

Diaspora project, commissioned by the Edinburgh International Festival, is an online arts project and exhibition by Pamela So.

2009 is the year of Scotland's Homecoming, a national event that celebrates the achievements and lives of the people all over the world who have Scottish ancestry. Of course, it goes without saying that the Scots didn't exclusively pass the seas or forge the road to new lands, so it is of significance that the Scottish Homecoming also concerns itself with the contributions of non-Scots.

The expansion of The British Empire and the subsequent independence of former colonies resulted in the mass migration of many peoples around the globe. As many thousands left Scotland to make lives in the new world, Scotland continued to grow with the input of immigrants from across the globe. Among the first of these new Scottish citizens were the Chinese.

Working over six months, Pamela photographed the lives of Chinese people who have made Scotland their home. This latest project follows in the footsteps of Pam's previous work, allowing the archive of Chinese and Scottish identity to swell, as she curates her own experiences and those of other people she is invited to work with. The Diaspora project also marked a turning point for Pam, being the catalyst for a personal family homecoming that saw her retrace the trail of places photographed by her father from Glasgow back to Guangzhou in China.

This exhibition presents the lives of people new to Pamela. Offering snapshots of the experiences, interests and histories of first, second and third generation Chinese Scots, these images and stories inform Scotland's complex cultural identity.

The photographs, created during socially led gatherings, are informed by the character, presence and environments of the sitter and are often influenced by a variety of photographic styles that themselves trace the history and development of photographic portraiture. Formal documentary style images along with candid snapshots mix to reveal the differing relationships and contact Pamela experienced on her quest to reveal hidden lives and identities. Some portraits in the series hint at neo classical sculpture, with one image of the Ang family depicting three generations of one family in a pose reminiscent of Antonio Canova's sculpture *The Three Graces*, who were said to represent beauty, charm and joy. Still lives featuring knick-knacks, treasures and photographs are embedded with personal and cultural references offering clues to the ever-changing nature of identity.

Chinese and Western aesthetics have been mixing via trade and exchange since at least the 18th century. In the *wunderkammer* cabinets of country houses once belonging to the British aristocracy and in the collections of national museums, Chinese objects together within the context they are viewed, carry remnants of colonial attitudes. In combing the archives to understand her own story, Pam's practice has explored fascinating tales of pioneering ancestors and re-imagined objects of devotion. This interest in cultural objects and Chinese identity has led Pam to regard her own story as an archive. The So Family collection of textiles and porcelain gathered by the artist's mother is examined and considered with the same deference as those objects observed and studied on the long visits to museums and collections during research into Chinese culture.

On her own homecoming to China, Pam returned to a long lost ancestral home, once thought to be demolished, to find it now open as a public museum. In an amazing twist of fate, The So Family archive and Pam's artistic practice are now enriched with the knowledge that the ancestral home is a vessel for culture, learning and the past.

Pam's practice as an artist is a joyful haphazard exploration, encompassing diverse references that encourage us to examine ourselves and the meanings encoded within objects, treasures and artefacts. This creative trail has been intertwined with The So Family's archive of memories, objects and stories, with many artworks being just as much a reinterpretation of global diaspora, post-colonialism and Chinese-ness as they are a personal family re-discovery.

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