



SCULPTING MEMORIES:

**ASTERIA LIU'S ARTISTIC VOYAGE THROUGH
NOSTALGIA AND IDENTITY**

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Sculpting Memories: Asteria Liu's Artistic Voyage through Nostalgia and Identity

Profile by Axelle Dequatre
Artwork by Asteria Liu
Photos by Monica Feng

In the hushed embrace of her studio, first-year BFA Visual Art student Asteria Liu conducts a symphony of memory, her brushstrokes dancing across the canvas like whispers of the past. Born in China, Liu's journey as an artist is a testament to the transformative power of creativity—a journey marked by her wanderings through the corridors of memory, explorations of fragmented identity, and an unwavering commitment to crafting narratives that resonate with personal depth and authenticity.

From an early age, Liu found herself enraptured by the vibrant tapestry of life unfolding in the world around her—the kaleidoscope of colours, the cacophony of sounds, and the delicate interplay of light and shadow. Raised in a family where music and photography intertwine, she was steeped in a culture where creativity was not merely a pursuit, but a way of life—a language through which the complexities of existence could be expressed and understood. It was amid bustling Chinese bazaars when Liu first glimpsed the

contours of her own artistic vision, shaped by the rich tapestry of her cultural heritage, the fluidity of her multicultural upbringing, and the inexorable passage of time. Drawing inspiration from the traditions of Chinese

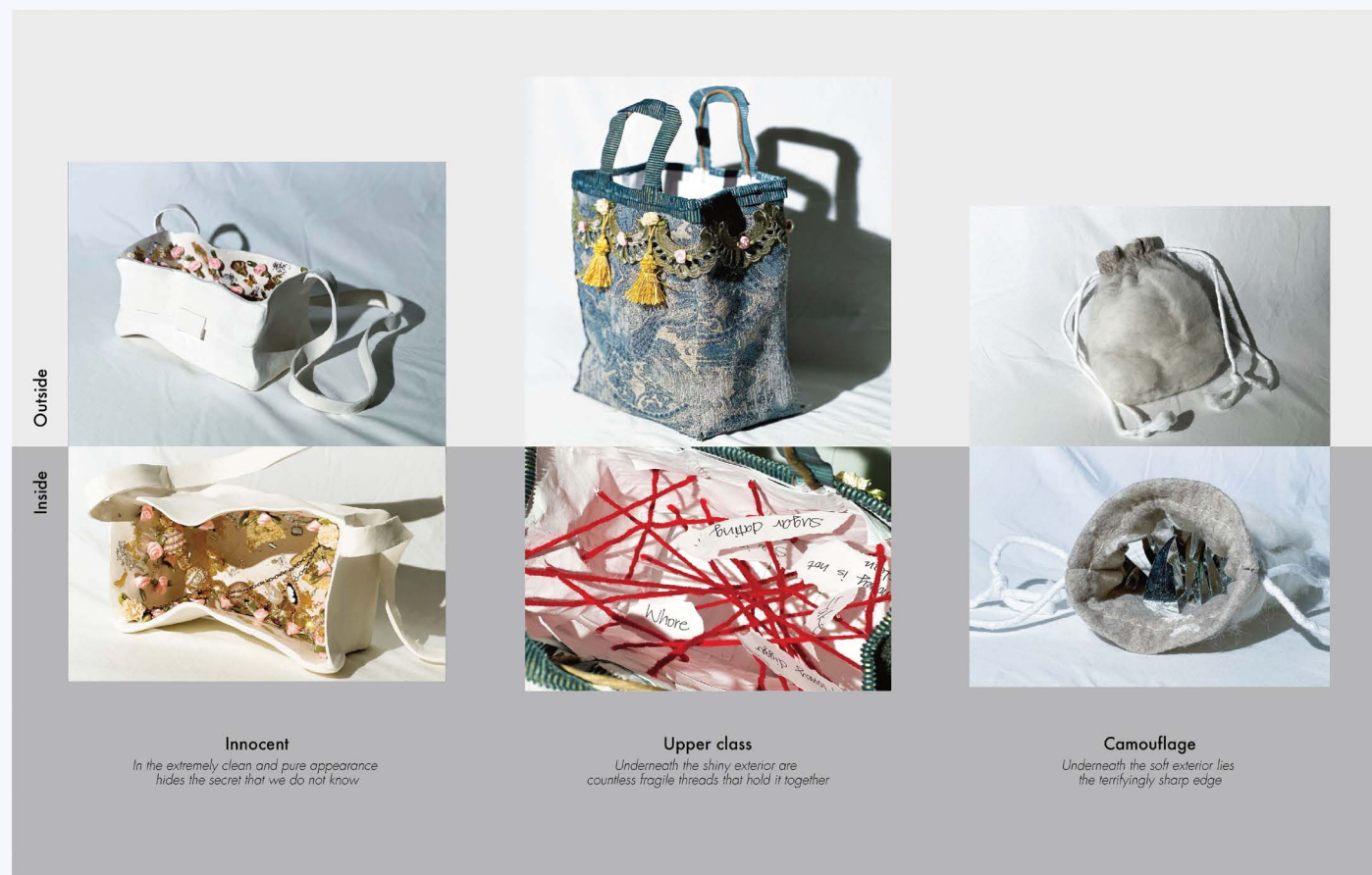
All my activities were in the living room, where I ate, slept, and studied. It began to coexist with me in the same space, a silent observer of my every move.

art and the avant-garde movements of the West, she embarked on a journey of self-discovery and exploration that would eventually lead her to the very heart of her own identity. “I want to express my feelings and like to make things with my hands ... I think 90 percent of my work is based on my past, my mom, my experiences; and 10

percent is about world issues; but issues that I was also experiencing before.”

As Liu's artistic practice evolved, so too did her fascination with nostalgia—a theme that would come to define much of her work in the years to come. For Liu, nostalgia was more than mere sentimentality—it was a visceral longing, a yearning for the ephemeral moments of beauty and tranquility that seemed to slip through her fingers like grains of sand. It was a feeling that resonated deep within her soul, beckoning her to delve into the recesses of her memory and excavate the truths that laid beneath the surface. As she embarked on her artistic journey, Liu found herself increasingly drawn to the intersection of memory and materiality—the ways in which objects and spaces become repositories of personal and collective history. Inspired by the works of artists such as Monet and Song Dong, she sought to capture the essence of nostalgia in tangible form, translating fleeting moments of longing and remembrance into evocative sculptures and installations.





◀ **FIGURE 1**

Asteria Liu, *Two-Sided*, 2022.

Wool felt, cotton, glass, paper, fabric, cotton thread, and clay, dimensions variable.

It was during this period of flux and transition that Liu’s artistic practice began to take shape, fuelled by her desire to reconcile the disparate elements of her identity and forge a deeper connection to her cultural heritage. Drawing inspiration from her surroundings and the memories they evoked, she embarked on a journey of self-discovery—one that would ultimately lead her to UBC and a renewed sense of purpose. “At UBC I can be in touch with areas outside of the arts,” Liu explains, her voice animated with excitement. “I can think about English literature. My class’s linked to nostalgia—so I can link nostalgia to my art. I want to explore that. Here I can also learn Japanese, I can learn English, I can learn other things to connect these to my art.” Armed with a diverse array of influences and a newfound sense of curiosity, Liu’s artistic practice blossomed, her work evolving into a deeply personal exploration of memory, identity, and cultural critique. Her practice grew to become a combination of sculpture, installation, and mixed-media, which attempted to make legible the fleeting nature of nostalgia and remembrance.

Nestled within the fabric of Liu’s artistic practice lies a series of evocative sculptures that serve as portals to her past, each work a window into the labyrinthine

corridors of memory. In her series *Two-Sided*, she delves into the complexities of consumer culture and the ways in which material possessions shape our perceptions of self and others. Through a combination of wool felt, cotton, glass, paper, fabric, cotton thread, and clay, Liu creates a trio of miniature luxury bags, each acting as testament to the allure of wealth and status (fig. 1). “In this series, I explore the complex industry of luxury retail,” Liu explains, her hands moving deftly as she works. “Each bag represents a different facet of society, from the aspirational dreams of youth to the hidden vulnerabilities that lie beneath the surface.” These luxury handbags are meticulously crafted to embody a monument to excess. Set against a backdrop of shimmering lights and opulent fabrics, the piece exudes an air of decadence—a stark reminder of the insatiable appetite of consumer culture and the ways in which it shapes our sense of self and perception of others. Yet, amid the glitz and glamour lingers a sense of unease—a whisper of discontent that speaks to the emptiness that lies at the heart of materialism. With *Two-Sided*, Liu confronts the excesses of consumer culture and the ways in which material possessions come to define our sense of self. Drawing upon her own experiences of displacement and longing, and through

a meticulous process of deconstruction and reconstruction, she invites viewers to contemplate the tangled web of symbolism and social commentary embedded within each piece, challenging them to confront the complexities of identity and belonging in an increasingly commodified world.

But it is perhaps in her sculpture titled *Red Sofa* that Liu’s artistic vision truly comes to life (fig. 2). Standing at a diminutive 5 x 3 x 3 in., this clay sculpture embodies the weight of Liu’s emotions, its vibrant red hue a testament to the intensity of her feelings towards her mother. “The red sofa expresses my complicated emotions towards my mother,” Liu explains, her voice soft with reminiscence. “It surrounded me like a shadow during my three years in Hong Kong, a constant presence in the corner of our living room.” Purchased second-hand and worn with traces of use, the sofa became a silent witness to Liu’s daily struggles and triumphs—a symbol of both comfort and

constraint. As Liu recounts her memories, the studio seems to come alive with the echoes of the past, the air thick with the scent of nostalgia. “I had no room in secondary school because of the high rent in Hong Kong,” she continued, her gaze fixed on the miniature replica before her. “All my activities were in the living room, where I ate, slept, and studied. It began to coexist with me in the same space, a silent observer of my every move.” But beneath the surface of domestic tranquility lies a tale of longing and loss, of a daughter yearning for freedom within the confines of familial obligation. “In the days that followed, my mother’s watchful gaze seemed to follow me wherever I went,” Liu reflects, her fingers tracing the contours of the sculpture. “Every New Year, she would rearrange the sofa according to Feng Shui principles, as if seeking to exert control over our destinies.” Yet, for all its weighty symbolism, *Red Sofa* is only one chapter in Liu’s exploration of memory and identity.

FIGURE 1 ▶
Asteria Liu, *Red Sofa*, 2023.
Clay and acrylic paint, 5 x 3 x 3 in.





“At the end, art is about you and your experiences,” Liu muses, her voice tinged with an unspoken resolve. “So, I think back to the original point, 100 percent of my artwork is me, it’s like a personal file.” As Liu continues to progress as an artist, her work serves as a poignant reminder of the power of creativity and its ability to illuminate the human experience. Through her meticulous attention to detail and evocative use of materials, she invites viewers to embark on a journey of introspection and empathy, challenging them to confront the complexities of memory, identity, and cultural critique in an increasingly fragmented world. In a society hungry for meaning and connection, Asteria Liu’s art offers a beacon of hope—a reminder of the enduring capacity of creativity to transcend borders and boundaries. With each sculpture, she invites us to pause, reflect, and rediscover the beauty and meaning that lay deep within the tangled web of memory and experience.

