

Amy Yao

AZN Clam

April 4–May 3, 2025

“AZN Clam” is Amy Yao’s third solo exhibition at 47 Canal. In her recent wall-based sculptures and a new site specific installation, Yao deconstructs the reproduction of language attached to notions of invasiveness. The vernacular names given to certain animal and plant species point to definitive geographic origins, doubly conveying foreign-ness and xenophobic anxieties.

In her practice, Yao has long held an interest in disrupting and complicating the performance of identity and authenticity most notably through her irreverent use of coded consumer objects. In this present body of work, the concept of belonging is also brought into the fold in her turn towards human relationships with both natural and built environments. Using collected specimens of *Corbicula Fluminea*, a freshwater clam also known in America as the “Asian Clam,” she has made sculptures in flux, replicating stories of a species on the move.

There is a common perception of migrating species as being invasive and detrimental or “bad” for the existing ecosystems that hosts them. This simplistic viewpoint can be attributed to the Swedish eugenicist, Carl Linnaeus, who upheld the belief that species “belonged where they were found,” while in fact the origin of a species’ habitat cannot always be explained by finding the species in a certain place and time. The perception that things belong to where they are “found” is an anthropocentric concept. An example that refutes this idea is the Galapagos Islands, where it remains unknown how certain species arrived there. Meanwhile, the human species’ impact on interspecies migration is immensely consequential—globalization and climate change have direct bearing on animal and plant migration. Coral around the islands of Japan have been traveling northward. More commonly known, species such as birds, vermin, and jellyfish have hitchhiked on boats and container ships to new habitats. In the Northeast, we are familiar with the “war on lantern flies,” a result of imported crops and lumber, which has reached a fever pitch with calls for eradication of the invading species.

The Asian Clam was first noted to have migrated to the Americas in the late 19th century. Otherwise known as the Golden Clam and Good Luck Clam, it’s prized and consumed throughout various regions around Asia. While there is the possibility of outcompeting native species for food and space, one of the Clam’s most impactful attributes is its prolific ability to biofoul or clog plumbing and intake valves of electrical and nuclear power stations, and other human-created infrastructure.¹

¹ “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>

In her series of wall-based sculptures also titled *AZN Clam* (2023–ongoing), sections of PVC pipes are bisected to reveal symbols—a heart, a star, a spiral—as if they’re the source of clogging. Clinging to the swirling concrete-like symbols are numerous clam shells (specimens the artist collected with the help of Dr. Wendell Haag of the USDA, Dr. Robert F. McMahon and Dr. Astrid Schwalb of University of Texas). Grains of sand, as well as plastic pearls and glitter proliferate, as if multiplying, her playful nod to feminine camp.

In the office adjoining the gallery space, plastic pearl balls invade the room, turning it into a ball pit. The installation, *Untitled (Pearl Office)* (2025), like her previous works, pokes at the austerity and romanticism of certain art historical works in the land art canon (such as Walter de Maria’s *New York Earth Room* located just up the street, or Robert Smithson’s earthworks).

“AZN Clam” was originally conceived and staged at The Power Station, a contemporary art space in Dallas, which had housed an electrical sub-station. Ignorant to all the controversy, the hidden genius of the small but mighty *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?

Accompanying this exhibition is a takeaway zine made by the artist, which is available for free in the gallery.

Amy Yao lives and works in New York City and Los Angeles. She received a BFA with Honors from the Art Center College of Design, Pasadena, in 1999 and a MFA from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, in 2007. She has had solo exhibitions at The Power Station, Dallas, Texas (2023); NYU Institute of Fine Arts, New York (2019); 47 Canal, New York (2017); Various Small Fires, Los Angeles (2016); and Green Gallery, Milwaukee, WI (2011). Her work has been exhibited at ICA LA (2024); Slought Gallery, Philadelphia (2022); the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York (2018); Musée d’Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (2017); Museum of Contemporary Art, Tucson (2014); MoMA PS1, New York (2014); White Columns, New York (2014); the Museum of Modern Art, New York (2013); He Xiang Art Museum, Shenzhen (2013); and the Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia (2013). In 2012, she received the Creative Capital Grant, and in 2011 the Printed Matter Artists Award. She has also been the recipient of the CUNY-PSC Professional Development Grant in 2009, and the Susan H. Whedon Award from Yale University School of Art, New Haven, in 2007. She was a member of Emily’s Sassy Lime, a punk rock group from Southern California.