

Interview by
CHLOE SPIBY LOH

Ran Hwang's installation art is a product of the people she has met and the places in which she has lived and travelled. Born and raised as a Buddhist in South Korea, she did not come to fully believe in the Buddhist teachings until witnessing the effect of the aftermath of 9/11 on the people of New York. With the opening of her new show approaching, we decided it was time to find out a bit more about the inspirations behind her evocative artwork.

Taking Flight with

RAN HWANG

How did you come to make such a specific choice to reference the fashion industry in the selection of materials for your installations?

When I was young I loved to play with paper dolls and draw clothes for them. After graduating from art school in New York, I worked as a part-time designer at an embroidery company; there were buttons, threads and pins everywhere. Eventually the memories of my childhood projects transformed into my professional art practice.

I love the fact that your work can be appreciated in a range of different ways and scales. Is this part of how you want the viewers to experience the work or is it purely as a result of the process of making?

At first, instead of using canvas, my works were directly produced on the wall, so they emerged on a larger scale. Looking from a distance allows the viewers to comprehend the image as a whole, whereas on closer inspection you can comprehend the importance of the detailing.

Often in your work there will be a pile of buttons or a ball of yarn that has been left at the foot of the finished piece, can you explain the reason behind this?

After witnessing the effects of 9/11, I began to think deeply about what human mortality really meant. Piled buttons or scattered things on the floor embody the ashes that remain after death.

Your work is heavily influenced by the Buddhist practice of meditation, was Buddhism something you discovered later in life or was it part of your childhood in South Korea?

I was born and raised in a Buddhist family, but not a faithful believer myself for years. When 9/11 occurred, I was living in downtown New York and it made me recall the Buddhist belief of Samsara, the eternal cycle of birth, death and rebirth. I started to develop meditation in my practice and therefore my work became the outcome of this process of contemplation.

Your work explores notions of the 'mass society' that we see in almost every culture around the world today, is there a religious, social or political motivation to your art?

Although I visualise Buddha sometimes, my motivations are mostly derived from my childhood or personal philosophy, not particularly from my faith. My major concern is to represent the eternal cycle of life and death through deep contemplation, though I would not deny that my work can be viewed from a socio-political perspective.

You have exhibited all over the world in all the major art cities (Paris, New York and London), does travelling for one show inspire the work for another?

Whenever I travel, I can feel my own existence amongst the crowd, which inspires me to create the artwork.

If you could hold an exhibition anywhere in the world where would that be and why?

It would be good to show in places where I have never exhibited before, such as Venice, Africa or the North Pole. I think everyone should be curious about things that they have never experienced.

We've spoken about the places that you have travelled to with your work but we want to know where do you go when you need a break from your life as an international artist?

Travelling is like emptying myself... like being a bird in flight. Last month, I stayed in a small temple in Korea for a few days to empty my mind after my solo exhibition in New York. Next month, I would love to visit a warm country in order to empty myself again and become a bird once more.

Ran Hwang's forthcoming exhibition, Snowfall of Spiders, will be exhibiting from 20th February through to March 21st at the Leila Heller gallery in New York.



RAN HWANG
BUDDHA FALLING IN LOVE, 2013
PAPER BUTTONS AND PINS ON PLEXIGLAS
150 X 120 CM