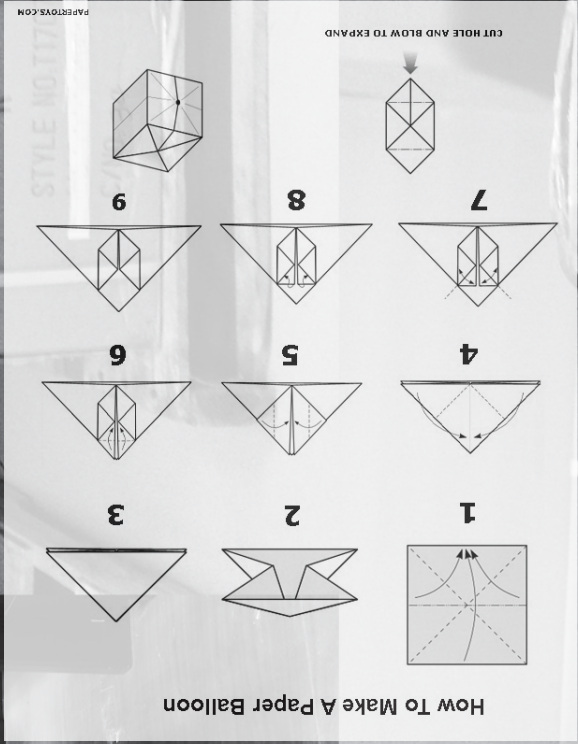




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How To Make A Paper Balloon



Flow was written and designed by Lois Klassen in consultation with Karen Ngan and Peggy Ngan. The Ngans provided the photograph.

Reading the Migration Library is a publication project by Vancouver-based artist, Lois Klassen. It encourages public circulation of migration stories.

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Flow You are looking at, and maybe blowing air into, a montage of cardboard boxes. Boxes that carry hand oils and fork lift scars from a long journey. Transported over the sea, Karen Ngan and Peggy Ngan wonder if the boxes are signifiers for the wave of immigrants that traveled from Hong Kong to the Vancouver region in the 1990s and, more generally, the flows of humans implied in the word “migration”.

Let’s say that this photo of cardboard boxes on pallets is a small view into the transition of Hong Kong Chinese families onto Canadian territory, by way of Lulu Island (the largest island making up the City of Richmond).

A “land of many people”¹ Richmond is, by its nature, a land of flow. Once an island of sea grass offering from its waterlogged land and ocean shores more sustenance than what Richmondites can imagine today, it has for thousands of years been the location of Coast Salish activities. Activities which supported *časnaʔəm*, a grand port and city before the city² located on the north shore of Fraser River’s North Arm, across from what is now Richmond’s Sea Island.

According to Musqueam councillor Morgan Guerin the word *Musqueam* (xʷməθkʷəy̓əm)³ can be translated as “people of the eel grass.” Guerin describes how the extinction of this flowery grass coincided eerily with genocidal assaults on the Musqueam people, such as the deliberate transmission of diseases and the forced removal of their children into residential schools by the colonial governments, businesses and settlers.⁴

There is no single *hən̓q̓əmin̓əm̓* word for the area now comprising the City of Richmond. Musqueam words for places around Richmond include, xʷəy̓qəθən - Sea Island | ɕʷəyaʔxʷ - Steveston | spələkʷəqs - Terra Nova | xʷiɕəm - Canoe Pass | ʔəqtinəs - Woodward’s Landing | ɕəw̓xələmət - Mitchell Island⁵

Harriet King, writing for The New York Times in 1996, describes how Chinese realtors have developed another Richmond origin story: that the island is a pearl in the mouth of a Chinese dragon –a pearl that is certain to bring good luck to its incoming residents.⁶

At the Aberdeen Centre mall in Richmond this summer, visitors at the main entrance are invited to interact with a temporary display called *Visual Impossible* 你做錯視3D美術館. If they upload a photo of themselves on one of the photo stages, participants might win a prize. One of the scenes pictures the Aberdeen visitors paddling an open-mouthed dragon boat in the waters of nearby False Creek.

At first, Peggy and Karen did not know what to tell me about their family’s migration to Canada. “Devil-may-care” might be the best way to describe their

attitude when, as children, they faced an uncle’s and their father’s aspirations to make new lives in Canada. But here now, with the ambitious men no longer in this country, these once-reluctant immigrant women are settled in Richmond. Between then and now, there is a bundle of tangled and water-logged story lines involving struggles to use English, international business interactions, illness and death, art studies, more immigrations and emigrations –involving siblings, cousins, aunts, uncles, parents brought together and then apart. Some washed ashore, and some sent back to sea.

The twins tell of many visitors and some settlers –their story seems itself to be a pearl bundled in a mess of sea grass before being swallowed by the lower mainland herself.

An attendant at the entrance to the Musqueam Cultural Centre exhibit *Časnaʔəm: The City Before the City*, tells me a little about the sacred stone, *qeyasca:m*, which in a ceremonial “game” held on its top a bundle of poisons. He suggests that I read about it in Susan Roy’s *These Mysterious People*. The author, an anthropologist and research consultant for Indigenous communities, describes how hearing the Musqueam talk about *qeyasca:m* taught her about the significance of mobility to this ancient and heavy stone’s meaning. She writes,

*Embedded in these histories about qeyasca:m are larger Coast Salish values about travel and mobility, intracommunity and kinship ties, the relationship to the environment, spiritual and ritual power, the links between the material and spiritual worlds, laws governing behavior and responsibility, gender expectations, and of central concern of These Mysterious People – differing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal understandings of material evidence about the past.*⁷

The cartons of goods shown in the photos bring back for the Ngans memories of incidents between their families before and after immigration. The cartons connect the highly materialized and commercial worlds, in which they live and work, with the art and cultural environment that they cherish and make happen through YACTAC.

The pictured boxes, and the tiny box that you have filled with air, float as bundles between their everyday lives and their art worlds.

*Yactac is a collective that is dedicated to the necessities of art flow. To promote, support, and encourage the creation of art daily; as we believe in the innate creative qualities of art-making within us all. In that, we practice art as a lifestyle where art and life become identical.*⁸

Lois Klassen, in conversation with Peggy Ngan and Karen Ngan

¹ “Our History,” *Richmond, City of Richmond, British Columbia, Canada*. Official website accessed Aug 26 2017. <https://www.richmond.ca/discover/about/history.htm>

² <http://www.thecitybeforethecity.com/> © *časnaʔəm, the city before the city 2014–2017* Museum of Vancouver, Musqueam Cultural Centre, and Museum of Anthropology

³ “Musqueam Indian Band,” *Wikipedia*, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Musqueam_Indian_Band

⁴ Graeme Wood, “The First People of ‘Richmond’” *Richmond News*, June 17, 2016 (updated, July 6, 2016), <http://www.richmond-news.com/news/weekly-feature/the-first-people-of-richmond-1.2281754>

⁵ Wood.

⁶ <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/09/08/realestate/near-vancouver-the-chinese-stake-is-growing.html>

⁷ Susan Roy, 2010. *These Mysterious People*, McGill-Queen’s University Press, page 7.

⁸ “Information,” YACTAC. Website. <http://www.yactac.com/information/>