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STEPHANIE H. SHIH
Greetings from Gold Mountain

February 23 – March 25, 2023

Berggruen Gallery is proud to announce *Greetings from Gold Mountain*, an exhibition of recent ceramics by Stephanie H. Shih. This show marks her first solo exhibition with the gallery. *Greetings from Gold Mountain* will be on view from February 23 through March 25, 2023. The gallery will host a reception for the artist on Thursday, February 23, from 5:00 to 7:00 pm.

Stephanie H. Shih's painted ceramic sculptures negotiate the dynamic narratives within contemporary Asian American identity. San Francisco—originally known in Chinese as 金山, or Gold Mountain—is the site of America's oldest Chinatown, and Shih's newest body of work chronicles its past and present through imperfect replicas of everyday items. Rendered in a medium malleable enough to yield to the artist's touch and painted by hand, each sculpture fits into Shih's object-based accounting of historical events and cultural touchpoints. Ultimately, it is the juxtaposition of seemingly disparate objects—a restaurant sign, a toy train, a dry-cleaning hanger—that creates for a narrative of America's first Chinese enclave that's at once playful and reflective.

Some references are easy to miss; if you didn't know that Jeremy Lin grew up in the Bay Area, you might have missed the connection to *Knicks Cap (Linsanity, 2012)*. A stack of four unrelated VHS tapes—a classic film noir, an experimental arthouse movie, a fantastical action-comedy, and a Tony Hawk skate video—are all set in San Francisco's Chinatown. Other references are more apparent; a ceramic poster of Bruce Lee's 1973 film *Enter the Dragon* highlights one of the city's most famous hometown heroes. *House of Nanking (1988)*, *919 Kearny St.* recreates the sign for a beloved local restaurant that has become a veritable landmark of the city.

As a counterpoint to these lighter nods to pop culture, other sculptures in the exhibition reference darker histories. *Angel Island (Immigration Station, 1910–1940)* is a hand-rendered map marking the point of entry—and interrogation, inspection, and detention—for an estimated 1,000,000 immigrants. A ceramic wire hanger titled *We <3 Our Customers (Chinese Laundries, 1850)* locates San Francisco as the origin of an industry born of prejudicial labor laws. *The Little Engine That Could (Transcontinental Railroad, 1863–1869)* presents the whimsical children's book character as an allusion to the migrant labor used to build critical American infrastructure.

Shih's broader artistic practice often explores objects that blur the line between foreign and domestic, emphasizing the layered identities of immigrants and their children. In *Greetings from Gold Mountain*, she uses a doiled plate of crab rangoons, a scorpion bowl complete with ceramic cocktail umbrella, and a clear bag of porcelain fortune cookies to challenge notions of supposed authenticity. While these foods were all concocted in the Bay Area—the first two having no basis in Asian cuisine at all—they have certainly become part of the lexicon of American Chinese restaurants. In this way, Shih reminds us that outside influence is an unavoidable, and even central, aspect of the diasporic experience. Confronted with the realities of colonialism, displacement, assimilation, and cultural interchange, the artist rejects the flattened identity politics that often dominate these conversations. Instead, Shih advocates for a more nuanced perspective, challenging the idea that such exacting discourse cannot be had in the public sphere.

Born in Philadelphia, Shih currently lives and works in New York City. Her work has been exhibited in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, San Francisco, Portland, OR, Dallas, Boston, and Philadelphia. Shih has recently been nominated for multiple awards, including the United States Artists Fellowship, the UOVO Prize at the Brooklyn Museum, and a permanent public artwork with the City of New York. She has been awarded grants and residencies from the American Museum of Ceramic Arts, the John Michael Kohler Arts Center,

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Lighthouse Works, and Silver Art Projects. Shih's work is included in numerous private and public collections, including the Syracuse University Art Museum and New-York Historical Society.

Notably, Shih's engagement with social issues extends beyond her craft. Since 2017, Shih has used her art and accompanying social media platform to raise over \$100,000 for disenfranchised and immigrant communities facing material instability and deportation.

Greetings from Gold Mountain, February 23 – March 25, 2023. On view at 10 Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, CA 94105. Images and preview are available upon request. For all inquiries, please contact the gallery by phone (415) 781-4629 or by email info@berggruen.com.