TiGA MATA

Guest Editor: Caron Toshiko

Issue #4

Re(framing) Identity

Editor's Note

To read the photographs gathered under (Re)framing Identity is to enter into an intimate dialogue with distant companions, souls who, like us, are quietly revisiting the question of self. Identity here is not a fixed monument but a current of longing, endlessly negotiating between the whispers of our own desires and the echoes of what the world asks of us.

From the 23 selected photographers, the body repeatedly emerges as a site of memory and struggle. We encounter self-images rising through fragments and ruins, through the resilience of standing one's ground even when others have walked away, through reminders that we may spring from the same soil yet grow with different roots, through ears attuned to queer stories we have not yet heard from those we hold dear.

Gender also emerges as a vital thread. In places where same-sex marriage and LGBTQIA+ lives remain unrecognised. One chose to work with fragile teabags, often discarded objects, which transformed through cyanotype into something visible and tangible, asserting the presence of lives and loves that cannot simply be thrown away.

Themes of well-being surface with quiet insistence. Some photos speak of religious trauma, rituals that should bring peace instead reopen wounds. Ghosts of unspoken feelings hover in images, embodying Freud's words that emotions buried alive return in more haunting forms. Here, photography becomes a stage where these ghosts are finally allowed to speak.

Cultural negotiation also threads through these pages. The push and pull of multiple racial identities can both anchor and alienate, creating inner dichotomies. Symbols of daily life reassemble into maps of belonging. A meal served in another land becomes a quite homecoming.

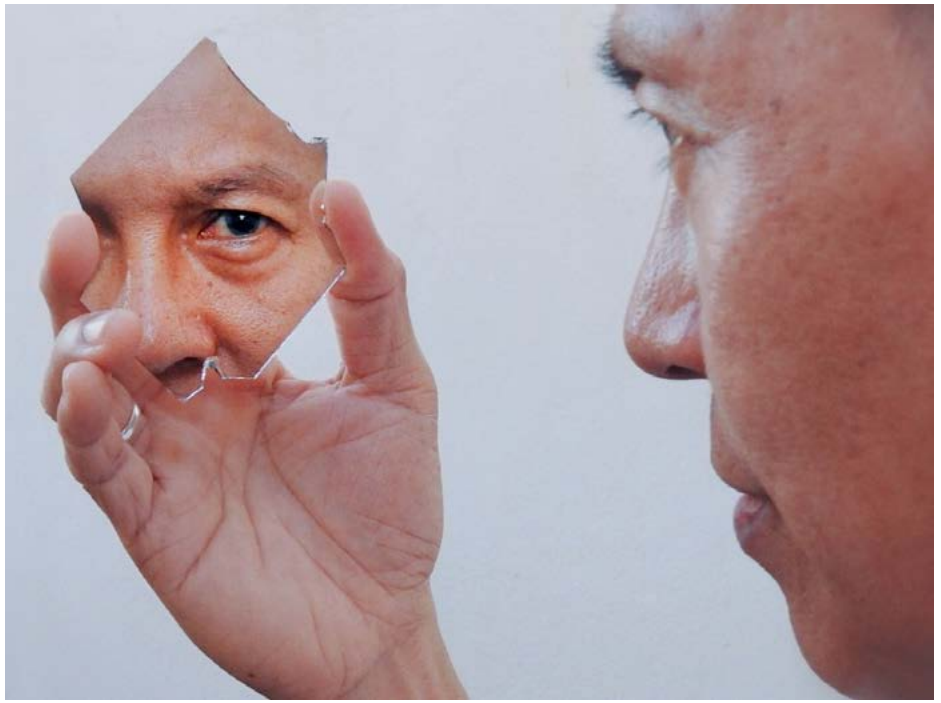
And always, the pulse of childhood and family. The weight of memories and resilience hidden in biscuit tins and cooking pots. The reimagining of oneself as a mother at 40. Learning to understand the language of love spoken by parents that we never quite grasped before. The silence of absent family members, the plantation paths walked with a father who led us back to our roots.

The photographs in this zine speak with voices that are fragile yet insistent, questioning identity again and again: Who am I? Voices searching for recognition, longing not only to be seen but also to be truly heard.

And to you, who now hold these pages. What part of you still longs to be heard, quietly shaping you all along, perhaps without you even realising it?

London, 16 September 2025
Caron Toshiko

To meet his eyes,



you have to look through everything that's broken.

01/08/2025

Dear Diary,

Moving back to Singapore from London has been harder than expected. The past week has just been a whirlwind of emotions and my mind has just been constantly in a daze. I constantly have the thought, "is this the right decision?"

And like magic, my TikTok fyp starts showing me motivational videos telling me how I should navigate & process my emotions. Either they have been spying on me, or its like my phone has picked up the anxiousness residing in my body.

I think one reason for this anxiety comes from the fear of being forced back into a previous version of myself, powerless and unable to be myself. Another worry is also how G & I will be. Will we be okay? I can only hope, as these motivational videos have told me: "you cannot control how others act, only how you react & act". I kind of wished my body didn't need to keep score & I could just be rid of these negative emotions.

But despite the anxiousness I feel, I am also excited to see where coming back takes me. I am excited to listen to the queer stories here that are waiting to be told. Not just the ones we see, but more so the ones that allude our sights.

Jay

I created cyanotype portraits of fellow trans women by printing digital negatives from film photographs onto used teabags as part of my series T(ea) is for Transgender. The choice of material carries layered meaning. Teabags are fragile and often discarded materials that reflect how trans lives are frequently treated: overlooked and cast aside. Yet through the cyanotype printing process, our presence becomes visible and tangible.

Furthermore, in LGBT culture, "tea" originally meant "truth," and that truth signifies someone's transgender identity. These portraits are our truth, our visibility, our resilience. Even in the most delicate forms, we persist. We endure.

Nagtagpo ang ating mga labi sa ilalim ng mga ilaw
Walang araw at tanghalan, kundi ang gabi lang
Sa lupang hindi pa rin tayo kayang pagmasdan
Maingay ang ating pagmamahalan, at hindi tayo lilisan

We kissed beneath the blinking lights,
No sun, no stage—just city nights.
In a land that still looks away,
We loved aloud, and chose to stay.

Hello. I hope you are well, and *sana masarap ang ulam mo.*


三段
二段


TOYOTA
Land Cruiser

Maythavee In-odd

Backstage at a Chinese opera, an actor transforms—with thick lines, crimson robes, and steady hands helping him into character. In this liminal space between person and performance, heritage and reinvention collide. The makeup is not just for the stage; it's a ritual, a negotiation. Who we are, who we're expected to be, and who we choose to become—they all meet in the mirror.

"I'm not actually from here." The lady with satay skewers had told me. I then proceeded to ask her why her recipe was so delicious.

With a gleam in her eye, she told me about her hometown in Padang, West Sumatra as well as the recipes passed onto her by her late grandmother. It turns out she just really wanted to share with others what the taste of home feels like to her.

Before I knew it, I had devoured 15 pieces of satay skewers whilst listening to her accompanied by the sound of the bustling night street of Yogyakarta.

Majoring in arts, my mother always integrated painting in her life. One of her university assignments was to paint a self-portrait of her then 21-year-old self. Looking back now, she says that she never expected life to fly past that quickly—she brings up all the interesting events that has happened throughout her life that greatly changed her as a person.

Regardless, she has her paintings stored safe, helping her remember capsules of the 90s, past versions of herself, memories in acrylic. I could never imagine the difference, the convoluted evolutions of her identity between that painted frame and her now 60-year-old self—all compressed in one photograph.

The gold earrings, the biscuit tin, the cooking pot ~ these are not just relics of my grandmother's life, they are fragments of a past that quietly shaped the foundation of who I am.

Her gold earrings, worn with quiet pride, reframed beauty for me ~ not as a luxury, but as a legacy. They were one of the few valuable things she owned, yet, she wore them like a crown. Today, they remind me to carry myself with silent strength, even in spaces that I never meant to enter.

The biscuit tin, once filled with sweets only on rare occassions, became a symbol of imagination and preservation. Long after the biscuits were gone, it held grandma's humble savings, sewing needles, buttons, and scraps of cloth. It taught me how something empty could still hold purpose. It helped me understand how I could build a life from what little was handed to me.

Her cooking pot, worn from years of use, had fed us in ways that went beyond food. It reminds me that love often looks like labor.

These objects reframed my identity by reminding me that I did not come from nothing. I come from a long line of resilience, creativity, and survival. One of scarcity, one of meaning ~ I, She left behind!

"I, She Left Behind!"

~Terri chong~

As an adult, I realized it wasn't a plantation, but a forest, where nutmeg and cloves grew on the forest slopes. It was also during that childhood that my father introduced me to Sasi.

Sasi is a temporary prohibition on taking or utilizing certain natural resources, in a specific area, for a specific period of time, so that nature canrecover and remain productive. Sasi isn't just a ritual—it's a system of customs or traditional rules used by communities in Maluku, Papua, and parts of Eastern Indonesia to protect and sustainably manage natural resources.

While finishing school in Maluku and pursuing college in Makassar, I was exposed to local knowledge and wisdom of the archipelago. My photography is deeply connected to ecological narratives, women, and local identity. The traditional character and knowledge of nature I was exposed to during my childhood connected me to local identity. Andingingi and Sasi are two examples of local wisdom from the archipelago which show that before there were formal regulations from the government or modern conservation science, indigenous communities already had their own very effective and spiritual nature protection systems.

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