

### ***The Unfortunates of D’Arcy Island***

2013 | 96.5 cm x 243.8 cm (4 panels)

Chinese paint pigments and acrylic on mulberry paper mounted onto board

***The Unfortunates of D’Arcy Island*** is a four-panel work on mulberry paper mounted onto board, produced for *You Cannot Kill What is Already Dead*, a group exhibit at the Doris McCarthy Gallery (curated by Suzanne Carte) exploring political compliance, de-individualization, and conformity through zombie culture.

***The Unfortunates*** furthers my previous explorations/disruptions within the forms of Asian scroll painting. The genre’s customary portrayals of figures of stature and privilege (such as imperial court subjects, literati, deities, etc.) within meditative landscapes has been replaced, in this case, by depictions of a 19<sup>th</sup> C. Chinese-Canadian leper colony on D’Arcy Island, off the coast of Vancouver Island.

Beyond drawing obvious parallels between zombies and lepers (living dead, numbness, etc) and their shared grotesqueries of disfiguration and rotting flesh; the work is more concerned with the collective paranoia towards the infected ‘*other*’, particularly in relation to British Columbia’s legacy of socio-spatial segregation. As a recent Vancouver transplant, I have been acclimatizing to the city’s tribal culture, geographic divisions, and a heightened sense of impermanence caused by high-stakes realty’s expedient displacement of vulnerable communities. By re-animating a dark history of exile, isolation and de-humanization, ***The Unfortunates*** conflates the marooned lepers with those currently susceptible to socio-economic extradition and class warfare.

Aside from the conceptual aspect, the work employs the scheme of contrasting technical refinement and formal beauty with abject subject matter. The picture, constructed almost entirely of lines and brushstrokes, seeks to echo the tenants of pre-Han era pictorial art. Particularly, the notion of “*empathic kinesthesia*” defined by Asian Art Historian James Cahill as follows:

*Reading these brushstrokes, we’re conscious of movements of the hand holding the brush that made them and varying pressure on the brush. This gives a certain energy to lines and strokes that make up the form. I used the term “empathic kinesthesia” for this quality—that is, feeling empathically a movement someone else made. And a sensitive, controlled movement... what was sought in Chinese painting, from the beginning, was not some accuracy of representation, but a certain “aliveness”—centuries later, a Chinese theorist would use the term qiyun shengdong (氣韻生動) or “engender movement through spirit-resonance” as the supreme quality to strive for in painting. (A Pure and Remote View: Visualizing Early Chinese Landscape Painting, Lecture 1, 2011)*

***The Unfortunates*** fuses Tsui’s recent explorations in scroll painting (*Horror Fables @ CUAG*, 2008-2010), with his interest in documenting early Chinese-Canadian experience through localized research (*Celestials of Saltwater City @ Centre A*, 2011), and re-contextualizations of historical narratives through engagement with museum artifacts (*Friendly Fire @ Agnes Etherington Art Centre*, 2012).