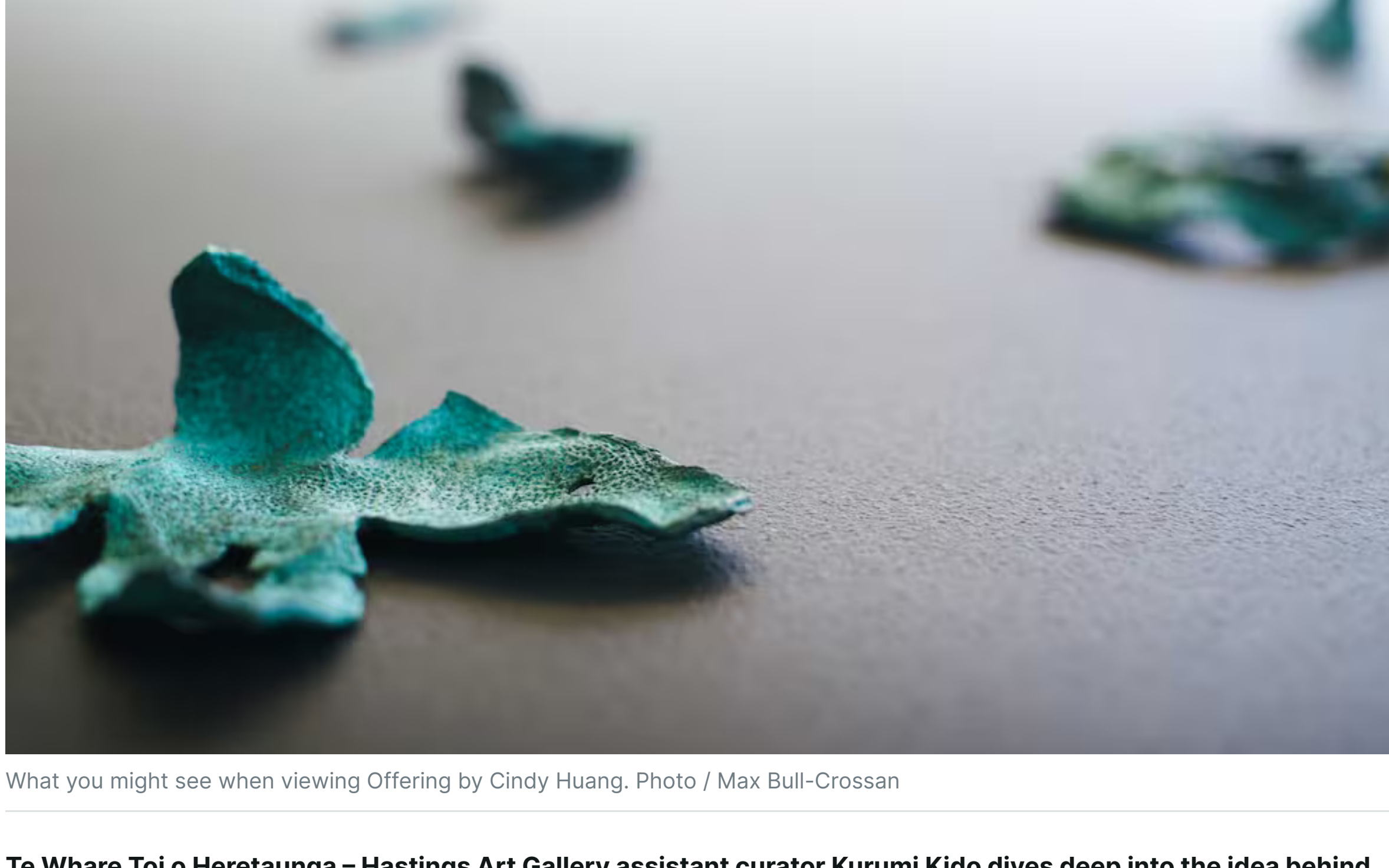


Hastings Art Gallery column: Cindy Huang's Offering - a reflection on the Tauwi Chinese NZ community in Hawke's Bay

Hastings Leader

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What you might see when viewing Offering by Cindy Huang. Photo / Max Bull-Crossan

Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga – Hastings Art Gallery assistant curator Kurumi Kido dives deep into the idea behind artist Cindy Huang's latest installation, titled *Offering*.

Cindy Huang, a rising star in the Aotearoa art world, has just had her latest installation, *Offering*, open at Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga – Hastings Art Gallery.

Currently based in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland and having lived in Hawke's Bay from 2023-24, in her work Huang reflects her journey into the oral histories of in-depth research into the Tauwi Chinese New Zealand community in Te Matau-a-Māui. It showcases her exquisite craftsmanship in creations made from local fruit.

She focuses on both its past and present narratives, particularly highlighting the region's market gardens, gardeners, and grocers — the lines of work of some of her ancestors who came to Aotearoa.

In her exploration of their stories, Huang encountered a notable absence of recorded accounts in local and national museums and repositories.

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Cindy Huang installing Offering in Te Whare Toi o Heretaunga's foyer gallery. Photo / Max Bull-Crossan

Many of the local people she spoke with had limited direct interactions with the community, and their memories often extended only to shopping at the grocery store.

As a result, she pieced together a picture of their lives, contributions, and labour, primarily by drawing bits of information from oral histories shared by community members through person-to-person accounts.

Her approach highlights the importance of storytelling in preserving cultural identity and history, especially in communities that have often been overlooked.

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Offering features handcrafted sandalwood incense blended with dried fruit powder. Bronze casts of citrus peels and apple cores serve as unique incense holders, filling the space with the aroma of the burning incense.

All of these elements are produced from fruit sourced from Onekawa Fruit Shop, a local Chinese New Zealand family business she became acquainted with through her research.

The choice of bronze, a material typically used for statues commemorating colonial figures, serves as a poignant reminder of the contributions of market gardeners and grocers, who have often gone unrecognised in the broader societal narrative.

The arrangement of these elements evokes forms associated with ancestral shrines, reflecting the traditional Chinese custom of filial piety — acts of remembrance and respect for both the living and deceased.

The ritual of burning incense, typically accompanied by fresh fruit offerings, creates a sanctified space that bridges past and present, allowing for a deep connection with ancestors and cherished memories.

Through the vanishing smoke, Huang's installation explores the ephemeral nature of the stories held by the community, highlighting themes of both presence and absence.

While Huang does not classify her work as a shrine, she views it as both an act of tribute and a tableau vivant—a living still life that gestures towards specific stories of hardship and resilience that are often held close within communities.

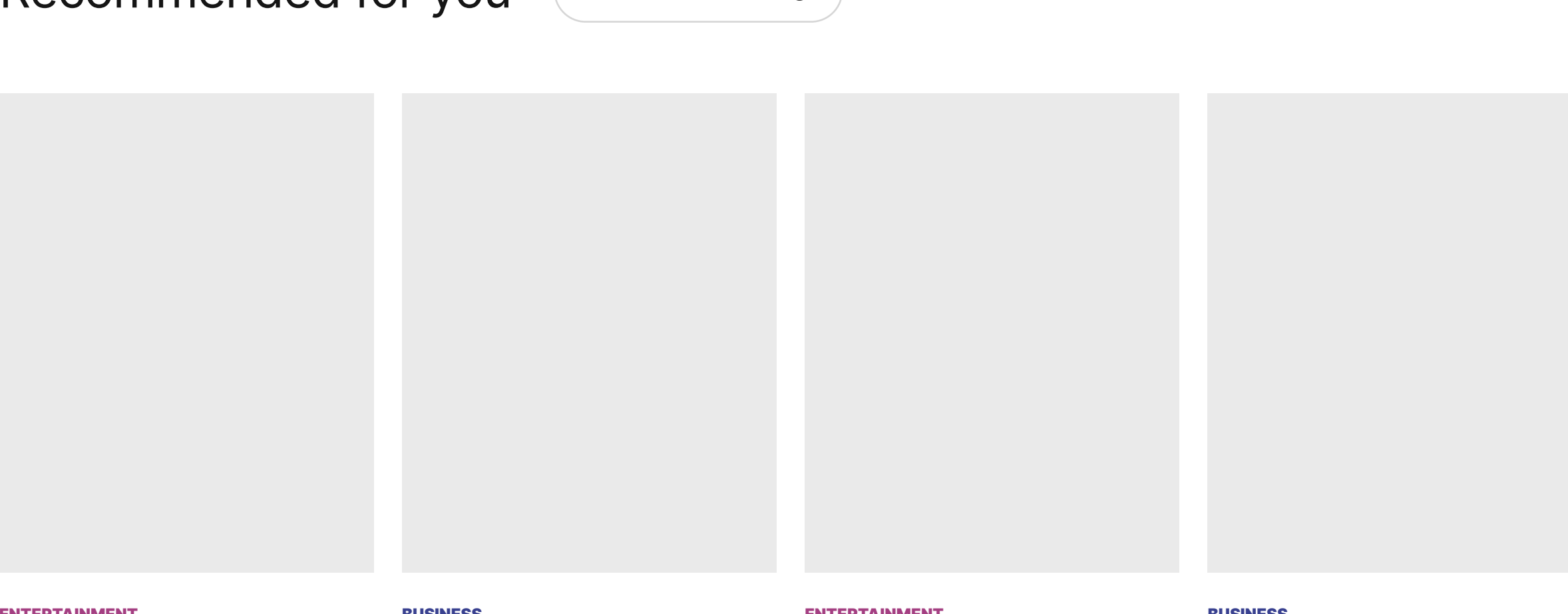
Through *Offering*, she aims to create an elegy for those who are remembered and for those who have been forgotten over time. Her journey of collecting and honouring these narratives will continue, inviting the audience to reflect on their own connections to the past and consider the ongoing narratives that shape their lives, foundations and communities.

The installation will be on view until February 1. We invite you to visit the gallery and immerse yourself in Huang's sensory journey for the community, where the aromas of handcrafted incense blend with shared narratives.



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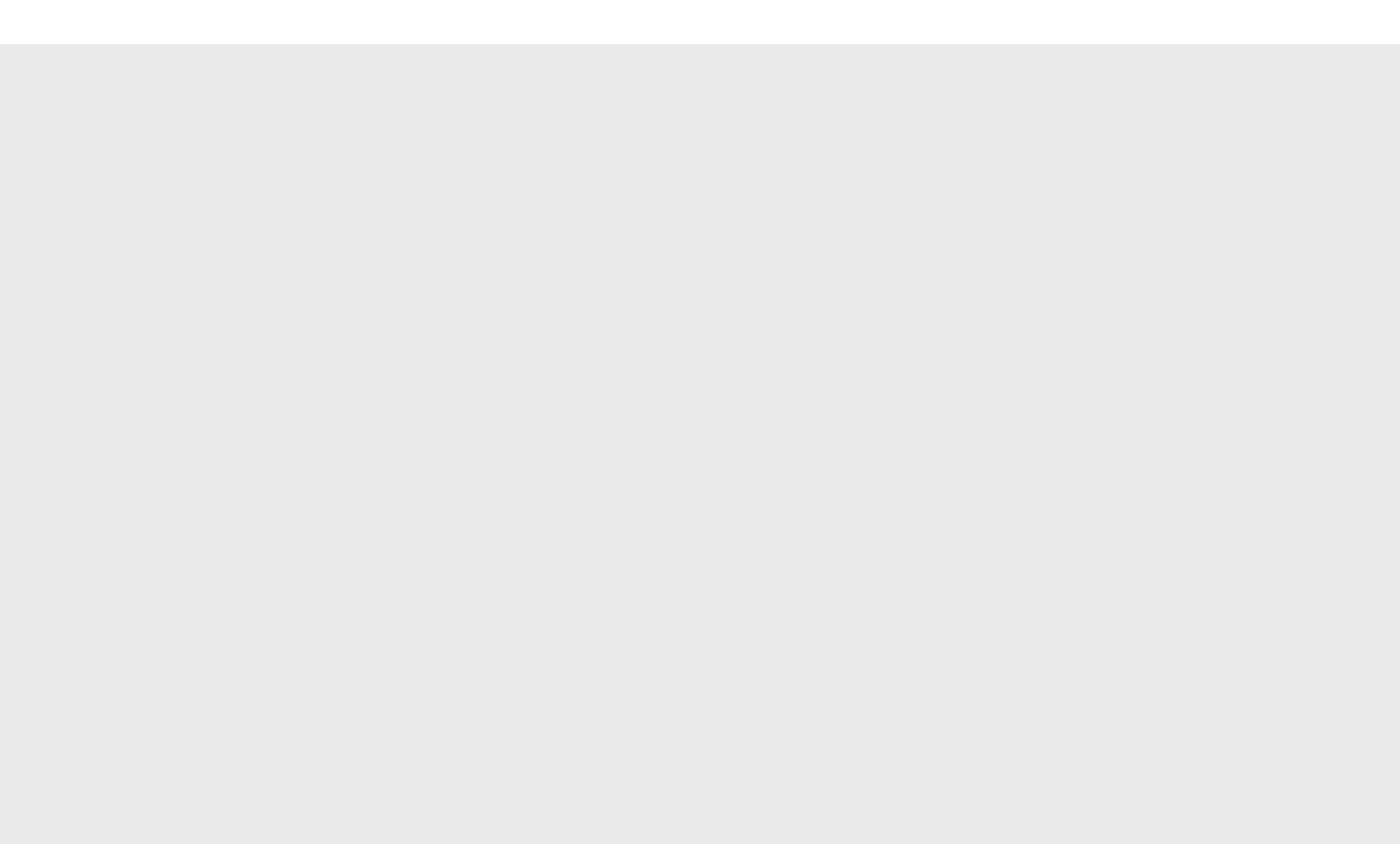
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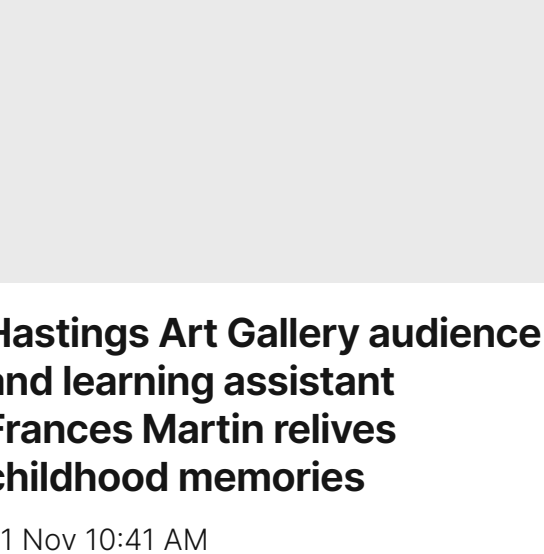
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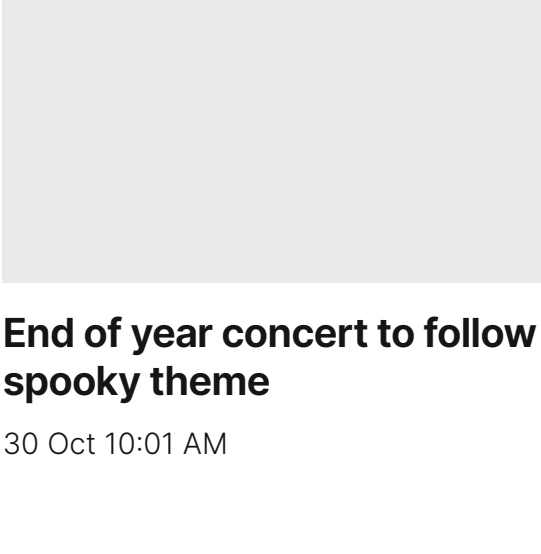
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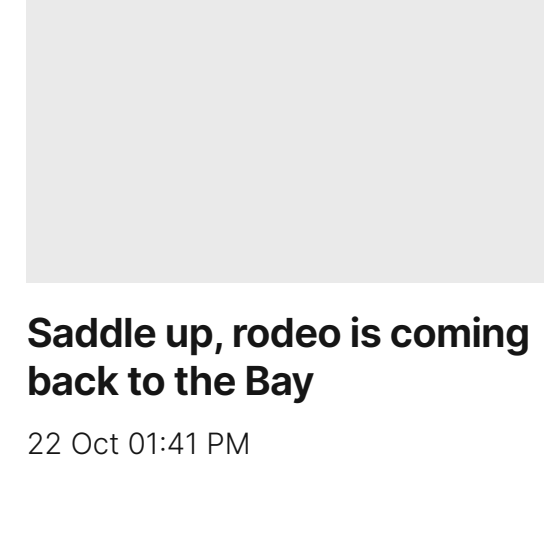
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