



The Making of Voids (2021)

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Artist, Hong Kong

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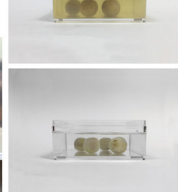
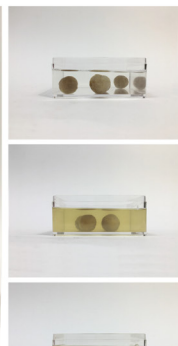
As an artist raised in a traditional Chinese medicine store in Hong Kong, I have been surrounded by all kinds of natural ingredients. However, all these ingredients always appeared different when used as medicinal materials than they did in their living forms: they were often dried up, cut into pieces, worm-bitten, burnt, and incomplete. My installation works deal with this unfamiliarity with and alienation from nature and the living environment, investigating notions of altered reality and transformation.

The Making of Voids is a reflection on what has happened since the summer of 2019 in Hong Kong, when large-scale protests against plans to allow extradition to mainland China took place. The coronavirus crisis came shortly after mass arrests shrank the protests. Crisis after crisis has made Hong Kong an altered island for many, much like what the pandemic has done to all parts of the world. *The Making of Voids* is a portal between one world and the other. It is an attempt to break with the past, to imagine a world anew.

The fruits used in this video are myrobalans. This native Hong Kong plant, known as *yau kam chi* in Cantonese, is often considered a 'green dia-

mond' thanks to its healing properties: as it is rich in antioxidants, the plant is believed to contribute to general health and longevity. The plant grows in the countryside and it can be found at local wet markets and Chinese medicine stores. The plant is used to treat infection, to soothe sore throats, and to quench thirst in general. The leaves are used to stuff summer pillows.

Because this fruit is so nutrient-rich and valuable in terms of medicinal use, preservation is important. The most common way of preserving myrobalans is through vegetable fermentation, or, put simply, pickling. The process involves adding salt or sugar, which cultivates fermentative lactic acid bacteria and suppresses the growth of bad microorganisms. The process of pickling is a constant microbial war of good bacteria against bad, resulting in a balanced microbial community that helps prevent the food from going bad.



Wing Po So, photographs of *The Making of Voids* (2021) project (courtesy of Wing Po So, 2021)



On one level, *The Making of Voids* is a demonstration of food preparation. The myrobalans kept in a glass jar appear as if they are going through a non-invasive fermentation process. On another level, the work shows the myrobalans going through an uncontrollable cell discharge process that affects all organic material as cells are expelled from the fruit. As time goes by, the fruit turns into a scaffolding for the tissue, coming to look like a ghost due to its paleness and translucency.

An empty fruit is created by stripping all the living cells from a myrobalan, leaving nothing but the 'empty' matrix that once used to hold the cells in place. The empty shells can be perceived as voids that convey hollowness and also possibilities. The scaffolding provides the necessary conditions to facilitate the growth of something new, be it a new environment for a seed or another host. It resembles decellularization, a technique in tissue engineering and regenerative medicine used for organ or implantation surgery—and decellularization is followed by recellularization. In the face of a series of crises that completely crush our once normal structure, it provides a gateway to regeneration, an empty room prepared to be repopulated by valuable essences.

Artist's bio

Wing Po So (born 1985, Hong Kong) currently lives and works in Hong Kong. She comes from a family of Chinese medicine doctors, and she grew up surrounded by medicinal ingredients, observing how raw materials are transformed into medicines and then into playthings and eventually artworks. Seeing how traditional Chinese medicine is produced helped So practice observation, sensitivity, and imagination when engaging with nature. In her art practice, So applies this same theory of knowledge to her investigation of forms, materiality and relationality. In Hong Kong, So's exhibitions include *Six-part Practice* (Tai Kwun Contemporary, 2018) and *From the Body to the Body Through the Body* (de Sarthe, 2019). She has participated in group shows, including *One Garden Six Seasons* (Para Site, 2020) and *The Palm at the End of the Mind* (Blindspot Gallery, 2020). Her recent work has been covered in *Art Asia Pacific*, *Artomity*, *The Art Newspaper*, *City Magazine*, *Time Out Magazine*, *South China Morning Post*, and *Ming Pao Newspaper*. She holds a BFA from the Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts, Washington University in Saint Louis (2007), and an MA in Fine Arts from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2012).

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