

Sha Lek Corner Foraging Recipe report

Artwork statement and content:

We have been always imagining and putting all our effort in shaping the future in the way we want, yet the world and the Nature seems to lose its balances. What if the future is fallen and 'technologically degenerate'? And it stimulates me to think how to survive without relying on our present food production system and how to live with the mother earth like our ancestors did.

This project is constituted by botanical drawing recipes, foraging workshops, an archival foraging basket which I built with scavenged materials. The workshops are focused on how our present food system has separated us from our relationship with the land; and how to reconnect ourselves with the land through foraging, drawing, and creating recipes. Reconnection is also a means through which to re-imagine how our diet and food resources could ideally be, while we generate diverse and intimate narratives about plants and nature. The materials collected from the workshops will be presented in an archival basket. This takes the form of an old and countryside/folk form of shape. It has cover and space for presenting drawings, it can also store and carry foraged plants, my drawings, participant drawings and tools for drawing and foraging. It is a symbolic, appropriative gesture that reconsiders our understanding of the world: our knowledge and images of plants, eating habits, and food resources. It is a reflection on forms of colonialism (political and capital) and, as a physical vessel, it is a container for further possibilities.

With focusing the Sha Lek Corner as the place of research, happening, engagement and creation. It was a fishpond, then waste land under the bridge and turning into a green community place. It carries the similar fate of many nature spaces, yet it is a lucky one among the unfortunates, it gets the chance to revival and regenerate.

A 'disturbed' and transformed environment like Sha Lek Corner, there is a term to describe the 'new lives' in this kind of ecosystem- Neo ecosystem, which is an emerging environmental and ecological field of studies. It focuses on the research, records and studies of the disturbed place. The reason why this field of discipline has emerged is because people, including scientists, conservationists, artists, spatial planners... have realized that as we human continue to develop, and the purpose of different spaces have changes numerous times, it is very hard to avoid the intervene of human to the environment directly and indirectly, meanwhile Nature is not an object, she is living, growing and transforming in following the rules of universe, there will be return species and 'new comers' to a 'disturbed land', for instance the jungle takeover Cambodia Angkor Wat, a previous farmland takeover by wild weeds and attracts different kinds of wild lives to live on. Then it becomes a new way to think of environmental protection, and conservation, there is another way to revival bio diversity, not to 'protect' and 'keep' the nature environmental the same forever, but to study the delicate 'new' and evolving eco systems in this piece of land. Hence, doing foraging in Sha Lek Corner is both an environmental science and artistic intervention to a public regenerate space.

It is both a mean to stimulate reflection, and possibly convert the habits of the participants. Bring ourselves to reconsider our everyday life; knowledge; behavior;

and the reconnection between the past, present and future.

The process:

In my first visit, Sha Lek Corner feels like a quite typical under bridge park to me, but once I know it was a construction before it changes my impression of the space. Therefore, the thinking of regenerative, revival and lives return become the core part of my artwork development.

In my art practice, as well as my own interests, I usually connect with an environment by senses, feelings, observation and reflection. When I was there in Sha Lek Corner, the grass land attracts me the most, because it is not just 'grass' land, it is a mixture, a collective of numerous lives, and species. And even edible wild weeds which can be found in other places in Hong Kong, both urban area and countryside. Then I have started to do research on how many kinds of non-human planted plants are edible in Sha Lek Corner. I collect and draw, and I have found at least 10 plants are edible, for example, Yellow Flower Wood Sorrel, Chinese Knot Weed, Asiatic Hawksbeard, Chinese Fever Vine, Shepherd's Needles meanwhile I start to think what if these plants can be part of our daily diet? Can it become a new way or can say return to our ancestor's way to live? And will this habit conversion release us from our dependence on commodity food system? Then I develop recipes based on the found edible wild weeds in Sha Lek Corner, I found it intriguing, and I even tried to cook and eat it, some are quite good to be honest. After I have developed the core part of the whole work, then I start to think of depth the layers of the work, which then involve performative element, workshops, crafts, sculptural element into the whole work. I have built a foraging basket, it was made of scavenged materials, all were found on my daily walk to different places. It serves the purpose of collecting plants, store drawings and tools, display drawings, as well as a tool for the foraging workshops, besides it carries a symbolical meaning--- with our passion, will, wisdom and creativity, we can turn trash to treasures, turn trash to possibilities, and waste land can regenerate.

After all my own artwork creation, I found it is missing something, and it is the participation of people. Because it is a research and archival based artworks, therefore the collection, stimulation and participation of people is crucial. Knowledge is comprised by numerous contributions of people, and we also need to continuously communicate with community to change our habits. Therefore, I have organized two foraging workshops and engaged with around 20-30 person. During the workshops, I gave a foraging tour in Sha Lek Corner to search for edible weeds, then we draw certain plants, and imagine possible recipes. Drawing is a good way to spend time with your subject matter, observe and study it in deep, connect with your muse in various senses. Sometimes participants may hesitate to touch or smell the plant as most of them grow up and live in urban city (so as me actually), but it is definitely a great impact to challenge their norm. And with the recipe creation, it stimulates the participants to rethink their relationship with the nature and society. A recipe can easily connect with their daily experience, cultural background, and yet it is an imagine recipe which can bring them reflection.

During the workshop, we shared knowledge and chatted, it was a great event for

reflection and connection with human beings and Nature. And the drawings created by the participants also becomes part of the artwork archive. Kept in the basket and continue to share with people who join afterwards and visit the artwork.

Reflection and future:

After around a half year of research and workshops with people, it seems the artwork can continue to live and grow, like being. It truly can be an on-going artwork, which continue with the research of edible weeds in Sha Lek Corner and nearby neighborhood, or even wild weeds which are usable for other purpose, such as weaving, dyeing etc. Moreover, workshops engage with more different group of participants in the future will enrich the diversity and depth of the whole artwork, because it is a participatory artwork, which means participants also are the creators of the whole artwork, the role of artist is the creator, tutor, mediator of the whole process. As the participants will carry their own knowledge, experience and cultural background, their drawings, feels and even stories about the plants will be very different, and that is one of the most precious things in archival artwork. For instance, there was a German participant, she picked Yellow Flower Wood Sorrel, as it carries a grassy and sour smell and taste which she can relate to her own experience of making cheese cake and salad; a girl picked Yellow Flower Wood Sorrel as well, yet she has shared a total different story, and even taught us the root of it is edible and actually very tasty. Same plant yet different stories and experience, that is diversity, and it is the beauty for public engage artwork; a lady picked Asiatic Hawksbeard, she remembers how she and her parents used in the past, and she also shared the folklore name of it, besides she taught us how to use it. I think it is the beauty of the participatory artwork, because the artist- me, is not expert, my role is to create a structure and method for people to share their know knowledge and enrich the archival artwork. And in this aspect, it is pretty successful.

In the future, I am thinking the artwork further, become more extensive and easily access. The medium and format at the moment is still quite object based, which means hands on solid materials form. I like the material volume and texture, yet it may constraint the spending of access. Therefore, I am thinking, what if the archival become digitalize, and it is an interactive archive which allows public to access easily, participate freely, like Wikipedia, collectively construct a 'wild plant ediblpedia', share people's own knowledge with stories from their experience and cultural background. And eventually built up a database big enough for AI engine.

My second possible future thought is, what if we start to grow all these edible wild weeds on the street planters? Will that become an edible sidewalk? And actually, there are already some experimental projects in France and United States are turning their sidewalks into planting edible plants instead of decorative plants, and these all are artist collective, environmentalist and government collaboration. And Hong Kong somehow is pretty easy to grow certain kinds of fruit trees and edible weeds, and the artwork that I have done in Sha Lek Corner has given me some insight and faith that Hong Kong can be an environmental innovative city with creativity and passions.

Acknowledgement:

It is my great honour that my open call proposal is accepted by Artist Coop, without

their open call program and full support of creativity, my creation can never happen. With the support of Artist Coop not merely on the funding, but also on the technical support, network support and advise support, without any one part of it, the whole program can not success. With this experience, I am confident to become a more mature and professional artist.