

I'm in Vancouver

prompt 2: Material

I'm still not used to a lot of things in Vancouver: three-minute waiting time for a SkyTrain, cloudy days, and feeling safe walking on the street at 10 pm. They all gave me the courage to get to know better this city, a city that is not in the US, and certainly not in the country in which I was born. In Prompt 2, I continue my photo book/zine practice, setting off on a journey for me to know the city and people better.

The prompt comes with several requirements. First of all, there is a keyword: material, which is very open-ended. And in the prompt description, we need to finish this project in a daily practice format with things or practice that we are not familiar with. Lastly, the second week of the prompt, it asked us to pay attention to the concept of "origin" in the process. I came out with an idea immediately after my professor Cameron introduced the prompt in class—one that requires a little courage and reminds me of Shizuka Yokomizo's Strangers series—I would go out to exchange my photograph with the photograph taken by people that I just met on the streets, every day.

With this simple but challenging goal, I started to look at the photograph in my own photo archive which contains hundreds of photographs I took during my undergrad in California. Having a mind of making a little zine (just like I did two years ago in my photo sequencing class), I curated 12 photographs and printed them out. I got my first photography from an undergrad photo student, David, on the fourth floor of the campus. We did not have a long conversation, treating it as homework for a class. It's a photograph of a setting sun

on a beach. The second intercourse happened in Steveston, near Fisherman's Wharf. I met a high school student, Thomas, who was taking pictures on the streets with a digital camera. We wandered around the street and talked about photography and art school as if I could give him some advice for being an artist. A few days later, he sent me a photograph of a car. I recognized the image. It was the car we passed by and he took a photograph. On the third and fourth days doing this practice, there was no luck for me. I was refused by five people. It made me rethink the method I use to exchange photographs.

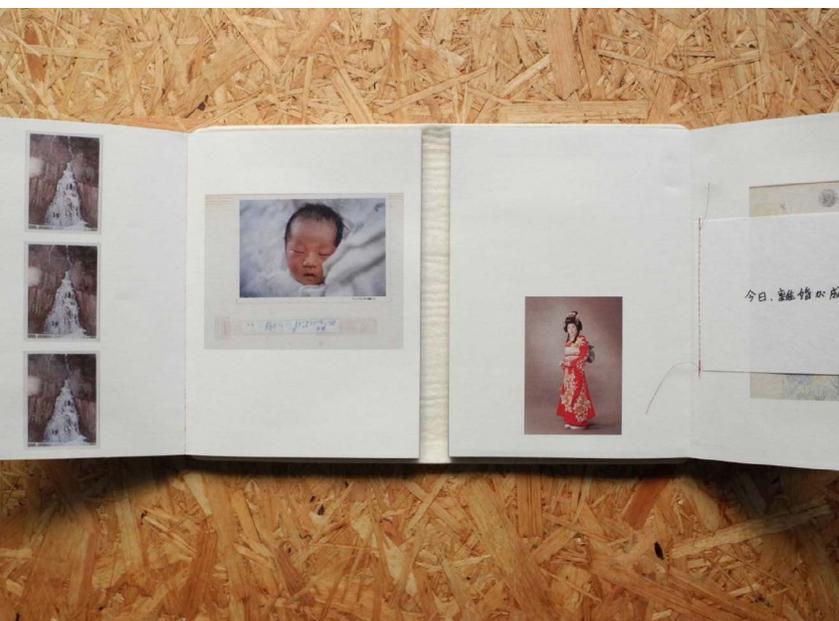


↑ My old apartment in San Francisco Chinatown; one of my photographs I used to exchange photos.

→ The photo Thomas sent me.



It appears to me that the gesture of asking people to exchange photographs up front seems impolite and sometimes invasive. Going back to the idea of getting to know Vancouver better, I changed my way to start a conversation with strangers. I would seek a casual conversation first then ask them if they are interested in this project. Gradually changing the way I'd talk to people, I successfully exchanged seven more photographs in the next four days.



↑ *Red String* (interior), Yoshikatsu Fujii, 2014.

It's time to switch my attention from the difficult part (talking to people) to my comfort zone which is to design the zine with the materials I got. It was also a rough journey. I had an image in mind of what design I wanted to make the book, which is a gate-fold book with my photograph on one side and the photographs I got from people on the other side. This idea was inspired by an artist book *Red String*, by Yoshikatsu Fujii. Reminding Cameron that I didn't need to worry about the book design until I have all the materials, I held off on this design idea. Eventually, I made an accordion book for the photographs. The accordion has two sides, which can be unfolded in a bigger piece with my photographs on top and others' images on the second roll. Together they form a conversation between photographs, in parallel with the actual conversation I had with the people I met. I also edited and typeset fragments of the dialogues in between the photos.

Here comes the crit day. I'm so grateful that everyone took a careful look at the zine and responded to the content. One of the comments was about the takeaways in this zine. I think: the momentum of doing this project comes from my curiosity about

this new environment and my cherishing my memory in the Bay Area. This serves as one of the takeaways for my readers, which is to share my story and my adventure knowing the new places in Canada. It is the main reason why I love artist books as a form of expression. It's intimate but also public. I think it holds something of me, at the same time provokes something for the readers.

After nearly a month of living in Vancouver, I'm more familiar with the city. I'm happy that I met a lot of new friends here. As a Chinese diasporic artist, it is a complex feeling to find a comfortable space to live and to make the connection to the land, culture, and geopolitics in new places. This exercise has helped me a lot. *I'm in Vancouver* marks an important milestone of my journey to seek ease in my diaspora identity.

↓ I'm in Vancouver, interior.

