



CAROLINE RICCA LEE

Silken Chimeras: Chronicles of desire

August 27 – September 26, 2026

BY CAROLINE HONORIEN
AUGUST 2026

That day, the internet connection is bad. In the video call window, Caroline Ricca Lee's image freezes. Sitting in their studio in São Paulo, they look motionless. I hear their voice tracing the paths taken by their lineages.

The artist is the third generation of a Chinese family that arrived in Brazil by way of Macau in the 1960s, and the fourth generation of a Japanese family that arrived at the start of the twentieth century. Two migration histories inscribed in different colonial trajectories: that of Macau, a Portuguese trading post from 1557 to 1999, and that of Brazil, colonized by the same crown for sugar, gold, and coffee.

Their Chinese grandmother, a wartime nurse, married a Japanese man. In this story, the enmity between China and Japan dissolves into love; but its memory persists in family memory, and across the seas. Caroline grew up without an altar, without Lunar New Year, without an Asian language spoken at the table. Their inheritance first appears to them in the form of objects and images: Catholic saints cast in Chinese porcelain (a hybrid iconography they recognize not from having lived among it, but because its afterimage is everywhere around them in Brazil), family photographs given to them at twenty. So many traces whose full story they never possessed.

«People sometimes say my research is only about me,» they tell me from behind the screen. It's a suspicion that weighs on artists who turn their intimate history into material, especially when they come from minoritized groups or from contexts historically pushed to the margins of dominant narratives.

One of the starting points of Caroline's work is a set of questions: «Is our ancestry, our heritage, a form of fiction? If we know its history, how do we keep it, how do we pass it on? And if we don't know it, must

we invent it?» Caroline speaks of «entangled fictions» to describe these narratives in which geographies, history, and imagination don't oppose each other, but interweave and feed one another.

With its telling title, *NARCISSUS* seem at first to confirm the suspicion that follows artists whenever they turn toward their own family history. But this isn't a narcissistic retreat, it's desire. Desire is what allows one to step back, to choose, to forge a singular relation to what came before. A desire that isn't mere curiosity about the past, but the desire to want something for oneself, to escape the controls that organize lives and images, to bring into being a form that isn't simply proof of a collective history.

It's worth pausing on the photograph Lee includes in *RANDOM ACCESS MEMORY*. In it, their Chinese grandmother, young, outdoors, with a friend. Both are laughing. The artist notes that this is one of the only images where their grandmother appears neither as a worker nor as a wife, but as a person caught in a moment of pleasure. She appears as someone experiencing pleasure, someone in relation with another person, someone existing outside of what she is expected to be or do for others. Here, desire doesn't serve to know, to enclose, or to capture. Lee has spoken of wanting «to mix the memory with the abyss of my own body,» turning what they received too late into something they could finally work with.

This photograph, like Lee's body-sculptures, stands against an older history, one that turned Asian bodies and objects into surfaces to be admired and consumed. Here, they are displaced, bound, broken, covered, suspended, allowing the artist to render them unstable.

This instability matters within the exhibition space itself. To show a family photograph, an inherited object, or a fragmented body is always to make it available to the gaze. The risk would be to turn the intimate into document, ancestry into proof, otherness into an object of aesthetic consumption. Lee's fragmentary works let this tension surface while refusing to let the images and objects become immediately legible.

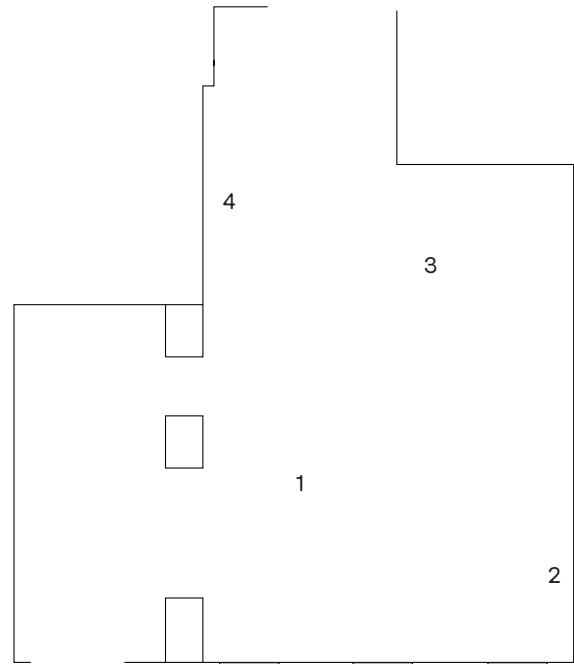
The same holds for the objects. The porcelain inherited from their grandmother carries the projections that once made it stand for a Chinese material: white, hard, pure, resistant. But Lee breaks it, and puts it in relation with clay, textile, coffee, sugar, flowers, and garments. They aren't trying to restore the object to some original state. They use its fragility, its emotional weight, its history of circulation, to make something else.

Ribbon, thread, an crichet run through the exhibition and make this tension physical. They can restrain, bind, or hold. They can suggest dependency or vulnerability, but also trust and desire. The bond can immobilize the body, or it can allow the body to work with the forces moving through it.

For Lee, desire works from incompleteness, ambivalence, and projection. Pleasure, shame, constraint, curiosity, and lack, whether historical or physically felt, act together in the making of a self. An ancestry you don't know isn't invented out of nothing: it is invented with flesh and viscera.

Silken Chimeras: Chronicles of Desire offers no settled account of ancestry or identity. The exhibition shows instead how bodies and objects can escape, even provisionally, the roles assigned to them. It asks what desire can do once it no longer serves to possess, to classify, or to consume, but instead returns to producing a relation, a form, a possibility of living.

TEXT BY CAROLINE HONORIEN



- 1 Narcissus, 2026
Hand-painted ceramics, garments collected, stolen, or inherited, textiles, various threads
- 2 Random Access Memory, 2026
Wood, broken ceramics and tiles, textiles, sugar, threads, metal eyelets, photos of know and unknow relatives (Chine c. 1960–65), cotton rope, suspension clip, and metal chains
- 3 Autonomous desire, 2026
Hand-painted ceramics, garments collected, stolen, or inherited, coffee, textiles, various threads, cotton rope, suspension clip and metal chains
- 4 Silken mirages, 2026
Wood, broken ceramics and tiles, sugar, objects and garments collected, stolen, or inherited, photos of know and unknow relatives (China c. 1960-1965), textiles, threads, metal chains, cotton rope