

Bittersweetness and Burning Wood

Ren Han

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Ann Gale

Zhi Lin

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Abstract

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Ren Han

Chair of the Supervisory Committee:

Ann Gale

Department of Painting + Drawing

My work has always been rooted in an obsession with process. I searched for something intangible while the material slipped through my fingertips for hours and hours, the final image being born of adaptive movements. In those repetitions, I began to find linkages to memories, writing, tension, and an affinity for nature that now contentedly perches on my shoulder and informs the work. I draw from imagery of unfurling moth/butterfly wings as well as undulations of jelly-like sea creatures and swiftly hunting birds. I am drawn to cyclical, repetitive motions in weaving and in color. I started to explore physical tension within fibers, drawing-like gestures, and the spinning, weaving, mending that I incorporate into the work which translates into cloaking, embodied woven paintings. The metaphorical tension appears in the concepts I think and write about such as memory, trauma, and the relationship of the

body to its space and others. In this way, I develop a macrocosm and specific color world from interdisciplinary techniques of fiber arts, painting, and drawing that invites the viewer to ponder conceptual bittersweetness, a feeling of cloaking, and suspension. This thesis aims to clarify and provide a deeper explanation for the body of work.

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Lastly, my grad cohort. We are a force to be reckoned with and I look to your collective dedication, ambition, and kindness. I am beyond fortunate to have met you all through this fascinating and weird circumstance of being MFA grad students at the University of Washington. The art world is a brighter place with you all contributing, and I know this collective creative power will endure.



Lepidoptera: Cleave, install photo at RailSpur

Introduction

There is a gentle melancholy to her solitude.

One that perches on a ledge, weeps with her, feels with her.

It's becomes a melodic, methodical delirium that propels a

Manic desire to weave, sew, mend her memories

Into something soft, supple, moldable-

A buffer of sorts for the aching words like arrows

Thrust upon her.

The evocation of trauma is complex. It provokes physiological and emotional reactions and the sympathetic nervous system reacts and fires to protect its person. It also affects memory in intricate ways. We develop vast systems of coping mechanisms to deal with these traumas, and it has a great effect on our lives and memory. These mechanisms are cyclical, self-regulating, repetitive. There is comfort in repetition, in habit, in practiced movements that are tied to specific feelings or actions. We look to nature also to be cyclical-made up of intertwined elements that work together to form patterns such as the golden ratio, as well as how animals evolve to mimic their surroundings as a form of protection (Rota & Wagner, 2006)

The current textile work is focused on the imagery of moths and sea creatures as a direct translation for metamorphosis, embodiment, and cloaking. Similar evolutionary defense mechanisms to how humans behave socially to traumatic situations or within

the brain to protect from traumatic memories. Through these cathartic and methodical processes of spinning yarn, weaving, dyeing, and manipulating fiber, I create work that is proportional to my body size. These forms often become similar to my personal wingspan and comparable to my height. Behind the scenes of the studio, they drape into organic mounds as I lay them across tables while I think about installing. Despite their clothing-like visage, I do not think of these textile objects as shawls or wearables—they serve as direct substitutions for my body. Lithe, representative of creatures that can swim or fly with equal grace, there is a freedom and translucency to these little creatures that I strive to capture in the work. The medium of fiber facilitates this as I am able to utilize all parts of textile processing from roving to yarn to felt in order to create textural differences. Through building up and taking away, I create layers of systematic blocks of color and line to invoke the image. The thesis work's thematic and technical progression is clear, from the body of work "Lepidoptera: Ray, Strix, Cleave, Cicada" to "Encircling I + II", "Velvet Aviation", to "Field Notes I + II"—my experimentation and handling of fiber becomes more intentional and cohesive. These objects oscillate between soft paintings and soft sculpture depending on the additive or subtractive nature of the work. At times, I cut away excess material and at other times, negative space remains as textural contrast. I invite the viewer to step forward and partake in a conversation where they and the work are mutuals, bodies occupying a parallel space. I want to convey a softness and openness to people, an invitation to engage.

"Is that what art is? To be touched thinking what we feel is ours when, in the end, it was someone else, in longing, who finds us?"

- Ocean Vuong, *"On Earth We're Briefly Gorgeous"*.



Lepidoptera: Cleave, install photo at RailSpur

Methodology

My methodology focuses on tactility and process, in combination with floral/faunal imagery. I am most invested in textile oriented techniques throughout my graduate research, although I frequently draw, paint, and screenprint as well. Research begins with a combination of photography and writing, often occurring parallel to each other. On hikes or walks I study smaller plant life, taking note of the way moss and lichen grows on a branch and how fungi seem to stack themselves mathematically at

the end of a fallen log. There is a deep breathing, an observation, a quieting in the soul that happens while the forest surrounds me with bird calls. Writing informs my greater practice as a generative way to document my thoughts. Sketching begins the image generation process until there is a more refined visual direction.

Spinning yarn provides a similar sort of quiet to writing-the back and forth treadling and the soft hum of the spinning wheel feel like a rhythm in music. Friction holds the microscopic scales of wool together and the tension creates strength in the yarn. This part of the process is an optical color mixing to create the palette that becomes the foundation of the piece.

Color is profoundly important to my work and process, although I realized in my early graduate research that I tended to be comfortable in organized, predetermined color worlds. Part of my research became about narrowing down my color story into more recognizable, cohesive patterns. I looked at the vibrancy of color in moths and nudibranchs for this. Through layering wool and creating differing densities in the tufted paintings, I change the color of the yarn when viewed from multiple angles. Fiber content in the yarn (such as silk or alpaca) also ensures that the fiber has a glowing, animate quality. While considering the efficacy of simplifying colors, I looked at artists such as Doh Ho Suh (Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2018) or Shiota Chiharu (Mori Art Museum, 2019) who work with monochromatic colors layered on top of each other to create a value spectrum. In addition, part of my research into textures stemmed from the Korean 'Dansaekhwa' movement, which focuses on the physicality of paintings and variation of texture through gestures like ripping, marking, tearing, scraping, etc (Hencz, 2022). It is through this physicality of material that I develop

density, gravity, and weight in the work. This is further enhanced by draping and stretching the work to create a sense of flow. The work frays over time on the edges, and slowly changes as an analogy to insects evolving over generations. The way the work is installed also transitions from one space to another.

Thesis Artwork



Lepidoptera: Ray

"Lepidoptera: Ray" is my first large scale rug textile work during graduate school and the catalyst for the current body of work. Starting with symmetry and developing into asymmetry of color, I experimented with drawing and form as well as leaving the edges

to fray. This work is also not backed with any permanent gel- the yarn is holding itself together through tension alone. There is an ephemerality in the idea that you could destroy this work one strand at a time whether through improper transport or installation. This work also features a secondary tufting process in which I go back in the monkscloth in a drawing-like motion.



Lepidoptera: Strix, installed at RailSpur

Lepidoptera: Strix

"Lepidoptera: Strix" is a transitory piece—an example of my metamorphic and adaptive process. The work feels heavy and draping as the body of it is densely tufted, with sections towards the top and bottom cut out to reveal the surroundings behind it. It's a painting floating in mid air with its weight dragging down other parts of the work. I worked on this piece both on and off the frame, cutting into and tearing the tufted cloth to fray it even further. Although it hangs in a traditional way, the installation methods cause the yarn to tear and fray the monkscloth until there are strands hanging loosely.

Lepidoptera: Cleave

"Lepidoptera: Cleave" is the opposite of Ray in that the process was almost entirely subtractive. The work came off the frame and was met with scissors and a woodcarving knife as I hacked into the untufted monkscloth. It is the most visceral, with a vague insect like form becoming clear as the wings are stretched out through install. Draped on its own however it becomes a replacement of the body, a representation of my torso and veins running through my body. It is the most subtractive of the four large scale works, with an ephemerality as the breeze shifts it or light filters through the crimson strands. "Lepidoptera: Cleave" becomes a circulatory system, with the wingtips stretching out in a holey indication of a hug or it being mid-flight. This work changes drastically as it is hung in different orientations, becoming less or more abstracted as it curls around itself naturally.



Lepidoptera: Cicada: Install photo at RailSpur

Lepidoptera: Cicada

"Lepidoptera: Cicada" became the most enveloping, cloaking work- the tips of the wings are held by monofilament to create a space that I can physically retreat to. The wool and silk creates a dampening of sound, a cocoon that becomes a shield at the same time. It is hung slightly taller than my body height, so that the acoustic dampening effect is strongest at my ear-level and the folding in of the wingtips mirror my shoulders and arms.



Encircling I + II, installed at RailSpur

Encircling I + II

"Encircling I + II" is a primary exploration into constructed suspensions and visibility of the work from both sides-they hang next to each other and slowly turn so the viewer is able to observe the differences between each side. The weavings don't extend fully to the ends of the steel ring-sections are left open so you can see through the structure. Areas are more densely woven than others and are visible in how compacted the fiber is. Tension is a major focus of this work, as the fiber holds itself under its own friction and is liable to shift-no glue or fixative is used in the weaving. The fiber is not unlike a spiderweb, being its own system of color and pattern unique to circular weaving.



Field Notes I + II, installed at RailSpur (Lepidoptera: Strix also showing)

Field Notes I + II

"Field Notes I + II" serves as a collage of sorts-my subconscious projecting an organizational system designed for the final textile objects to be cut out. The work became an enlarged sketchbook page. The work is later cut out into individual elements similar to a functional sketchbook, collaged into something new. My process changed slightly as I started to think of other ways I could incorporate different parts of fiber processing into the work, with needle felting and wet felting by steam ironing directly onto the surface. This process felt most directly like painting overtop of drawing, a way of mending and almost forcing two different textures together through

friction and heat. I mimic the original organizational system through the salon style installation which transforms over time and the works' relationships to each other.



Velvet Aviation: Installed at RailSpur

Velvet Aviation

“Velvet Aviation” is both a summary of my research techniques and a launching pad for work after grad school. Through a combination of needle felting, wet felting, and steaming, the fibers shrink, tense, and affix together to create a rippled effect and uneven edges. They become objects as I vigorously wash them with hot water and soap to encourage the felting process. I transfer energy from the felting process to the

washing process, my hands imparting a rough and consistent pressure onto the fibers. They are intimate works and the catalyst for my postgraduate research into textile art's ability to merge with painting and drawing methodologies. The abstraction of moth wings and bird legs is intentionally blurred to create a sense of capturing fauna in motion. "Velvet" refers to both the quality of the wool and silk as it is compacted into a form, and for how I perceive moth wings and bird feathers.

Conclusion:

A few lines of inquiry have come up during my research which I aim to continue developing post-graduate education. Overall, I am interested in investigating a more direct relationship between the work and the viewer, creating spaces that invite the viewer to touch and hear as a way of communicating. I want to maintain a sense of suspension and blurred lines between what exists in water and in air, how insects and underwater creatures cyclically mimic each other. Flying contrasting with swimming, unwrapping contrasting with cocooning. I find reassurance in what we learn from land animals and marine life and the beauty in their evolution of protecting themselves through color signaling, predator patterns, and behavior. I subconsciously mimic these ways of protecting myself through the comfort of process and the tactility of handling the fiber. All aspects of these textile techniques embody painting and drawing methodologies in a truly interdisciplinary way of working that I am enamored with and excited to continue.

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