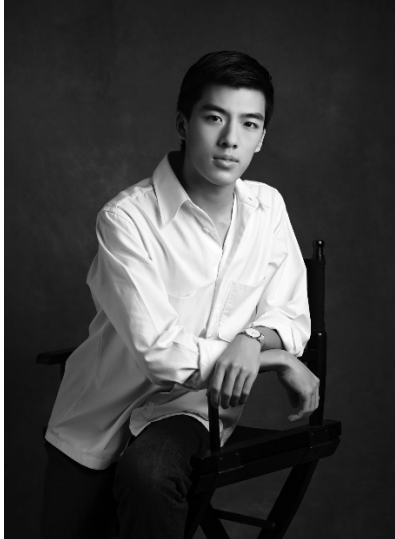


INTERVIEW WITH ETHAN LUK '24, CREATOR OF “團/Gathering” - WINNER OF THE UCHV SHORT MOVIE PRIZE 2023



UCHV: Where are you from, and what is your major?

EL: Hi everyone! My name is Ethan Luk, and I am from Hong Kong. I am majoring in Comparative Literature.

UCHV: When did you start making movies and how did you come to make “團/Gathering”?

EL: I don't think I was ever serious about making movies, but I have always been passionate about film since I used my parents' camcorder to make short videos with my friends in elementary school. During the pandemic, I watched a film almost every day. It was a ritual that sustained me and allowed me to travel beyond the walls of my room.

團/Gathering began with looking at *The Kitchen Table Series* by Carrie Mae Weems. In the photographs, Weems places herself in the center of her own kitchen. She stages figures around the periphery, occupying familiar, archetypal roles: lovers, children, friends, mothers. I was moved by the kitchen table as a site of memory and an opportunity to nurture the families we forge for ourselves. I thought of choreography as a tool to animate and amplify the space in between the photographic tableaux: what happened before and after these pictures were taken? What are the narratives outside of the frame? My goal was not to simply restage Weems' images, but to use her work as a starting point, a hinge that opens to questions about interpersonal intimacy and intergenerational relationships, the fragmented and recalcitrant processes of remembering, and the ghosts of people past who will not loosen their grip on our present.

I was also drawn to the formalistic tension between photography and dance. Photography expresses a memorialization, whereas dance is the moment transpiring and leaving simultaneously. To paraphrase Peggy Phelan, dance becomes itself through disappearance. *團/Gathering* reflects a selfish desire to harness the caprice of dance through superimposing a photographic influence. I also thought of the inherent drama within Weems' photographs. Marie

T. Cochran observed that in *The Kitchen Table Series*, “The “convening table” is a stage; the imposing light seems to interrogate; the shifting props of glasses, wine, and cigarettes are iconographic objects reminiscent of those in film noir.” I saw making this film as an attempt to embody the theatricality of Weems’ work.

The Chinese character ‘團’ (which roughly translates to ‘together’) is used to describe the annual meal (團年飯) in which families gather on the eve of the Lunar New Year. Through imagining and physicalizing lineages beyond the immediately tangible, this piece aims to expand the notion of ‘團’. To be at a table is also to hold space for the absent, to reflect on the privilege of sharing space. I am reminded of a line from Joy Harjo’s poem ‘Perhaps the World Ends Here’: “Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating / of the last sweet bite.”

UCHV: What was your budget?

EL: I didn’t have a budget! All of the equipment was sourced from the Visual Arts department and I filmed the project in the Drapkin Studio at the Lewis Center for the Arts.

UCHV: Could you briefly describe the process you went through/difficulties you had in making “團/Gathering”?

EL: One of the biggest challenges of this project was mustering the courage to start it. I hadn’t choreographed since my senior year in high school, so there was a lot of fear and hesitation walking into the early stages of development. I called my mom fifteen minutes before the first rehearsal, and told her that I was about to give up on the project because I didn’t think I could do it. She told me to walk into the studio, play some music, and just get it started. That was the push I needed. I needed permission to create something without the pressure of the work having to be “good”.

Another big hurdle came in the editing process. I had choreographed the piece as disparate vignettes rather than connected units in an overarching narrative, so I had to play around with a myriad of choices in order to find a structure that made sense within a film format.

UCHV: Any final thoughts?

EL: This project would not have been possible without the generous support of diSiac Dance Company. I am really grateful to all the members who were involved with the project for their artistry, vulnerability, and time. I am also grateful to the choreography studio class led by Rebecca Stenn, in which a lot of the movement material was developed.