

**Cici Wu talks about "When leaving white dust"**

2018.05.14 by Jianru Wu



Cici Wu was born in Beijing in 1989 and grew up in Hong Kong. She currently lives and works in New York. Her solo exhibition "Upon Leaving the White Dust" unfolded on the incomplete discussion of culture and memory by American artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha [1]. Wu used her own invented recording device to translate Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's unfinished film footage into light data and then into a digital video; dozens of hand-crafted objects scattered on the floor responded to the Cha's storyboard. In this article, she talks about the shaping of Asian identity in the pre-globalization era and the self-consistent nature of the identity today. The exhibition will be held in 47 Canal, New York until May 27.

"Upon Leaving the White Dust (2018)" is the only piece of this exhibition of the same title. Part of the naming of this work (exhibition) originated from an unfinished project by American artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha: "White Dust from Mongolia (1980) [2]; Another part is my imagination towards the action "leaving" in time and space. In addition, I also hope that we can give "white dust" a variety of metaphors.

I really want to take Theresa Hak Kyung Cha back to the art scene in New York, because some of her ideas are worth paying attention to again. In 1980, the tide of globalization had not yet formed, and its identity and culture had not yet been capitalized on a large scale as it is today. In this era, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha wanted to discover stories about people and wanted to know how a small group of people from South Korea's exile to Manchuria lived, what their history was, rather than using superficial images or visual elements. It makes me curious to construct a certain image. I appreciate her as an American artist who realized early on and started to create for non-white audiences in America. She started an experiment created in the context of global art. What is even more valuable is that the spirit of this experiment is very natural. It seems that she naturally understands the differences between cultures, and at the same time has the creativity to combine these differences after understanding.

I am interested in Cha's work, partly because I have many people in my life circle in New York that affect me. They are all Americans, and I could also say they are also Asians at the same time. In my press release, I quoted Cha's writing:

"All the elements are historical to lessen the physical geographical distance as well as the psychological distance of the Asian people from other ethnic cultures. The causes for the Korean War, and the reasons for the division of Korea into North and South, and the perpetuating conditions of Cold War will contribute to the understanding of Korea and Asia as whole cultures, not merely state their economic and political status as nations.

MEMORY as a collective source, as almost having physical and organic dimensions, where space and time superimpose within it. It represents a body of time, units in time inside the time mass that is eternal and immeasurable, within which our existence is marked like a wound."

The text was written in 1980. I don't seem to have ever truly understood that how Asians come from different ethnic cultures. That is to say, there are Korean-Americans, Korean-Chinese, Vietnamese-Philippines and even Korean-Russians in the world. Japanese-Brazilian and so on. Most of their existence is due to war, whether it is militarily or culturally. What Cha is committed to discussing is not political or identity differences. She wants to explore how to reduce the geographical distance and psychological separation between people. I was very much influenced by this idea, and also began to realize that my existence may really be a scar in this world. Of course, I also clearly understand that not everyone needs or wants to be such a "wound." It's not necessary.

I have always regarded the cinema theater as a place for carrying images, and got a lot of inspiration from this carrier. In "Upon Leaving the White Dust," you can only see the changes of monotonous light. There is no image. Last year, the Museum of Art and Design in New York screened the 30 minute footage of "White Dust from Mongolia". During the screening, the light of the cinema was recorded at a rate of 24 frames per second on a handmade device (Foreign Object #1 Fluffy Light, 2017) and then converted to a digital video. I feel like watching these lights is like watching a person's feeling when they turns around to leave a cinema theater.

The objects on the floor include ceramics, unfired clay, glass, silicone, Lehmann Gross Bahn train tracks, and so on, all of which are parts of the "White Dust from Mongolia" story. The only thing elevated from the ground is a piece of transparent blue plastic cloth sandwiched between two pieces of rice papers, with "woman man" on one side and "father mother" on the other. When I first saw "woman man" in DICTÉE, I used the Western feminist logic to think of some theories. But on the other hand, during the course of the study, I discovered that when Cha described the young female revolutionary who died in the war, she would write: "She was born in one father and one mother."

The projection on the wall puts all things in neutral shadows, forming some unfinished meanings.

[1] Theresa Hak Kyung Cha was born in Busan, Korea, in 1951. She moved to San Francisco with her family at the age of 13. She majored in comparative literature and art at the University of California, Berkeley. Her works focus on the culture brought about by political and regional changes, misplacements and variations of memory, including performances, videos, paintings, writing, etc. She was killed in New York in 1982.

[2] "White Dust from Mongolia" includes both a movie and a historical novel, which are all unfinished. Berkeley Museum of Art / Pacific Film Archive.