which we constantly experience intimacy with other life forms, and yet these encounters occur underneath the metaphysical surface, sometimes beyond perceptibility. At times, these intimacies are ineffable, yet they often leave traces as affective records of desire. Lin's installation is a wonderfully chaotic archive and fantastical display of precious records of intimacy and closeness.

At the entrance, we are greeted by ceramic feline guardians who sanctify and punctuate the factory. The headless animal-demon *onggi* greets us on our journey with small candles at their feet, sacred, profane, and full of something. Perhaps we pray here. Maybe their shapes remind us that desire is a vessel, full, not empty. Is the sex demon composed of all that it is missing? Or perhaps to be filled up with desire is to be filled up by something, not emptied by want but bursting with the energy to search, to pursue, to love.

Desire, as Deleuze and Guattari posit, is an assemblage of experiences forming complex bodies of contradiction.² Each of us is our own assemblage, entering the world of a million chasms between us and others, either waiting for them to be filled or trying to build bridges across them. Like the sex demon, we succumb to desire because a gap exists between us that feels uncrossable. In the moments when boundaries feel most rigid, we feel awash in the dangerous comforts of solipsism. That is why we might sometimes feel melancholic at the moment of our lover's touch because the boundaries of skin and flesh reveal to us the intensity of the longings we have to be fully enmeshed in their being, yet knowing we will never fully succeed in penetrating their mortal wall.

What is so radical about thinking about desire? If we know we are indeed all interconnected by a desire for intimacy with others, we probably know its political force. We already understand the ways that desire drives us to action or inaction. If we accept that life is driven by a yearning for intimacy with others across time, space, and species, then we no longer must exclude the aberrations associated with the models of life predicated only on the desires for survival and reproduction. Instead, we can begin to account for the violent, the logic-devoid, the silly, the beautiful, the ambiguous, the contradictory, and so on and so forth. The acceptance of desires for cross-species, transtemporal, complicated intimacies as the thread that binds us also allows us to put aside anthropocentric logics of affect, to see what we've been missing and to see what kinds of things had been there all along.

² G Deleuze, and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

In Lin's world, we might see and feel the invisible ways in which we encounter each other. Here, a shelter of painted indigo tapestries tells our sex demon's tale. Underneath the manager's office, against these fabrics of time, perhaps you sense something stirring. The fabric puckers and bends around a body, which briefly meets your own, though your encounter is frustratingly mediated by this thin fabric. A rush, a pang, and a longing to know what or who is underneath stirs you from your solipsism. A tiny passion grows. But the mystery continues on its way, disappearing into temporal depths beyond your reach. The encounter leaves you wanting more, but the moment of touch promises you a return—it promises you'll meet again, next time, perhaps as someone else entirely. Here, we are reminded that if we look up once in a while from our workstations and be comforted by the image of another feline friend who is pretending to work. We know that if we could, we might honestly organize our days around sex and eating, but for now, we must think about labor. (At least we have cat memes to get us by.)

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Texts by Sara Garzón, Summer Guthery, and Rachel M Tang

Cover Image: Textile by Candice Lin, 2023. Natural pigments on textile (painted, katazome, and quilted). Courtesy the artist and François Ghebaly. Photo: Paul Salveson.

Installation views by Izzy Leung and Filomela Aguirre-Ono

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Candice Lin, *Lithium Demons in the Factory*, 2023

Manager's platform, ceramics, wood, metal work stations, laboratory stands, animation, sound, electronics, hacked stirring machines, office supplies, aluminum and plastic ducting and tubing, embossed copper sheet, magnets, drawings, printed paper, glass, plastic, various liquids, cardboard, brass fittings. Dimensions variable.

3D Modeling and animation by: Yotam Menda-Levy

Ceramic onggi production: Hyangjong Oh

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Other assistance: Anna Cho-Son

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