

[00:00:05] **ALEX KITNICK**

My name is Alex Kitnick, and I teach art history here at Bard, and I'm really excited to be able to introduce some real life in person speakers, even if it's in the snow. Shanzhai Lyric, aka Canal Street Research Association, aka Ming Lin and Alexandra Tatarsky. I don't think those proper names at the end there are a secret. But there is something mysterious about the activities Lin and Tatarsky have gotten up to. A colleague told me the other day, "I'm not sure I understand exactly what this is," and I'm happy that person is here, because "this" involves a wide range of activities, in and out of the art space, in and out of fashion, in and out of real estate and commerce, exhibition and display. I first heard SL's project described as an Instagram archive of pictures comprising Shanzhai shirts, garments whose most identifiable feature are their just-off slogans, memes that made a wrong turn. Memes that made a wrong turn somewhere. "We shall all be femenies," for example, or, "being emotionally manipulative, isn't very puny rock of you." Was this all done for a lab?

[00:01:31] **ALEX KITNICK**

That didn't seem quite right. And it turns out this collection was directed toward other affects, attempting to find alternative energies in copying again, copying again, ripping, ripping off until difference breaks through. Calling their work poetic research and archive, Shanzhai Lyric creates something along the lines of a poor poetry, or what artist and theorist Hito Steyerl has called "international disco Latin." Other precedents, from Édouard Glissant's "Poetics of Relation," to Bernadette Corporation's "Complete Poem" also bubble beneath the surface. Globalization and circulation, one might say connection, are central.

[00:02:15] **ALEX KITNICK**

This spirit also animates Lin and Tatarsky's adjacent project, Canal Street Research Association, which is housed on NYC's Canal Street, examines the overlap of the area's commercial and creative histories. The aesthetic is lo-fi and DIY. A slightly nostalgic whiff of bohemia blows through the door, but so does a suggestion that there might be a way forward if one stays close to the ground. Shanzhai also means "mountain hamlet," a

space just outside, and Canal Street Research is maybe a little like that too. Now Shanzhai's Lyric is up to some of the things artists do giving talks, contributing to publications, delivering statements, getting tied up in webs of gentrification and commerce. But it's not clear whether it's an artist or something else, and or what else it might become. Lin studied research architecture in London. In addition to other hats, Tatarsky is also an actor, and, if I'm not mistaken, a licensed clown. Those are just some of the reasons I'm excited to have them here today.

[00:03:28] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Thank you so much for that lovely introduction. We're going to start by just taking the lights down. Thank you.

[00:03:36] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"New products on the market in winter / the explosion the distribution and promoion the tea large duranatyag."

[00:04:04] **MING LIN**

"Tonight Need York."

[00:04:10] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"Recession forecast interest rates / crash economic disaster looming / financial crisis nalis capshaw investment / osis stingy I us package / slow revival revive sund Dollar we keens / crash assets interest rates / session forecast / revive sund monetary financial crisis."

[00:04:46] **MING LIN**

"I'm so tired of love I'm still more tired of rhyme but moner gives me pleasure all the time. Lack of moner is the roo of all evl"

[00:04:55] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"Art is a way of survivelle / fashion sport / there yours."

[00:05:29] **MING LIN**

"Nothing to say? Nothing"

[00:06:06] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"We shall all be feminis"

[00:06:18] **MING LIN**

"Indulge your fantasies this season with sexy sitthouettes and luxurionic lace /  
photography lze zinco fashion new sujan"

[00:06:33] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"Into the depths / in the height of fashion / into the depths / in the height of fashion /  
into the depths / in the height of fashion / into the depths / in the height of fashion / into  
the depths / in the height of fashion / into the depths / in the height of fashion / into the  
depths / in the height of fashion / into the depths / in the height of fashion / into the  
depths / in the height of fashion / into the depths."

[00:07:08] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We can bring the lights back up. Hi, everyone. Thanks for being here. It's really nice to be here. I'm Alex, this is Ming. And together we form part of Shanzhai Lyric, and more recently, the Canal Street Research Association. So this is the poem, transcribed, that you just heard [gesturing to a slide of a transcription of text found on t-shirts]. It was compiled, unedited, from t-shirts mostly made in China, and sold around the world, a linguistic phenomenon that we've been calling Shanzhai Lyric. We've been collecting and thinking about these t-shirts since 2015. And in the video poem that you just saw, we used the garments to caption and critique the shifting landscape of Lower Manhattan, where we both grew up. So for the past seven years or so, we've been a roving archive.

[00:08:00] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We take up residence wherever we can find cheap space, basically. And that includes markets, libraries, community centers, empty offices, storefronts, galleries, museums, personal closets, parks.

[00:08:14] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Ming saw,

[00:08:16] **MING LIN**

"all palaces are temporary palaces."

[00:08:19] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

In a stall outside her house when she was living in Hong Kong. And then a friend sent us,

[00:08:26.090] **MING LIN**

"ALL PALACES ARE TEMPORARY HALACES"

[00:08:29] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

from a mall in Istanbul.

[00:08:32] **MING LIN**

What appears to be a spelling mistake can be a conceptual opening, as you see here, "all falls apart. It reveals the eye inside, the ailment of the individual eye. How it ails. Palaces are retemporary, again and again. Retemporary art, temporary palaces of ale, ailing palaces. Palaces that, like words, fall apart and can be rebuilt differently. Differently. In place of palaces, perhaps halaces."

[00:09:08] **MING LIN**

In the Pearl River delta, where an abundance of the world's goods are made for export, alternate markets circulate items known as shanzhai. In English, we might say counterfeit, or bootleg, or fake, but these translations aren't quite right. In Chinese, the word "shanzhai" translates literally to mountain hamlet, in reference to a Robin

Hood-esque tale from the Song dynasty of an area where outlaws would stockpile stolen resources, to redistribute among those on the margins. "Shanzhai"—"mountain hamlet," retains this spatial dimension, referring to a place protected from government interference by being on the outskirts, a place that rejects the very notion of a single original owner or author.

[00:09:57] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Philosopher Byung Chul-Han traces shanzhai to the lineage of Chinese landscape painting, where emptiness surrounds a central image and the composition invites subsequent owners of the work to inscribe themselves into it, imprinting their own signatures and seals and aphorisms directly onto the work. So, the shared landscape is collectively created, and it accrues value with the addition of ever more author owners. There is no single individual artist and there is no original.

[00:10:31] **MING LIN**

So we research, celebrate and circulate shanzhai lyrics in various modes. Sometimes this takes the form of publications. This is a zine that also forms a work called "Distributed Landscape." The cover is a series of Shanzhai Lyrics, printed on tattoo paper, so the archive can be further shared across bodies and surfaces, by cutting up and distributing the original landscape.

[00:10:57] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

A core aspect of our practice involves placing shanzhai lyrics into existing archives. So at the Women's Art Library in London, an archive of feminist work that's collected on slides since the '70s, and exists in shoe boxes filled with ephemera, we physically sewed shanzhai lyrics into the archival materials, positioning it as a form of subversive feminist work that melds experimental text and textile.

[00:11:27] **MING LIN**

We think of the hybrid language that appears on shanzhai clothing, mostly made by women and an object of fascination and derision around the world, as a feminist

project of appropriation poetics, to develop a new type of language, "écriture feminine," written from and on the body as a site of creative agency.

[00:11:46] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We call the ongoing transcription of the archive, "the endless garment," an endlessly unspooling scroll of poetic text. And we call our physical archive of poetry garments "the incomplete poem." So for this, we create iterative installations in response to the specific history of a site. We hope these structures invite a kind of group poetry reading that we consider another mode of archival practice. We think of the structures as reading apparatuses and our inspiration comes from the many places that textile and text often appear. These include runways and closets and retail spaces and billboards and newsracks.

[00:12:39] **MING LIN**

At Abrons Arts center, we wanted to place garments in conversation with the neighborhood's history of tenants rights organizing the largely immigrant garment industry and the multilingual cacophony that is flattened and homogenized by gentrification. The installation recalls the tenement laundry lines that trouble the bounds between public and private space by extending between buildings.

[00:13:03] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

One of the archival forms that we've come the most excited about is the heap. A heap, we've found, invites a visitor into the digging and the sorting. It stokes their desire to sift and arrange to make legible, to grab and read the shirt. A heap can also take form anywhere, and it suggests the informality and the excitement of the street.

[00:13:27] **MING LIN**

In October 2020, we found ourselves occupying a disused storefront on Canal Street. There we became Canal Street Research Association, a fictional office entity we invented that has, over the past year and a half, become somewhat real. And this friction and slipperiness between real and fake is at the heart of the whole operation.

[00:13:50] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Much of Canal Street has become a kind of ghost town, and we wanted a chance to talk to these ghosts, the artists and businesses and residents who've been evicted and priced out, and the less than legal Canal Street industries that make the block so beloved.

[00:14:07] **MING LIN**

Our storefront was next to the last rubber supply store, and the last plastic supply shop, where the artist David Hammons purchased plastic molds to make perfectly spherical snowballs for his famous "Bliz-aard Ball Sale," in which he sold snowballs on the street. Supposedly, the very last snowball was preserved for many years in a freezer until one day the power went out and the snowball became a bowl of water.

[00:14:36] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We bootlegged Hammons' piece, as you can see here, on a rug sold to us by John. John is the traveling carpet seller of Canal Street, and he peddles his rugs up and down the block to the bag vendors to use as prayer rugs. We've learned from being on Canal Street that everyone on Canal is an artist.

[00:15:06] **MING LIN**

Khadim Sene, who's here on the right, is a bag seller down the street from us, and sometimes he stores his djembes at our space. Khadim is a musician from Senegal, and used to live and perform inside a replica of the Grand Mosque of Djenné in Mali, built as part of a museum of African culture on the Korean tourist island of Jeju. A bootleg grand mosque. Khadim comes from a family of Griot, a lineage of musicians, storytellers, and oral historians from West Africa, and so he understood our project immediately. Being a Griot is like being a living archive, the holder of stories of the whole community.

[00:16:17]

[Video playing]

[00:16:38] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We've also been collaborating with a mysterious figure named Nothing Man, who plays harmonica while folding dozens of roses in the Canal Street subway station. He sits in front of "Empress Voyage," a mosaic by the artist Bing Lee, who lived on Canal Street for many years, and who also designed our logo, an empty vessel strutting down the street in heels, moving forwards or backwards down the block, depending on how you look at it. We commissioned Nothing Man to fold our myriad Canal Street leases into a dozen roses, a bouquet that we hope to give to that most intimate and toxic of partners: the landlord.

[00:17:24] **MING LIN**

Canal Street used to be an actual canal running through the early Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam, at the tip of what we now call Manhattan. Built on a stream running through unceded Lenape land, and today, the epicenter of the counterfeit market, Canal Street is still a channel of flow and overflow, a through fair that calls into question the politics of ownership, property, and who gets unjustly criminalized for theft on stolen land.

[00:17:49] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

When we first moved back to the block in 2020, the shops were all boarded up, and in front of them, the street markets of counterfeits were once again vibrant. Street life was able to flourish in the empty space because there were no business owners around to say, "get off my property." From our storefront, we had a literal window into the entwining of legitimate, semi legitimate and illegitimate activities that characterized the block. So all day long, we just sat there associating. We stared out the window, waving at the bootleg vendors, and they stared back, and they waved at us. And sometimes we crossed the street to talk to them, and sometimes they cross the street to talk to us. We seem to share a mutual fascination with each other's semi-legitimate activities.



[00:18:39] **MING LIN**

We consider Canal Street to be a kind of mountain hamlet where counterfeit markets and shadow economies propose a different relationship to property. Redistributing the excesses produced by empire.

[00:18:51] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Inspired by Canal Street vendors. In 2008, artist Yoko Inoue sat on the steps of Canal Rubber, right next to our storefront, unraveling Canal Street sweaters that had been knit with the American flag to sell as souvenirs after 911. Shanzhai writing similarly unspools the language of imperialism and corporate branding, churning together found newspaper text, ad copy, luxury logos, design manuals, iconic city images, and pop ephemera in an innovative experimental English, both to evade copyright infringement and to comment on cultural phenomenon. Adorning garments in undulating blocks of text, a drama of the global supply chain unfolds alongside supra-sensical musings on ownership law, gender, fashion

[00:19:47] **MING LIN**

Ensnared in a sea of text, mired somewhere along the Gulf shores, where numerous dollars are lost to bogus claims, a shanzhai CoverGirl navigates the detritus of her environment, and emerges, defiant. "Reflect," she says, lowering her aviator shades, and "are you ready for?" Before trailing off into an oblivion of keyboard commands and erratic punctuation, the floating shards of hysteric glamor emit a wail that is at once a guttural battle cry and blissful babble.

[00:20:15] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"Glamour YSTERU ARGRL!"

[00:20:20] **MING LIN**

In the cacophonous valley of the counterfeit, tales of satisfaction and desire are spun from the webbed tangles of power and production protocol. The language of rupture

revels in the imaginative potential of the shanzhai encounter. The shanzhai garment demands a moment for floating contemplation, reflection amidst swimming signifiers.

[00:20:43] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

The repeated letters, misspellings and redundancies insert a break, or a pause, or a disruption into the usual unquestioned flow of things, in order to make space for reflection and questioning. What Bernadette Corporation might call "conceptual stuttering." Design instructions are at times themselves the adornment, as when a t shirt simply says,

[00:21:08] **MING LIN**

"Logo herr"

[00:21:10] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

or

[00:21:12] **MING LIN**

"Helvetica"

[00:21:14] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

or

[00:21:15] **MING LIN**

"Sample text"

[00:21:17] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Logos become symbols that mock the hyperbole of branding. Language is transformed into patterns, not nonsense, so much as beyonsense. You [a long string of incoherent vowel and consonant sounds]

[00:21:39] **MING LIN**

In its unbridled alteration of words and insertion of erratic outbursts into the language of marketing, shanzhai text, while undeniably a for profit enterprise, produces a set of alternative values.

[00:21:52] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"Unemployed. Dear my boss, I don't want to was I for the weekends I'm going to find my happiness. Skateboard, read a bootsurf, travel, dance seep. So I will quit. Please confirm, Chance."

[00:22:11] **MING LIN**

Shanzhai strategy provides a way to think about rising unemployment and the so-called "retail apocalypse," a situation that has already arrived and has been exacerbated by COVID, as a chance to forge a different relationship to work, value, ownership. We are reminded of the Greek term "kairos," with roots in both weaving and archery. Just as the shuttle of the loom slips through a gap in a growing textile, and the archer cannot aim directly, but must instead calculate an arc that will bend eventually to her target, so too, the shanzhai text style activates the literal material of its circumstances to navigate a chaotic accumulation of positions towards the completion of its own project. Kairotically, the shanzhai lyric bends the language of dominant ideologies and modes of perception, so as to demonstrate both the appeal and the contradictions of capitalist production.

[00:23:10] **MING LIN**

Economic downturn and slump, looming disaster and fear, are the current materials of our circumstances. At the Canal Street Research Association, we saw pause as an opening, a chance to follow the threads towards the completion of a fuller tapestry of relations.

[00:23:27] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We had planned to spend 2020 tracing the root of a shanzhai garment around the world, and inserting ourselves as unofficial artists in residence at the Museum of the

Counterfeit in Paris. Unofficial, because at some point, they just stopped responding to our emails. The Museum of the Counterfeit is a charmingly whimsical, yet sinister place. It's owned by LVMH, the Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy Corporation, and was set up to train border guards to identify fakes crossing the border into France. So, it's a repository of confiscated counterfeits— stolen stolen goods. We're interested in how these definitions of real and fake criminalize the bootlegger in order to conceal the much bigger theft that takes place under the guise of legitimate ownership and property. So policing the bootlegs is in actuality a method of policing the borders.

[00:24:26] **MING LIN**

We look to shanzhai design, production and distribution to identify tactics that we think of as shanzhai strategies. Subverting hierarchy through exaggerated mimicry, using shininess to both attract and distract. An emptiness that leaves space for collective imagining, the poetic juxtaposition of distinct aesthetic registers and a devoted irreverence distilled from the cast-off of consumer culture.

[00:24:59] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So these are some of the strategies we also see at work on Canal Street. A place that both attracts and distracts the gaze from its less than legal activities. A collision of high and low, where innovation emerges from the detritus of production, and the emptiness of boarded up businesses that invites imaginings of a different relationship to our shared and shifting landscape. We study these ebbs and flows as a warning, and as a call to action.

[00:25:27] **MING LIN**

Unlike the mashups of a shanzhai t-shirt, our research follows and delights in the collisions of associations, to see where they might lead us. One day, a visitor brought us a heap of oyster shells. We learned that the waters around the island of Manhattan were once filled with oysters, some the size of a plate, so big you could share one oyster with a friend.

[00:25:49] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Oysters could be cheaply, shucked and devoured street side, even garnering an all you can eat special for six cents called the Canal Street Plan. Of course, if you ate too many, the vendor might flip you an oyster past its prime, and then it would be a long time before you'd want all you can eat oysters again. These unregulated street markets provided some of the only reliable income streams for the communities who ran the thriving oyster industry, mostly immigrants and African Americans. Considered a scourge by city officials, street vending became heavily policed and was finally outlawed by the 1930s, enabling a system of racist, violent control over the vendor communities that continues on Canal Street to this day.

[00:26:37] **MING LIN**

Extremely prevalent in the rivers ringing the island, oysters built this town. They were so often burnt down for the lime in their shells, that many sellers had purpose built openings just for this task. Sensitive yet gritty souls. An oyster's hard exterior protects a vulnerable and soft interior. The oyster's response to a foreign intruder is to transform it over time, into a pearl vital to the local ecosystem. A single oyster filters 30 to 50 gallons of water daily. Yet pollution from industrialization eventually led to the oyster's demise. Where once the Hudson and East Rivers were sources of sustenance to the Lenape people, who feasted on the plentiful oysters, colonizers turned the canal into a dump for garbage and sewage, identified in maps as the "common ditch." Eventually, the runoff made the riverbanks too toxic for the reefs to thrive, and the oyster population dwindled. When the river was dredged in the 1800s to make space for large seaport vessels to pass through, the oyster's home was destroyed.

[00:27:43] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Urban planners actually made attempts to disguise this fetid waterway of the canal by planting rows of riverside trees, trying to conjure a European promenade. But it never worked. The stench was still too strong, so they filled the canal in, and that became the chaotic east west thoroughfare that we know as Canal Street. Today, police continue to harass and arrest Canal Street vendors who mostly hail from East Asia and West

Africa. They confiscate their goods during aggressive raids as part of the ongoing attempt to beautify Canal Street, that's been at work since its inception. This attempt to cover up the waste and the overflow, the stench generated by capitalist industry.

[00:28:29] **MING LIN**

On this block known for hustles and gambles of all kinds, we ended up on Canal Street in October as part of a related real estate hustle and gamble to fill empty storefronts with artists in order to attract longer term, higher paying retail tenants. Art was being deployed as part of a beautification attempt to cover up the stench of capitalism and continue a history of displacement. The organization that brought us into the storefront worked in tandem with a consortium of landlords, curating and programming their empty spaces with arts content.

[00:29:03] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So as artists, we understand that we are a part of this whole scheme. You could kind of say that we are the trees. We are the trees planted along the canal to hide the toxic waters. And a tree can't help but want a place to grow. And yet it's painful to put down any roots, knowing that you will soon be chopped down.

[00:29:25] **MING LIN**

As we wrestle with this conundrum, we look to Canal Street for models of art, a subversion of existing laws and norms. For instance, street vendors can evade the regulations that require licenses if what they sell is considered art, because then it is protected under freedom of expression. And so art is a way of survival.

[00:29:47] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Paintings, photos, prints, sculptures, David Hammons snowballs. If it's considered art, it evades the laws that criminalize informal street markets. Marcel Duchamp allegedly found his famous urinal on Canal Street, or rather, his uncredited female collaborator, The Baroness did, thus ushering in the age of the Readymade. This next slide is a urinal that we saw on Canal last week, so the theory sounds promising to us. The legacy of the

Readymade, or the found art object, was started on Canal Street and carried on on Canal Street. Here's the Flux Shop, which is today a matcha shop. If the bootlegs were understood in this tradition as found art objects, then their status as art might grant immunity to their sellers.

[00:30:47] **MING LIN**

This is Leo, one of the last remaining caricaturists on Canal Street. The contraption from which he sets up his portrait station doubles as a swift hiding spot for bootleg bags. They can quickly be whipped out of sight in case of a raid. The block has many of these spatial maneuvers built into it. The storefronts contain different sections and alcoves leading further and further back. And a web of elaborate tunnels beneath the block allegedly form what are known as the Canal catacombs, where goods can be sequestered and vendors can quickly exit if need be.

[00:31:21] **ALEX KITNICK**

So, for decades, a common tacitly sanctioned Canal Street setup was to have a souvenir shop up front, and then you'd have secret compartments housing luxury goods in the back. But under Mayor Bloomberg in the 2000s, landlords became liable for any of the illicit activities conducted on their properties. LVMH and other luxury brands pressured the city to surveil and punish sales of bootlegs. So landlords began to forbid the sale of counterfeits on their property, and their tenants, no longer able to pay such high Manhattan rents, were evicted.

[00:31:57] **MING LIN**

The block has been an empty shell of itself since then, and property owners are desperate for a rebrand. We have been able to inhabit these empty spaces along the block only when landlords can't find anyone else to rent them to. And within this scheme, we are well aware that our position as artists advertises. It is our job to make the space look high end, to entice folks to the block and attract longer term, higher paying tenants. Then we will promptly be evicted.

[00:32:27] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So if we do our job well enough, we will quickly contribute to our own displacement. Indeed, after six months at 327 Canal, the landlord found a higher paying retail tenant to replace us, and with nearly no notice, we had to vacate. We find ourselves trapped in this repeating cycle. Now, our new landlord has just found a higher paying retail tenant this week who will be running a fashion boutique, and we have to leave by the end of April. The new tenants came by the other day to scope out the space with their consultant. Their consultant, who is opening a new bar nearby— actually just across the street from a jail complex called the Tombs, that is forever sinking back into the swamp it was built on— this new bar will specialize, she told us, in champagne and caviar.

[00:33:33] **MING LIN**

The precarity of our situation recalls a long line of artists evicted from Canal Street in 1968, Jack Smith, avant-garde theatrical maestro, lived in a loft right around the corner at Canal and Greene Street, in his home studio, which he called the Plaster Foundation of Atlantis. There, Smith often staged midnight performances for small, stunned audiences. One mode we are particularly fond of of his are his slideshows, in which he would stage theater scenes as carefully choreographed tableaux to be photographed and projected as slideshows of accompanying narration. These expanded cinema screenings blurred the line between film, photography, performance, documentation and archive, with names like "Young American Beatniks, Morally Opposed to Prisons, Hallucinatory Colored Light, Flip Out, Grass Busts of the Brassiere World of Narco Goon Benefit"— that's all one title— and simply, "A Dance with a Penguin." Part of Smith's horror of the rented world. A slideshow in boiled lobster color.

[00:34:36] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We find ourselves in a rented world horror show, in which our own ongoing dances with landlords often pivot on a question of aesthetics. Landlords have become our curators and our critics. In March of 2021, when we were informed we would have to vacate our storefront, it was explained to us by the landlord that we just weren't the kind of artists he had envisioned. He didn't seem to appreciate our art. In his view, it wasn't art.



Perhaps this is because our work was a kind of unsanctioned collaboration with him, the landlord. Indeed, we had repurposed the materials of the storefront exactly as he left them for us. Ceiling crumbling and chunks on the floor, stray wires everywhere, no heat, lights going out, sloping floor marked up walls. The plywood that he used to board up the building with a landlord's fear of looting, during the uprisings in June of 2020, we mounted as a landscape. The brown construction paper that he affixed to the windows with blue painters tape, we cut up into posters for our outdoor cinema. One of them was a poster of Jack Smith, who was often unable to pay his \$150 a month rent, which he called a fruitless, endless enslaving enterprise, and by 1970 was facing eviction from the Plaster Foundation. Jack Smith became convinced that the evils of landlordism were at the heart of all plays, for one always had to rent the land in order to perform the works.

[00:36:13] **MING LIN**

One day, while buying supplies, we spotted this photo in the doorway of our local hardware store, Chinatown Building Supply, surrounded by images of flowers, sunsets, landscapes. This one stood out. We recognized the building in the photo as the one directly across the street from the hardware store. So someone must have stood there in the doorway and bore witness to this miraculous near collision. We bought the work for our fantasy office art collection. And now here you can see an empty space where the photo once was. The cashier told us her father, Bon Lee, was the proprietor of the shop, was also the photographer. The photo was actually a scene from a movie that had been shot right there, the 2014 remake of the musical Annie, in which Jamie Foxx plays a modern day Daddy Warbucks.

[00:37:06] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So the man you see in this photo is actually Jamie Foxx's stunt double Daddy Warbucks. What you're looking at is thus a representation of a stunt double in a remake, a copy of a copy of a copy of yet another tale of an evil landlord, daddy in the character of Daddy Warbucks, which proves Jack Smith's theory that all scripts do have at their heart the evils of landlordism. Our actual landlords kept complaining that our posters were

unbelievably, unprofessional, especially the blue tape, they said. Tape should never be visible in a window display, they said. But the paper and the tape had come from their own window display, which they had been using for months to conceal the condition of their storefront. It seemed that what they actually didn't like were the materials of their own waste and fear and neglect being brought to their attention, and perhaps to the attention of passerby and potential renters. That is, the reuse of trash materials functioned as a strategy of estrangement to make the gaze notice that which it often glosses over by making it appear strange.

[00:38:20] **MING LIN**

The history of SoHo has long been a doomed love affair between artist and developer, encapsulated by the 90s flick "Ghost," which takes place in a renovated Soho artist loft right near Jack Smith's unrenovated artist loft and filmed just one year after Smith passed away from AIDS related pneumonia. One could plausibly argue that the evils of landlordism are at the heart of this script, as Patrick Swayze's banker fingers entwine with Demi Moore's artist's hands in the iconic scene. We need to dim the lights, please.

[00:38:55]

**[Video plays]**

[00:41:16] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Clearly, as you just saw, together, artist and developer mold a shape that cannot hold, quickly collapsing in on itself as it spins, grotesquely intertwined. Developer claims he wants to help and quickly destroys what the artist is making. He can't seem to help it. The artist seems to momentarily regret her flirtation with the man of money, and yet, for the rest of the film, she remains haunted by him.

[00:41:51] **MING LIN**

As artists living with capitalism, we are aware of the paradox of our existence. No matter what we do, we are inevitably contributing to our own imminent displacement and to the lore of Canal Street, whose authenticity will be used to raise real estate

value and erase the authentic. Even the existence and undoing of Canal Street Research Association would become fodder for real estate copy, lending a valuable story to property as the site where real things happened. Kicked out by the landlord, Jack Smith became obsessed with what he calls the rented world. Manhattan is, of course, the Rented Island. We screened fragments of his *Hamlet in The Rented World*, along with *Annie*, projected on the window of the storefront for passerby. Smith had been talking about staging a *Hamlet* for years, and in the spring of 1971, after relocating to Canal and Mercer, he began producing what is known only through film rehearsal fragments as *Hamlet and the 1001 Psychological Jingoleansisms of Prehistoric Landlordism of Rima-Puu*, or *Hamlet in The Rented World*.

[00:43:01] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So in Jack Smith's surreal underwater version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Ophelia is a drag queen, Claudius, a composite character, is an octopus, and the royal family are, of course, landlords, the central social evil of our time, as Smith says, Hamlet is a melancholic art student, a prince of privilege, heir to this fucked up real estate family. And, as we might recall, Hamlet ends with the entire royal family sprawled dead on the floor, stabbed by their own poisoned swords and drinking from their own poisoned goblets.

[00:43:40] **MING LIN**

For Smith, the struggle against the landlord was written into the original *Hamlet*. After all, Shakespeare's own Globe Theater had stood on leased land. Always at risk of eviction. Smith was constantly cutting, adding, tweaking, rearranging his *Hamlet* on paper and on stage, akin to the repetitions, hesitations, and apparent failures of a Shanzhai t-shirt text. Smith's stuttering style made a space for reflection. An approach of error and restart allows for a pause in which fantastical imaginings might take root— dreams of a world beyond the rented island.

[00:44:17] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

The "reptilian acting technique," as Smith called it, brought attention to the construction

of the performance itself. À la playwright Bertolt Brecht's "estrangement" or "alienation" effect—a set of theatrical techniques used to render artifice visible and thus to subvert the emotional manipulations of bourgeois theater.

[00:44:39] **MING LIN**

It was after attending his first Chinese opera in Moscow in 1935, that Bertolt Brecht had misidentified those attributes of the form which he would later develop into his theory of estrangement, based on his perception of the exaggerated and ornate stylization he saw in the Chinese opera. Brecht considered his approach a mode of active resistance against the capitalist social order, which seeks to pacify the masses through fictive narrative and illusion.

[00:45:07] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

At the storefront hung costumes for a production of Brecht's "Threepenny Opera," that never happened. Artist Lorenzo Bueno had planned to stage the play at a nearby Chinatown karaoke bar. And these are the costumes he made for the thieves, of course.

[00:45:25] **MING LIN**

And this is a scene from Patty Chang's "Church Basement Bomb Shelter," partly shot in a nearby basement in Manhattan's Chinatown, which restages the imagined moment of Brecht's first encounter with Chinese opera legend Mei Lanfang. The short film is based on an alleged transcript of their conversation, which later turned out to be a fictional dialogue for a play. Chang's film reappropriates Brecht's appropriation again. The lines between real and fake are blurry, and often the fake version is more inspiring anyways.

[00:45:56] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So Brecht, like Smith and in some sense like us, could be said to be using these fantasies of the Other as a vehicle for his own utopian longing, as a device to examine his own cultural inheritance and baggage, a violent and persistent strain in European and American art making. Patty Chang in her film, perhaps provides one strategy for

dealing with this kind of mess, akin to trash picking on Canal Street for treasures. Sift through the detritus, the garbage that gets produced by a racist and exploitative culture, and then take only what is useful to you and leave the rest to rot away.

[00:46:37] **MING LIN**

Continuously evicted, Smith never was able to finish his *Hamlet*. It comes to us and found fragments, much like the discarded Canal Street materials Smith lovingly fashioned into sets, trash archives, a copy of a copy coming apart at the seams. Smith's *Hamlet* stands in a long line of sanctioned and unsanctioned rewritings of this epochable tale. Indeed, the original *Hamlet* is itself a bootleg assemblage of earlier plays. An archive of edits.

[00:47:08] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Jack Smith's unhinged *Hamlet* is an homage to and the takedown of a royalty in tatters, in which the prince is a fop and the understudy steals the spotlight. Shakespeare has interested us for some time as the canonical keeper of the English language, and whose English is rife with misspellings, adventurous word mashups and lots of stolen goods.

[00:47:31] **MING LIN**

Widely regarded as the greatest individual English author, it is questioned whether Shakespeare existed at all. Some suggest he was a composite figure, to whom many tales have retroactively been attributed, and that Shakespeare's plays are compiled from fragments of works sneakily transcribed during live performances or jotted down by actors from memory. These are called "bad quartos," the unauthorized pirated tapes essentially bootlegs. The first published version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is one such bad quarto—a ripoff of text stolen, borrowed, misremembered, transcribed, copied, bootlegged, pirated ripoff. And the text of *Hamlet*, having achieved cult status, is constantly taken apart and copied by countless ripoff artists. Shakespearean text is frequently reappropriated by Shanzhai poets.

[00:48:23] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

So in some sense, we feel that the Canal Street Research Association exists inside this extended pun on the double entendre of Hamlet. Hamlet, as a word play. For Hamlet is both a misanthropic antihero, and a very small enclave. A hamlet, a community of people smaller than a village, the mountain hamlet on the edge of empire where stolen goods are redistributed. Shanzhai.

[00:48:52] **MING LIN**

At our storefront, we often initiated conversations with passerby and neighbors and curiosity seekers by inviting them to inscribe directly onto a landscape that stretched around the periphery of the room. Comprised of photos we took of every building on Canal Street going east from the Hudson River.

[00:49:09] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Visitors were encouraged to add their own memories and knowledge and commentary directly to the wall, thus creating a collectively composed landscape. "Jewelry to get your car pimped out and fireworks. That's the only reason you would ever go to Canal. Dick owns this, used to be a gas station Mobil, had a big gas leak seeped into all the land they had to excavate and take all the dirty dirt away. And then we built this building."

[00:49:46] **MING LIN**

"Took pictures here with my brother."

[00:49:48] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

"We thought we were gods surrounded by cops during protest. Worst feng shui would wait once a week to meet blind uncle and help him across."

[00:49:59] **MING LIN**

This collectively generated landscape is the aspect our landlord found most egregious

of all. He says the handwriting looks unprofessional and unintentional.

[00:50:10] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Yes, it is intentionally unprofessional. We want to create an archive that is inviting to anyone who might feel alienated or maybe just bored by the sleek, white walled galleries and whose ambiguousness might pique the curiosity of passerbys. In this conceptual stutter is the possibility of encounter. People frequently peek through the window of the office at the oyster shells that line the sill, or at a Shanzhai t-shirt on display, or at the clusters of souvenirs dotting the room, or Betty Roytburd's Statue of Liberty crown made of clay, or the photos lining the wall. And then they would poke their heads inside and say, "What is this? What's going on here?" "Exactly," we'd have a chance to say, "Yeah," and we'd invite them in to take a look around and add themselves into the landscape.

[00:51:04] **MING LIN**

The invitation to add to the archive has also been an invitation to be in conversation with us, and it is how we have been able to find many research threads to tug on.

[00:51:14] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

Our fantasy office art collection, as we call it, was created by reaching out to artists with whom we feel resonance, and by welcoming input and offerings from artists who happened to stop by. And, as we said, on Canal Street, everyone is an artist. So, like a Chinese landscape painting, the project accumulates traces, and it increases in value as more hands co-author the work with us. Marco Barrera brought by jars of Canal Street sewage creek water that he collected and that have since turned a very mysterious pink hue with time. Max Guy contributed a bootleg basho layered with a scan of a watch where the ticking hand blurs as time eludes the print. Poet [inaudible 00:51:57] was hanging around working at the clock shop next door to us. And then he began using the back room as a studio, and then he became a painter, and he changed his name to Day. And Day Sinclair shot the video with us that you saw at the beginning. Emmy Catedral gifted us with a constellation made from the patterns of gum

on the subway platform, and dedicated to local community activist Lorena Borjas. We think of all of these works as a constellation, or, we think that our work is to do the work of constellating between them. And when visitors come by, these are the pieces, the conversation pieces, that help us tell the story.

[00:52:38] **MING LIN**

The found works exist alongside found materials. Which then become found work. We are most fond of a landscape made of salvaged plywood. The plywood boarding up unrented storefronts represents the landlord's attempt to assert individual ownership to bar all others from access to this empty space. And yet, in the summer of fall of 2020, it formed an unspooling blank stroll across the city, inviting inscription within hours and days, seals, aphorisms and commentary accumulated on the plywood. In our final weekend at 327 Canal Street, we turned into a retail experiment. Souvenir shop up front, and bootleg warehouse in the back, in memory of spatial hustles that have characterized the block, and an homage to the history of neighborhood artists. Wooster Enterprises, Flux Shop, The Store— using retail as a medium.

[00:53:28] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

We imprinted Bing Lee's logo as a seal inside a classic Canal Street t-shirt, a garment that, amidst ongoing cycles of gentrification, development and displacement, expresses exactly how we feel.

[00:53:50] **MING LIN**

Since leaving the storefront, we've moved the entire Shanzhai Lyric and Canal Street Research archive to a storage in Long Island City, that we constructed inside of the PS1 museum. We've continued a methodology of what we call restaging, creating bootlegs of ephemeral artworks or moments on the block, such as the Hammons snowball sale, as a mode of docu-fiction, blurring the line between real and fake. This is our bootleg of Trisha Brown's "Roof Piece," performed in 1971 across rooftops of Soho, turning buildings into a distributed stage. We invited dance artist Lai Yi Ohlsen to recreate, interpret, bootleg "Roof Piece" with us, on the roof of 82 Walker Street, just behind the empty



office building where the association has now taken up operations. From the fire escape, the audience witnessed slow movements, drawing attention to the barely perceptible changes that, over time, result in an unrecognizable landscape. We documented this happening in a photo that was then wheat pasted around the neighborhood.

[00:54:56] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

And this is our bootleg Felix Gonzalez Torres. A string of Canal Street lights hanging out our window, an unsanctioned collaboration with the McDonald's next door, which is itself a real estate hustle, where franchise owners are forced to rent from McDonald's vast real estate holdings.

[00:55:17] **MING LIN**

And we recently staged "Basin Girl in the City of Ash," on the banks of Flushing Creek, soon to be a luxury development, by inviting visitors to embody Basin Girl, proposing leakiness as a form of resistance to developers visions. The costume referenced Edna Cowan, pictured here, the only female architect at the 1931 Beaux-Arts Ball who came dressed as a sink. Here are our bootlegs.

[00:55:50] **MING LIN**

And our most recent bootleg is of the classic New York coffee cup, which we produced at 4oz instead of the typical 8oz, which is just the right size for drinking Café Touba, a spiced Senegalese coffee drink enjoyed by many West African vendors along Canal Street. Café Touba was allegedly invented by the Sufi spiritual leader Sheikh Amadou Bamba, who led the pacifist resistance against French colonial rule in Senegal, and the drink is a spiritual and political beverage to be sipped with intention.

[00:56:21] **ALEXANDRA TATARSKY**

In developing our bootleg coffee cup design, we of course discovered the best archive of all, the trashcan, where we often find, and salvage, many versions of this often bootlegged New York icon. Around the rim of the cup snakes a pattern known as a

Greek key, or a meander. Named for the winding Menderes River in Asia Minor, this watery pattern has become our research methodology. To meander is to take the most inefficient route between two points, to travel against the city grid, to travel in spirals. In a subtle piece that is perhaps the one we're most proud of at PS1, we inserted Café Touba onto the menu at Mina's, the museum's Greek inspired cafe, where it is listed as "money has no smell," or "Pecunia non olet," a term first uttered by a Roman emperor in defense of the urine tax that he imposed to fill the city's coffers. The glint of gold often conceals the stench of its origins. We borrowed the line "Money Has No Smell" from the title of a book by the anthropologist Paul Stoller, who describes how West African vendors in New York City must resolve this tension between their spiritual values and the activities that they have to undertake just in order to get by.

[00:57:42] ALEXANDRA TATARSKY

Artists, too, of course, pursue funds of dubious origins in order to make work that opposes the values of the very same funding streams and systems they rely on to make the work that opposes the values of the very same funding streams and systems they rely on to make the work. So "Money has no smell" offers a moment to sip some Café Touba and reflect on these contradictions of a life in which one's values are often in conflict with the need to make a living. We are happy to serve you. And money has no smell. In our Canal Street loft sits this papier mache bootleg of the bottom left corner of Duccio's "Temptation on the Mount." Here is the original.

[00:58:30] **MING LIN**

It depicts the moment when the devil tempts Jesus with all the kingdom of the world, in return for his worship. As artists accept unsavory collaborations and funding from foul sources, the castle serves as our daily reminder of the deals that we make with the devil in order to pay the rent. And as we do so, we try to remember. ALL PALACES ARE TEMPORARY HALACES.

[00:58:56] ALEXANDRA TATARSKY

A meander is a kind of a constellation that one can create on the street, rather than in

the sky, by following points and forming encounters into a shape, and then giving that shape meaning through naming. Mountain Hamlet. Shanzhai. Taking resources from the kingdom, and then using them to try to overthrow the king. The huge mountain. Thanks everyone.