

HERSTORICAL VIBES

Rewriting History through Space, Material and Feminist Memory

Dagmar Rauwald 2026

Herstorical Vibes emerges from an international artistic exchange between women artists from Hamburg and Xiamen. Rather than understanding this encounter as a dialogue between two geographically distinct cultural positions, the exhibition approaches it as a space of entanglement in which histories, materials, images, economic structures, family memories and forms of knowledge intersect. The project continues the earlier collaboration *Transcend Biology?*, first realised at MOM Art Space in Hamburg following an encounter at Koganecho Art Community in Japan. With *Herstorical Vibes*, the dialogue enters a different historical and spatial context, shaped by migration, transnational capital and familial structures.

The exhibition takes place at No. 97 West District International Art Community in Fulin Village, Longhu Town, a site marked by the so-called Overseas Houses. Built in the early twentieth century by Chinese families whose wealth was generated through migration and economic networks across Southeast Asia, these houses are architectural manifestations of transnational mobility. Their facades incorporate elements associated with Neoclassicism, Art Nouveau and early Art Deco, revealing complex processes of cultural translation and circulation.

Yet to read these buildings simply as examples of Western influence would reproduce an asymmetrical understanding of cultural exchange. The Overseas Houses are not copies of Europe. They are hybrid formations produced through migration, appropriation and translation. Their architecture materialises a history in which global economic systems, colonial modernity and Chinese agency are deeply intertwined. The houses embody movement across borders, but also the return of accumulated capital into family, community and place.

Architecture consequently becomes a form of historical evidence. It records not only economic mobility and social aspiration, but also the transformation of capital into space. At the same time, the visible architecture risks concealing the social and reproductive labour that sustained it. The monumental facade belongs to the public history of the house; the everyday practices that made family life possible largely remain inside.

It is precisely this relationship between visibility and invisibility that provides one of the conceptual starting points of *Herstorical Vibes*. Feminist historiography has long questioned the separation between public history and private life. As Griselda Pollock argues, the history of art is never simply a neutral record of artistic production but is structured by systems of selection, exclusion and representation. The question is therefore not only which women are missing from history, but which forms of experience have historically been defined as worthy of historical representation.

The term *Herstory* functions here as more than a linguistic reversal of *History*. It becomes a critical method of rereading. It shifts attention from supposedly universal historical subjects towards plural, situated and embodied experiences. In this sense, it resonates with Donna Haraway's insistence that knowledge is always situated: "there is no view from nowhere." The production of knowledge is inseparable from the position of the observer, from embodied experience and from the relations within which knowledge is produced (Haraway 1988).

Herstory therefore does not simply add women to an existing historical narrative. It questions the structures through which historical relevance has been assigned in the first place. This also means questioning the distinction between centre and periphery. Chandra Talpade Mohanty has warned against constructing a universal category of "woman" that erases differences of history, geography, class and cultural experience (Mohanty 2003). *Herstorical Vibes* responds to this problem by bringing different female artistic positions into relation without reducing them to a common identity.

This approach is particularly significant in the context of South China. Transformations in women's social roles cannot simply be measured against a European model of emancipation. Social change may take place through less visible transformations within family structures, domestic practices, forms of care, education, economic participation and intergenerational relationships. The absence of these experiences from conventional historical narratives does not mean that they were historically insignificant. Rather, their invisibility reveals the politics of the archive.

The home, in this context, cannot be regarded merely as the private opposite of the public sphere. It is a political and cultural space in which identities are produced, relations negotiated and social continuity maintained. Feminist theory has repeatedly demonstrated that the supposedly private sphere is deeply implicated in structures of power. bell hooks describes the home, under conditions of domination, as a site that can simultaneously reproduce oppression and provide a space of resistance, belonging and transformation (hooks 1990).

Herstorical Vibes consequently operates between the architectural and the intimate, between monument and fragment, between public visibility and forms of labour historically rendered invisible. The artists do not reconstruct a singular women's history. Instead, they produce a constellation of perspectives in which different temporalities and experiences become perceptible.

Memory is central to this process. Aleida Assmann distinguishes between the canon and the archive: while the canon contains what a culture actively preserves and repeatedly presents, the archive also holds what has not yet entered collective attention (Assmann 2008). Artistic practice can activate this archival potential. It does not necessarily recover an intact past; rather, it brings traces, fragments and absences into new relations.

Walter Benjamin's concept of history is useful here. Against the idea of history as continuous progress, Benjamin describes historical knowledge as a moment in which the past suddenly becomes legible in the present (Benjamin 2003). The past is therefore not simply behind us. It can become activated through an encounter with an object, an image, a place or a material.

The artworks in *Herstorical Vibes* can be understood in precisely this sense: as forms of counter-archiving. They do not claim to provide an authoritative historical account. Instead, they create situations in which forgotten or marginalised experiences can become visible and available for reinterpretation.

Dagmar Rauwald's contribution, *Famille Rouge*, approaches these questions through painting, transparency and colour. Her paintings on transparent foil refuse the conventional autonomy of the painted surface. The transparency allows the surrounding space to remain visible through the image, transforming painting into a porous interface between artwork, architecture and environment. The work does not simply occupy space; it enters into an exchange with it.

This material strategy is particularly resonant within the context of the Overseas Houses. Their architecture can itself be understood as a layered surface through which different histories become visible: Chinese, European, colonial, economic and familial. Rauwald's transparent paintings similarly operate through layers rather than establishing a single visual plane. What is visible is accompanied by what lies behind it.

For *Famille Rouge*, Rauwald developed a chromatic system in which intense red or turquoise blue encounters light violet and more restrained tones. Colour functions neither as illustration nor decoration. It becomes relational: generating proximity, tension, interruption and cohesion. The compositions emerge from an interaction between spontaneous painterly gesture and conceptual structure.

The title *Famille Rouge* invokes the art-historical terminology of Chinese porcelain, particularly *Famille rose* and *Famille verte*, categories associated with Chinese porcelain produced for European markets from the eighteenth century onwards. These terms already contain a history of cultural translation: objects produced within one cultural context were classified and interpreted through another.

Rauwald reappropriates this terminology by shifting its meaning from the classification of objects towards the notion of family itself. Beginning with the Chinese character for “family”, fragmentary family images enter the abstract compositions. Family, however, is not represented as a stable unit. It becomes a relational field between intimacy and structure, memory and identity, visibility and concealment.

The transparent foil intensifies this instability. Images appear, overlap, dissolve and become entangled with their surroundings. The family is therefore not presented as a fixed origin but as something continuously reconstructed. Like memory, it exists through fragments, repetitions and connections.

The work also reflects Michel Foucault's understanding of history as a field shaped by relations of power. What becomes visible as knowledge is never independent of the institutions, classifications and discourses through which it is produced (Foucault 1972). *Famille Rouge* responds to this condition not through a counter-history in the conventional sense, but through an alternative visual logic: layering instead of hierarchy, relation instead of classification, permeability instead of fixed boundaries.

Andreas Huyssen's concept of the “geographies of modernism” is equally relevant here. He argues that modernism must be understood through multiple cultural locations and transnational exchanges rather than through a purely Western genealogy (Huyssen 2007). The Overseas Houses offer precisely such a site of multiple modernities. They reveal that cultural modernity was not simply exported from Europe to Asia but was appropriated, transformed and reconfigured through migration and local agency.

Herstorical Vibes therefore does not seek to replace one dominant history with another. Its feminist gesture is instead one of multiplication. It asks what happens when the supposedly peripheral becomes central, when the domestic becomes political, when material traces become archives and when personal memory is recognised as a form of historical knowledge.

The exhibition ultimately understands history not as a completed narrative but as a contested and relational field. Its “herstorical” perspective is therefore not only about recovering women from the past. It is a practice of looking differently at the present. By bringing architecture, memory, family, migration and artistic practice into relation, *Herstorical Vibes* opens a space in which histories can be revisited, translated and transformed.

In this sense, the exhibition proposes art as a form of historical agency. It does not speak for those whose voices have been marginalised. Rather, it creates conditions in which other forms of knowledge can become perceptible. The past is not restored; it is reactivated. What has remained in the background can enter the field of vision, not as a fixed monument, but as a living and unfinished question.

Literature

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