

A close-up photograph of a hand touching a black leather jacket. The jacket features a silver zipper and a woven lining. The hand is positioned at the top, with the index finger resting on the leather. The background is a blurred, colorful pattern.

RUORU MOU

Leftover Linings
2 Feb - 23 Mar 2024
San Mei Gallery
Loughborough Road
London SW9 7TB

Ruoru Mou

Leftover Linings

San Mei Gallery presents *Leftover Linings*, a solo exhibition by London, Amsterdam and Florence-based artist Ruoru Mou.

Incorporating sculpture, installation and sound works, Mou's exhibition is inspired by the evolving material culture of the Chinese diaspora communities in Florence, Italy where she grew up. This new body of work addresses the complex relationships between migratory labour and international trade, interweaving personal experiences and encounters.

At the centre of the exhibition sits a large-scale sculptural installation and percussive instrument, *Songs from the tract (pentatonic crossing)*, 2024, representing the internal volume of a boat. An inverse skeleton, the beams of charred wood demark the ship's belly. Porcelain slats line the surface of the structure, which is intended to be played collectively by many people, each with a pair of dummy mallets typically used for woodcarving and leather works. A recording performed on the boat by Mou and musician Tom Halstead reverberates around the gallery walls, a ghost of the sculpture's activation.

Mou is interested in how both the form of boats and the material of clay hold or carry sound, stories,

labour, and lived experiences. Drawing on philosopher Édouard Glissant's description of the boat as a 'womb abyss' or 'belly' in his book *Poetics of Relation* (1990), this instrument functions as a vessel for sound in which the form of the abyss becomes both visually and aurally perceptible. Influenced by the aesthetics of classical Japanese cinema, this sculpture directly references the set design of the film *Ugetsu* (1953) by Kenji Mizoguchi. Mou reimagines a scene in the film in which a potter and his family flee their home, trying to rescue as many ceramics as possible. In their journey through an uncanny, dark, and mist-covered lake, a phantom ship appears and the dying man warns the potter of his misfortunate fate. How and why we carry objects, what we choose to rescue and what we digest and discard are questions that linger in the materials that comprise Mou's works.

The ghost of the belly appears in almost all of the sculptural forms, an organ that digests and metabolises materials while tracing their tangled paths. Invested in objects' transient forms of existence, *Leftover Linings* repurposes the material excesses of production and alludes to missing wholes, playing with the gestural language of lining a stomach or lining a bag. Reconfigured boat hulls encase

leather offcuts that trace the curve of the outer stomach whilst providing a space to house the carpentry tools Mou's grandfather used to carve wood. Drawing parallels between their crafts and highlighting shifts in intergenerational experiences of both moving and making, the exhibition layers sedimentations of material information and traces of memory.

The personal significance of objects is foregrounded in other works, such as *Serving Bowl* (2023), which is both casted and smeared in restaurant grease. The low-level presence of this sculpture on the gallery floor alludes to the slipperiness of the kitchen floor in the restaurant run by Mou's family in Florence, whilst also echoing the hull of the boat.

Embedded on opposite walls of the gallery, *La Fontanella di Soia* (2023) features dimly lit soy sauce bottles that flicker like nautical dock lights. The lids of these bottles have been replaced with hand-blown glass tube stoppers that resemble the mouth of a fontanella, a traditional Italian drinking fountain. The soy sauce appears to have been fully dispensed, the fountain left dry. Mou's reworking of a familiar architectural feature foregrounds a lingering sense of exhaustion, of both materials and labour, just as traditional attitudes towards common public facilities like drinking fountains shift in Western cities. These faulty replicas of original fontanellas further question the interdependency, complicity and binaries between the authentic and the reproduced.

The artist's new direction of material investigation draws from her extensive research into the histories of industrialisation and the labour practices of Chinese workers in the peripheral towns near Florence. Observing the assembly lines of contemporary Florentine factories, Mou notes how the luxury goods produced by famous Italian fashion houses may bear the prestigious moniker 'Made in Italy', but are in fact made by the hands of migrant workers. She combines offcuts from these leather factories with soy sauce-stained fragments of fabric from the artist's family restaurants. These material residues of industrial wastage and years of labour toiled in restaurants attend to the uncanny circulation of materials and people around the globe, disrupting the assumed relationships between hierarchies of production, the modes of display, and material orders of power. Throughout the exhibition, Mou imagines the so-called "belly" inside the boat, the restaurant, the factory and the bag as itinerant carriers that dislocate culture and destabilise fixed identities.

Works List

Clockwise from front desk:

Six of Swords, 2023
ceramics, leather, steel, wood carving tools, oil
22 x 57 x 5 cm

Carpenter's Carry On, 2023
wood, glazed ceramics, steel leather moulds, tape, leather handle, glass
44 x 35 x 15 cm

Untitled, 2023
steel, pewter
9 x 5.5 x 3 cm

Untitled, 2023
steel, foam
9 x 8 x 3cm

La Fontanella di Soia, 2023
hand-blown glass, soy sauce glass bottle, restaurant grease, LED lights
dimensions variable

Serving Bowl, 2023
resin, restaurant grease
28 x 17 x 17.5 cm

Songs from the Tract (Pentatonic Crossing), 2023
wood, ceramics, leather, sound
302 x 154 x 84 cm

Artist biography

Ruoru Mou (b. Florence) lives and works between London and Amsterdam. Mou graduated from Central Saint Martins with a BA in Fine Art in 2021 and is currently in residence at De Ateliers in Amsterdam. Recent exhibitions include *Cozzie Livs* (2023) at Des Bains, London, UK; *Lateworks: Preparations* (2023) at Cafe OTO, London, UK; *No More (Cruel) Optimism* (2023) at SZN Gallery, London, UK and *you can't discourse without disco* (2022) at Gallery Nova, Zagreb, Croatia.

Contributing Text by Minying Huang

Safe Passages is an accompanying text by writer Minying Huang, commissioned in response to Ruoru Mou's exhibition *Leftover Linings*. Available in person or to download via the San Mei Gallery website.

Reading list

This reading list of books, film, and sound has been compiled by Ruoru Mou in conjunction with her exhibition, expanding on its themes and references.

Playlists:

A Queer Anthology of Drums by Valentina Magaletti, released 27 May 2022, <https://valentinamagaletti.bandcamp.com/album/a-queer-anthology-of-drums>.

Films:

Mizoguchi, Kenji, dir. *Ugetsu*. Reel Images, 1953.
Shindo, Kaneto, dir. *The Naked Island*. 23 Nov. 1960.

Books:

Povinelli, Elizabeth A. *Routes/Worlds*. Sternberg Press, 2022.
Henningsen, Therese, and Juliette Joffé, eds. *Strangers within: Documentary as Encounter*. Prototype Publishing, 2022.
Zhang, Gaoheng. *Migration and the Media: Debating Chinese Migration to Italy, 1992-2012*. University of Toronto Press, 2019.
Alampi, Antonia, et al. On Labour: *Sonsbeek 20-24 Force Times Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies*. Archive Books, 2021.
Han, Byung-Chul, and Philippa Hurd. *Shanzhai: Deconstruction in Chinese*. MIT Press, 2017.
Strauss, Carolyn F., ed. *Slow Spatial Reader*. Valiz, 2021.
Mishima, Yukio, et al. *The Temple of the Golden Pavillion*. Tuttle Publishing, 2002.

Christian, Toby. *Commuters*. Walther König (Verlag), 2021.
Le Guin, Ursula K., and Donna J. Haraway. *Carrier Bag Theory of Fiction*. IGNOTA Books, 2020.
Glissant, Édouard. *Poetics of Relation*. Trans. Betsy Wing, The University of Michigan Press, 1997.
Cowen, Deborah. *The Deadly Life of Logistics: Mapping Violence in Global Trade*. Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2014.
Chua, Charmaine. "Indurable Monstrosities: Megaships, Megaports, and Transpacific Infrastructures of Violence," in *Futureland Reader*, CRA, 2018.
Rossiter, N., "The Logistical City." In *Transit Labour Digest*, eds Craig Kernow, Brett Neilson, and Ned Rossiter, (2011).

Acknowledgements

Thanks! To Tom Halstead, Valentina Magaletti, Sophia Al-Maria, Jos Nyreen, Sam Watkins, Minying Huang, Hana Minowa, Vlatka Horvat for the help and forever inspirations. To my grandfather guiding me in spirit, to my grandmother and mother's support in Florence, esp in getting in through the various factory gates. To Rochester Square ceramic studio for all the frings, to my studiomates for the company and my flatmates for putting up with all the DIY wood steamboxes in the kitchen.

Events

Performance by Valentina Magaletti and Tom Halstead

Thursday 1 February, 6-8pm
Join us at the opening of Ruoru Mou's exhibition for live performances by Tom Halstead and Valentina Magaletti. Booking recommended.

Community Coffee Morning

Thursday 7 March, 10.30am
A relaxed coffee morning within Ruoru Mou's exhibition, free and open to all.

Reading Group

14th March, 7pm
Writers Sam Watkins and Minying Huang guide a reading group, in response to Ruoru Mou's exhibition.

All events are free and can be booked via our website:
www.sanmeigallery.co.uk/events/



Feedback

Your feedback enables us to know more about our audiences and how we can improve. Please complete an evaluation form by scanning the QR code below:



About San Mei Gallery

San Mei Gallery is an independent non-profit space for contemporary art in South London, committed to research-led, educational, and collaborative exchanges. Operating with an artist-led approach, we support artists and curators to experiment with new ideas.

San Mei Gallery
39a Loughborough Road
London SW9 7TB

sanmeigallery.co.uk
[@sanmeigallery](https://twitter.com/sanmeigallery)
info@sanmeigallery.co.uk

Support

This exhibition and associated events have been supported using public funding from Arts Council England.

Drinks at the opening preview are kindly provided by Brixton Brewery.



Supported using public funding by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND





San Mei Gallery