

To: Eunice Belidor

Cc:

Bcc:

Reply To:

Subject: Hello, hi!

Signature: Signature #3

Dear Eunice,

I am here, basking in the springtime afternoon sun like a cat as I write to you. It's been just over a year since I arrived back in Toronto from Banff, after the Banff Centre was shut down for the pandemic in March 2020. I was there from the start of January 2020 on a curatorial fellowship working on some ideas about contemporary feminist uses of pornographic imagery and display before we had to leave. Two friends and I didn't want to get on an airplane to come back home, so we decided to cancel our flights, rent a car and drive across the country home to Ontario. It was a surreal experience, with the provincial closures following us daily: Alberta, then Saskatchewan and Manitoba, before arriving in Ontario.

Since, I've had a lot of time to think over what I might want the next few years to look like. I've had the privilege of travelling somewhat regularly throughout my adult life, so it's rare that I'm grounded in the same country for this long. In December 2019, I officially moved back to Canada after living for over three years in New York City, so I've been taking advantage of the pandemic slow time to figure things out. I'm enjoying the slower pace and quiet, taking my time to reacquaint myself with the art scene here and learning about how things have (or haven't) changed. This old town has so much potential for new, interesting and innovative ideas; I hope people are receptive when the world opens up again.

What else is happening with me? I've been writing like a mad person! I've just spent an hour making some vegetarian cheeseburger dumplings—I forgot to add cheese until more than halfway through stuffing them, oops—so I could take a break from the screen, hoping that any outstanding edits weren't going to come through for at least the day. Mostly, I've been writing some general texts for a book publication (not mine), exhibition reviews and essays, but something I am working on more concertedly is learning the craft of writing. I've been writing professionally for 15 years as an art critic, but casually for my whole life. I've also done my share of writing for my graduate degrees, but I never actually learned the "how" of writing in a focused manner. I'm currently a participant in the [Art Writing Workshop](#) run by AICA-USA and The Andy Warhol Foundation Arts Writer Grants program, working with a mentor on my long form writing. I'm excited because I'm learning a lot outside of the walls of the university. It's always been a dream of mine to be able to write for a living, and while I'm barely getting by on it, I've been able to lean on it a bit more in recent months, while cobbling together grants, friends' projects, guest lectures and the odd part-time teaching gig. It might not be forever but seems to be working for the now times.

Curatorially, I'm working on some exciting things including an exhibition project called [Stories and Storefronts](#) with my friend Negin Zebarjad. It's an exhibition idea that we started conceptualizing in late 2018, born of our desire to connect contemporary artists and neighbourhoods in meaningful ways, working with stories of immigrant and newcomer shopkeeping in Toronto and how these small businesses have shaped this city's amazing communities. This is also very close to my heart for another reason: in 1964 my grandparents and most of their 8 children immigrated to Toronto from Guangzhou, China via Hong Kong. A year later, my grandparents opened East-West Variety and Gifts at 2340 Bloor Street West in Toronto's Bloor West Village neighbourhood. They retired in 1982 when I was a tot, so I don't remember the store, although I've managed to collect quite a few "deadstock" curios from the store like Chinese porcelain dishes, bowls and funny Toronto themed souvenirs. This project is a way for me to delve back into that history and create a network of other community members who might also want to share their stories. We've invited the artists Sarindar Dhaliwal, Mani Mazinani, Petrina Ng and Shellie Zhang to make new works that will eventually be shown in storefront windows, responding to their own histories of migration, but also to that of the shop whose windows they are using and the communities in which they are situated at large. Check out our [Instagram](#) and let me know if you can recommend any stories/storefronts!

Break time over! I should get back to work. But coffee and cookies first.

I hope to talk to you soon and see your face again.

Charlene