London-based Taiwanese-British artist Yu-Chen Wang's work asks fundamental questions about human identity at a key point in history when ecosystems and technosystems have become inextricably intertwined. She has a long-standing interest in the entangled relationship between land, history and identity. Many of her projects have been developed through undertaking residencies, conducting field research, developing cross-cultural and disciplinary collaborations, creating site-responsive exhibitions, and engaging with the public. All of these are vital processes for developing her artistic practice: mapping, navigating and connecting. Her work is informed by the history of places, collective memories, individuals' stories and relationships established with different localities and communities: from Manchester's textile and railway industries, Birmingham's canal networks, Liverpool's observation and maritime navigation, CERN's particle physics research, South Yorkshire's peat extraction and coal mining, to East Anglia's agriculture and ongoing peatland conservation and, most recently, Taiwan's mangrove forests.

Wang has exhibited widely, including most recently at the Drawing Biennial (London, 2024), Le lieu unique (Nantes, 2022), MoCA Taipei (2020), Kumu Art Museum, (Tallinn, 2020) and Science Gallery Dublin (2020).

Expanding further upon my long-term interest in industrial history and its inextricable link with British identity, I am exploring collections from the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool, Manchester Art Gallery, Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery, and Tate Britain. As part of the Transforming Collections practice research residency, I began the project by tracing the histories of art museums in the most important industrial cities of nineteenth-century Britain: Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London. This period was marked by immense industrial development, economic progress and imperial expansion, which fundamentally transformed the nation and continues to have a lasting impact on contemporary life today.

I am interested in the social relations and power dynamics that shaped these museums – a mix of public and private, civic and individual – driven by Victorian ideas about the role of art in reforming society. These museums were created as models for improving industrial design and working-class behaviour, with the pursuit of beauty intended 'to rectify the moral and physical ugliness of industrial capitalism'.[3] I have been investigating the entangled relationship between art and industry, and their often-overlooked connection with empire. Specifically, I am focusing on how these entanglements manifest in museum spaces.

These spaces, encompassing both physical architecture and intangible systems of collecting and interpreting, have been carefully and deliberately constructed to tell stories and direct specific perspectives. My project aims to shed light not just on what we see, but also how we perceive museum collections and narratives. This new work asks how we navigate in and around these spaces as a way to begin addressing decolonial practices. It also examines how we recognise celebrations of white superiority and naturalising Western imperialism that are still deeply embedded in our museums today.

Working closely with the curators from these museums and Creative Computing Institute data scientists, I am creating a machine learning dataset using photographs of collections I have taken during the residency. Unlike typical images found in museum databases, these pictures capture collection items in context, in relation to other objects, the surrounding gallery settings and architectural space. The approach, coupled with textual analysis and data labelling based on my personal experience of seeing and navigating, aims to unravel layers of constructs shaping museum spaces and narratives. This image-focused dataset will offer a great opportunity to test the potential of training algorithms to identify language patterns and visual representations that have long privileged whiteness and that continue to perpetuate colonial perspectives and exclusionary practices.

I am creating an architectural and theatrical intervention within Tate Modern's South Tanks. Resembling theatre sets, the installation *How We Are Where We Are*, combines suspended wooden structures, painted fabric backdrops, floor drawings, sculptural props, lighting, sounds and multilayered projections to spatially evoke speculative museum environments. Audiences are encouraged to become more attuned to various embedded visual tropes, consider how they interact with the work and navigate spaces. The audiences' movements and experiences, both individually and collectively, will help to activate multiple perspectives and contribute to the completion of the installation. The work at Tate Modern will serve as a blueprint for a series of evolving exhibitions at the Walker Art Gallery, Manchester Art Gallery and Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery in 2025 and beyond.

It's not just about what you see, but how you see it.

The shadow of the empire baked into the fabric of the building.

3——— Amy Woodson-Boulton,
*Transformative Beauty: Art Museums in Industrial Britain*,
Redwood City 2012.

Yu-Chen Wang
*How We Are Where We Are*
2024