

Hsu Wei-Hui's Conflict Aesthetics

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Hsu Wei-Hui is a young female artist who is tireless in her pursuit of new knowledge. She has an impressive academic background in art, studying in Fine Art Department of National Hsinchu University of Education, followed by the graduate school of painting at Savannah College of Art and Design and the graduate school of fiber art at Cranbrook Academy of Art, both in the United States. This rich and diverse education has given Hsu an excellent background in the application of materials, development of forms and conceptual development, allowing her to really make the most of the materials she uses.

As a new-era female artist, Hsu Wei-Hui is very interested in experimental expressionism and dares to reveal the conflict and struggle in her own heart. As she creates, Hsu also likes to share with her audience private things about her life and it has been suggested that it is this degree of openness that infuses her art with its great appeal. Hsu Wei-Hui has been invited to show her work at exhibitions in Taiwan and overseas and these events have both showcased the light, ethereal quality of her work, spatial environment and viewers. Her displays are very much lively events infused with energy.

Hsu Wei-Hui has divided her work over the last few years into three main series. One of these, the "Potential Cell Series" takes cell structure as an organizational concept, utilizing different media and installation methods to express internal personal contradictions and anxieties. This Series, which was started in 2004, is free and diverse in form, and includes floors, walls and suspended spatial installation. It also makes use of display areas ranging from outdoor beaches and coastal areas to doors, windows, hallways and even official display spaces.

Hsu also uses a wide variety of materials, including cables, foam cups, facial mask and stretchable cloth, which is indicative of a rich experimental streak. Ultimately she always takes such external performances and connects them to her own inner world. Hsu herself had said, "This is series of works is mainly based on the structure of cells. By using different materials and installation types I can better express hidden contradictions and anxieties. These pieces started from the line paintings of two-dimensional space, which I extend into the three- dimensional space of our lives where it combines with building space."

The second series, "Feminine Writing", was developed at around the same time as the "Potential Cell Series." In terms of creative conceptualization, it also focuses

on personal faith and social context. However, whereas the former presents us with such representative work as “Desire”, the latter is best understood through installation pieces like “Guerilla Girls” which are made from restructured toy soldiers. Although both also use facial masks, “Dress Up, Cover Up, Protection” is more representational, as they are tuned into women’s clothes.

In the artist’s introduction to her work, Hsu Wei-Hui says, “I use ready-made objects from daily life as creative materials, utilizing transformation, symbols and allusions to discuss issues and shared experiences relating to the external world and youth of women.” In this series, Hsu utilizes her perspective as a “female” artist to reflect on the cultural complexities and contradictions of “beauty and difficulty” as experienced by women. From there she discusses various possibilities inherent in the way modern women artists construct their own identities, in the face of long-term social constraints.

The third series, “Far From Home,” was produced between 2006 and 2010, when Hsu was studying overseas. In these pieces, she naturally extends her gender consciousness to the subject of cultural differences and identity, in an attempt to emotionally reflect of her own mental and physical experiences. In terms of creative materials, Hsu uses warm cultural totems and cold environmental images (a beautiful classical Chinese embroidered pattern on a painting box that cannot be opened because it is wrapped in wire; a bizarre installation where a sculpture made of Chinese qipao material floats on a Western style pond; an ancient Chinese thread-bound book seemingly mistakenly placed between two hardback English language books). Intriguingly, these works, which are all connected in some way to floating, loneliness and being rootless, and conclude with “Extending” in 2010, seem to end in a crescendo of self-improvement and strength.

In addition to mixed media, sculpture, and indoor and outdoor installation, Hsu Wei-Hui also uses photography to record her performance art, in an attempt to establish an even clearer connection between the work and the environment or her own feeling at a specific moment in time. Hsu says that she seeks to record the different fragments and emotions at the moment of artistic creation, resulting in an “in-between” state of mind. This idea has led her to place video or photographic works at the side of many of her installations, because these allow the artist to emphasize covert explanations of her work or highlight the process of self-dialectic realization.

A review of the work of Hsu Wei-Hui shows that her art is infused with its own distinctive voice and inimitable style. The displays themselves are designed to make the most of different spatial conditions in a way that highlights visual effect and aesthetics. It is this defining characteristic that means if we were to encounter one of Hsu’s

works in a different venue it would still seem fresh and new, imbued with different meaning in its new environment. Over the last few years, Hsu has had numerous opportunities to exhibit her works overseas, but her self-effacing and introspective nature have compelled her to first build on her burgeoning reputation in Taiwan. Hsu Wei-Hui recently received the Newcomers Award at Art Taipei 2010. I am confident that this will be the first of many such awards and hope that it will also help her move on to the next level of recognition and much deserved accolades.