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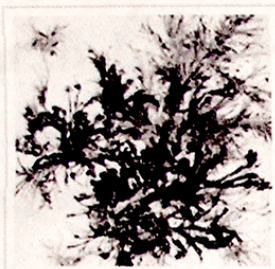
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Beili Liu

Vessel Gallery



Beili Liu, from the "Aerophyte" series, 2012. Photo courtesy Beili Liu Studio

Hitting that sweet spot between old-school emotion and avant-garde formal innovation, Beili Liu's work combines Eastern continuity over time with Western passion for the new. Her ingenious use of materials, process, and occasionally performance, finds audiences around the world.

Her recent exhibition "Between Wind and Water" suggests the *feng shui* aim of arranging one's life in harmony with nature (as interpreted geometrically—and a little romantically). The Taoist idea of a balance between opposing polarities pervades Liu's work, though without the mythological panoply of competing gods and goddesses.

Liu designates her two-dimensional wall-hung works as "process drawings," reflecting her materials-based investigations. Her 2012 "Affine" series—three collages on birch panels—refers to higher-mathematic geometrical transformations beyond the comprehension of many. They depict or rather present delicate nets of white paper, undulating as if windblown or waterborne. The "Wind Drawings" (2012) comprise two botanical bodies of work, "Pods" and "Aerophytes," both created by blowing black sumi ink with an air-compressor into what read as gray branches and floral blooms against a white acrylic background, *contemporary versions of traditional calligraphy painting; the reference to aerophytes, rootless plants seemingly subsisting on air, is clever and apt.*

Air is employed as a drawing tool again in the "Airseed mono drawings" (2012), which at first glance look like photograms of bubbles, or X-rays of concrete aggregate. They were made by mixing ink into bubble soap and the polygonal or spherical chambers that we now see are the ground plan of a now-lost structure shaped by chance and fluid dynamics.

Lapse/Passage (2009) is a large horizontal collage made from strips of vellum that have been singed into irregular, brown-black deckle patterns, then mounted, slightly overlapping each other, to suggest ridged or furrowed landscapes; it is one of a series that Liu created that can be mounted horizontally or vertically, suggesting land and water or mountain and tree trunk, respectively.

Sure to garner the most attention here, however, is *Stalemate* (2012), an installation designed for Vessel Gallery's long, nave-like central corridor, with skylights set into its pitched roof. Liu and her husband laboriously drilled hundreds of tiny holes into two eighteen-foot long, sharpened, cylindrical wooden stakes. After threading strands of fishing line through the openings, they used the filaments to hang the two missiles or lances, facing each other across a yard-long gap, at head height. The aggressive energy of the piece is extraordinary, but so is the stasis imposed by the restraining and supporting webs, or shock waves, described by the artist as slender, soft, feminine and persistent.

The idea of aggression and danger halted by gentle restraint is similar to that embodied in a 2011 performance/installation, *The Mending Project*; in this piece, Liu sat at a table, calmly stitching together swatches of cloth that appear to belong to a floor-bound circular quilt "island" surrounding her, while above hung a cloud of menacing steel scissors, pointed downward and agape: the Sword of Damocles transformed into glittering birds of prey.

- DeWitt Cheng

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