

Amy Yao

Asian Clam

April 19th – July 2nd, 2023

Opening April 19th, 5 - 8 PM

Picnic Curatorial Projects

Thinking about the symbolic language attached to invasive species has led Amy Yao to her current work with *Corbicula Fluminea* also known as “Asian Clams.” She has been in conversation with Dr. Wendell Haag of the USDA, Dr. Robert F. McMahon and Dr. Astrid Schwalb of University of Texas who have also helped her collect the specimens. Like the politicization of Covid-19 by Donald Trump as the “China Virus”, the description of many “invasive species” also embodies xenophobic racializing language. Climate change and capitalism has affected animal and plant migration and each species carries with it a history, which often reflects evolving human biases at different points in time. Using the collected specimens, Yao has been making sculptures in flux, replicating stories of a species on the move.

Corbicula Fluminea (Asian Clam) was first noted to have migrated to the Americas around 1920. It is a freshwater clam that is prized in various regions of Asia. Alternatively named the Golden Clam, Good Luck Clam, etc. it is eaten in regional cuisines. Oftentimes named invasive in North America, not much is known about the Asian Clam or its possible threat of disrupting native ecosystems. “It has been documented, however, that indigenous fish and crayfish have added the clam to their diets.”¹ One of its nasty attributes is its proliferating ability to biofoul or clog the intake valves of electrical and nuclear power stations. “As water is drawn from rivers, streams and reservoirs for cooling purposes so are *Corbicula* larvae... Economic problems can result from the decreased efficiency of energy generation.”²

The common popular perception of migrating species is that they are invasive and therefore bad. The history of this perception is linked to the Eugenicist, Carl Linnaeus, who upheld the belief that “species belonged ipso facto wherever he found them,” while in fact the origin of a species’ habitat cannot always be explained by finding the species in a certain place and time.³ The perception that things belong to where they are found by humans is a human centric concept which assumes the partiality of human

¹ “Asian Clam,” Texas Invasive Species Institute, <http://www.tsusinvasives.org/home/database/corbicula-fluminea#:~:text=Ecological%20Threat&text=It%20has%20been%20documented%2C%20however,could%20then%20infect%20native%20species.>

² “Asian Clam (*Corbicula fluminea*) Ecological Risk Screening Summary,” U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, July 1, 2015, <https://www.fws.gov/sites/default/files/documents/Ecological-Risk-Screening-Summary-Asian-Clam.pdf>, 3.

³ Sonia Shaw, *The Next Great Migration* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 221.

experience to be the total experience or fact. An example that refutes this idea is the Galapagos Islands, where there is a mystery to how certain species arrived there. Meanwhile, human's impact on species migration is consequential – globalization and climate change have direct bearing on animal migration. Coral around the islands of Japan have “been moving northward at a speed of fourteen kilometers every year.” More commonly known, species such as birds, vermin, and jellyfish have hitchhiked on boats and container ships to new habitats.

Ignorant to all the controversy, the hidden genius of *Corbicula Fluminea* is that it is an environmentalist pirate, a hijacker, and terrorist to energy systems that propel technology, efficiency and development. Celebrated here in a mixed bag of biofouling fantasy: Which is the clam who clogs? Who is the wedge of wise pearls?