



microscope gallery

525 West 29th Street, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10001
Hours: Tues-Sat, 12-6pm
T: 347.925.1433
www.microscopegallery.com

Tenzin Phuntsog “Pure Land”

March 3 - April 9, 2022

Opening Thursday March 3, 6-8pm



Still from “Dreams” by Tenzin Phuntsog (2022), 35mm film to 4k video, 2 minutes
Courtesy of the artist and Microscope Gallery, New York

Microscope is very pleased to present *Pure Land*, the first solo exhibition by artist and filmmaker Tenzin Phuntsog in New York. Phuntsog’s works in moving image, installation, photography and performance have previously appeared at the gallery in screenings and exhibitions including in the 2019 exhibit “Scrapbook, (or Why Can’t We Live Together).”

In his work, Phuntsog, who has had his repeated attempts to enter his ancestral home denied, confronts his existence in a state of exile. For *Pure Land* the artist more specifically turns towards notions of home and displacement from the perspective of the Tibetan diaspora including, in addition to himself, family and friends, with an emphasis on the personal, cultural and existential significance of landscapes.

“Pure land,” for Phuntsog, is a land accessible solely through the realm of the imagination or art making, one that transcends the physical limitations and arises from “a cultivation of an inner landscape.” The artist also considers it as a longing for or a forced idealization of one’s homeland by a person who is refused entry into that land because of political boundaries and other restrictions.

The concept is most directly expressed in the title piece, a 15-minute single-channel video work shot on 35mm film that builds a loose narrative around a long distance conversation between a young Tibetan-American man and his Tibetan-born mother. The character, played by a friend of the artist, wanders through a natural landscape resembling the exiled homeland of his mother, taking photographs in an attempt to “find a frame that evokes a sense of belonging.” The camera in these works is used as an instrument to reveal the impossibility for displaced Tibetan individuals to be seen in actual Tibetan landscapes. The sparse terrains in “Pure Land” were shot by the artist in Montana.

In several sculptural works, videos contained within small, brass and jade containers — inspired by Tibetan *Gau* prayer boxes — play scenes from everyday life as shared on the social media app WeChat among the artist’s relatives in Tibet and those in the US, allowing a mediated access to the autonomous region. Footage of grazing yaks, a lively

indoor family celebration, and a heartfelt message sent to his mother by her sister play on loop within these “portable memory boxes.” The series was prompted by the 2020 US ban of WeChat, which effectively prevented the artist and his family from communicating with their relatives during that time and until the app’s reinstatement in August of last year.

Among other works on view, are two video works in which the artist’s parents perform roles, representing themselves as well as serving as vessels of a diaspora family. For the two-channel video “Pala Amala,” which translates as “Father Mother,” Phuntsog asked his parents to express “love” in the ways in which it is conveyed daily in their household. The work portrays Phuntsog’s parents engaged in acts of care, walks on the beach reminiscent of their strolls in the sparse landscape of their youths, and other tender moments.

In the single-channel video “Dreams,” we see the pair go to sleep on a single mattress on the floor — akin to the one the artist’s family used when they first arrived in the US — within an empty photo studio. The bed seems to be floating mid-air within an erased environment as if any place could be photoshopped around them, heightening the sense of uprooting.

Pure Land runs from March 6 through April 9, 2022. Opening Reception: March 6, 6-8pm. Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 12-6pm. Currently, proof of Covid-19 vaccination and masks are required for entry. Please check our website for updates.

Tenzin Phuntsog is a Tibetan-American artist living and working between San Francisco and New York and working with the mediums of film, installation, multi-media, and performance. His works have previously exhibited and screened at The Rubin Museum, New York; Anthology Film Archives, New York; The Eye Filmmuseum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands; Galerie Vermelho, São Paulo, Brazil; Video Brasil, São Paulo, Brazil; among others. Recent Fellowships and residencies include a Marble House residency (2022), NARS Residency (2021), and a Flaherty Fellowship (2019). Tenzin Phuntsog received a BA in Media Arts from the University of California, Los Angeles and an MFA in Visual Arts from Columbia University in New York.



Tenzin Phuntsog, *Summer Grass*, 2022, video and custom electronics in antique jade box, 3 x 1 1/2 x 4 1/2 inches
Courtesy of the artist and Microscope Gallery