

A.I.R.

Couroupita/Corpus

Rachelle Dang

November 20 - December 20, 2020

A.I.R. Gallery is pleased to announce *Couroupita/Corpus*, the first institutional solo exhibition by 2019-2020 A.I.R. Fellow Rachelle Dang. Born and raised in Hawai`i, Dang considers transoceanic colonial histories and intertwined legacies of control over environments and populations. Through her work in sculpture and installation, she interprets the significance of historical source material and natural forms while emphasizing the shared vulnerabilities of environment, body, and matter.



Couroupita/Corpus addresses artificial displacements and haunted social and natural histories. In the center of the gallery, viewers encounter the upright form of a truncated rainforest tree alongside a narrow, perforated chamber. Dang's sculpted version of *couroupita guianensis* appears frozen in a peak state of abundance: long vine-like stems, blossoms, and rotund fruits envelop the trunk, yet these rigid forms evince an unexpected brittleness. The chamber's structure is based on an eighteenth-century French drawing of a punctured tower designed to convey valuable tree species within and between tropical regions and Europe. A parted curtain alludes to historical forms of museological display, while exposed seams on the trunk's backside suggest both wounds and taxidermical reconstruction. The iridescent sculptures, curtain, and surrounding gallery walls comprise a field of eerie, petrified stillness.

A 1922 Field Museum publication makes note of a *couroupita guianensis* (cannonball tree) that was felled in Guyana, its trunk sent on to Chicago to be "restored to life-like appearance." Negatives, samples, and plaster molds facilitated the replacement of "perishable parts" with wax leaves, flowers, and fruits. One of many anthropological, botanical, and geological projects undertaken by institutions during a period of American imperial expansion, the Field expedition amassed a trove of data related to the economic potential of Guyana's forests, along with prized trees intended for exhibition. Installed in didactic displays, the preserved specimens contributed to an implicit demonstration of a Western order of power, governance, and knowledge.

The extraction of *couroupita guianensis* and the distribution of its parts and seeds across geographies echo the historical dispossession of Indigenous land and sovereignty in Guyana, Hawai`i, and elsewhere. Colonial networks of seed exchange first brought the cannonball tree to Honolulu, where Dang was raised. These displaced giants tower over the city's botanical gardens and university campus, evoking for Dang complex and unsettled notions of home. Her family resides on a street named in Hawaiian for cannonballs of a different kind—the projectiles fired from the U.S. artillery batteries once staged nearby. Dang has long imagined an impossible inversion: a street named for these magical trees and not for weapons of war.

Rachelle Dang (b. Honolulu, Hawai`i) has exhibited her work in New York at Socrates Sculpture Park, Fergus McCaffrey, Nathalie Karg Gallery, Lesley Heller Gallery, Motel, and mh PROJECT nyc. Additional exhibitions include the Honolulu Museum of Art, Hawaii Pacific University, and the Haverford College Art Galleries. Her residencies include Shandaken: Storm King Art Center, the Smack Mellon Artist Studio Program, the Studios at MASS MoCA,



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Cooper Union, and Sculpture Space where she received an Emerging Sculptor Fellowship. She was awarded a 2019-2020 Fellowship with A.I.R. Gallery and will participate in a 2021 residency at Yaddo. Her solo exhibitions have been reviewed in the *Brooklyn Rail* and *Hyperallergic*. Dang received her M.F.A. from Hunter College and her B.A. from Wellesley College. She is an adjunct faculty member at Hunter College and based in Brooklyn, NY.

A.I.R. Gallery is wheelchair accessible via ramp. There are accessible toilets in the venue. There is comfortable seating with backs. Free tap water is available. The venue is nearest to the F train at York St (0.2 miles) and the A train at High St (0.5 miles). The nearest wheelchair accessible trains are the B, Q, R at Dekalb Av (1.1 miles) and the 2, 3 at Borough Hall (0.8 miles). The roads immediately surrounding the gallery are cobblestone. The nearest accessible parking garage (for an hourly fee) is two blocks away at 100 Jay St. No ID necessary for entry. Please contact info@airgallery.org for more information.



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