



Tommy Xie
hold me again, in the jadeite gaze
July 31 - September 3

Shrines

I

They say its disrespectful to look
away from the shrine. A home within a
home, a place for the people that have come before
you. Where they can stay a while, and listen.

Body towards the shrine, you look
away. Flanked by siblings, shadows, re-
flections; one facing forward, one with head
bowed in
prayer. Yet to learn that more tears shed over
answered prayers than un-
answered ones.

Even looking away, running
away, putting a half a world between the body and the
shrine, won't take the weight of history from your
shoulders. A weight you have seen carried, like
Atlas with the Earth itself, by your
mother. The woman who taught you that
love and acceptance aren't the same thing. The woman that
follows you across oceans, through time and space. And when you look
back, back towards something like
home, you see her in the pieces of religion, folklore, and memory that
linger on your shoulders.

On the left hand side of the shrine you've left behind there's a
San-greal. Two crescent moons you bring together, in wishing or
prayer. And then you throw them
down onto the ground. The way they land offers an answer:

Both face-up is a cosmic may-
be. One face-up and one face-
down means it will happen. Both face-down means you need to
move on. You imagine bringing them together, then casting them
down before turning your back for what might be the
final time. But you don't. You can't. Afraid of knowing you might get
exactly what you want.

II

You slowly learn that bodies can be shrines. Each carrying its own history, its own faith. And that when you cast your eyes down on the person you'll be lying with, it sometimes looks like they're praying.

The window by your bed offers more than just a view of the city. Even closed, with blinds drawn, hiding your messy, early-morning hair from the world, its still a window into something.

Sometimes you shut it to keep the world out, other times it lets the past back in. The buildings and the sound of traffic replaced with the Image of Guanyin - a kind of maternal affection, an echo. Her name meaning the one who perceives the sounds of the world. You wonder how much of your life she's heard.

You want to ask last night's impenetrable meaning less boy what he sees out the window. Another way of asking: is my history too personal to be shared? What would you do if I offered some of the weight on my back. He falls asleep before you do; you whisper the question, safe in the knowledge that he'll never be able to answer.

III

You can't find the right word to define your longing for home - the one you had, and the one you hope to build someday. It manifests in strange ways, across distance and time zones, that delicate balance between love and resentment, the challenge of loving someone as they are, not as you wish that they could be.

You hope that both of you will learn how to forgive one another for the great, unspoken sin of not meeting the unsaid expectations that you set.

Home feels like a ghost, the flicker of a familial face in the puff of cigarette smoke. A magic trick: now you see it, now you

The longing persists, won't go away, no matter how far from home you find yourself. Even as you build a new one with your bare hands; with paint and easels and memories, the shrine from the other side of the world remains. No matter where you find yourself, a part of you is always looking back.

Text by Sam Moore

Tommy Xie (b.1998, Chaozhou, China) lives and works in London. His work revolves around Chinese queer sentiments expressed within the post-modern political and cultural climate. His paintings explore desires held within queer individuals in a familial context. Recent exhibitions include: *Meltdown*, Ridley Road Project Space, London (2022); *Do I Belong T(her)e?*, Harlesden High Street, London (2021); *Entropy*, baba gallery, London (2021); *I Wish He Is Home*, YouAllDroveMeCrazy Collective, Czech Republic (2019).

Works (from left to right):

Untitled (Merciful Distance)

2022

Oil on canvas

120 x 160 cm

Sweet Dreams

2022

Oil on canvas

80 x 80cm

Breeze

2021

Oil on canvas

65 x 90 cm

Me In You I

2022

Pencil on paper (in frame)

43 x 36 cm

Me In You II

2022

Pencil on paper (in frame)

43 x 36 cm