

A Response to *Too (un)Familiar?*

Review by Marie Anthony

Humans can do hard things.

We carry what is heavy.

We adapt.

We survive.

We even laugh, celebrate, and thrive through it all - especially with the support of an interdependent immigrant family.

Kledia Spiro explores these truths through her lens with her current solo exhibition at Kingston Gallery - *Too (un)Familiar?* Through the examination of the artist's family dynamics, she reminds us that the bonds of family can make hard things doable, and even beautiful, within this surreal pandemic experience.

A retreat to nature: The Wachusett Reservoir and the home are interchangeable where four gallery walls envelop the viewer. Ceiling-high grids of Spiro's photos of stunning, smokey electric sunsets on the east and west walls remind us of both the constancy and the ever-changing nature of the sky....the familiar made brand new again and again. Here nature is friendly though imbued with mystery.

Two eight foot projections reveal footage of the artist's family, her parents and a sister, on a seemingly joyous outing at the Wachusett Reservoir- a micro migration. Yet this safe haven of clean air and freedom is found amidst a hard crust of snow and a bitter winterscape....they persevere where nature works to hinder rather than delight.

This public space is made to be their private den: again we see a palpable struggle to enjoy thick Turkish coffee replete with heirloom old world doilies and weighty iron slabs burdening each lap in lieu of plates. With the subtlety of a brick, Spiro communicates the mandatory resilience of the immigrant family unit as two daughters serve their parents - a traditional act of respect in an untraditional setting.

Throughout the footage we see flashes of Spiro's weight lifting ritual set in an urban landscape: These glimpses invoke words like empowerment, strength, and ambition. The lifting practice tells the mission of this first generation American woman - to create her own legacy of strength and achievement, and also to lift up her parents metaphorically and literally as an act of gratitude. There again is the theme of perseverance as it's a physically impossible task for Spiro and her sister. We see this attempt play out as the parents are perched ceremoniously on winged, welded metal chairs connected by a metal bar. They are the weights. Ultimately the successful lift is the one executed as a family unit.

The final element, a comparatively diminutive iPad, presents us with a morphed reality of the Spiro home. The artist shares video of aerial visions of shifting and tilting rooms, and their floor plans. We see masked inhabitants as we peek at domestic nakedness where the private and the public intertwine. Yet this address is no more or less a home than the reservoir. Home is where family gathers: a lesson learned through immigration and displacement.

A poignant message is embedded in *Too (un)Familiar?*: Humans can do hard things - anyplace and under any circumstances...when nature is kind or cruel, even in this unfamiliar pandemic reality, when we meet tough challenges together.