**Interview Questions for Artists**

* Please describe the artwork in your own words. If possible, please offer us some details on processes of construction, fabrication or even conceptualization.

Since 2010 I have rendered natural imagery out of everyday pollutants to explore the emotional tenor of the environmental challenges we currently face. The work *Against the Wind* is a continuation of that practice, in which feathers cast from coal dust are arranged into an agitated tableau. To create the work I select feathers for certain qualities, in this case for their knife-like appearance and make silicone molds from the chosen feathers. I then cast fiberglass dummies of the feathers, which I use to find the overall composition of the work. After settling on an arrangement, I cast the final feathers from coal and set them into a board using magnets according to the determined composition.

Conceptually I aim to create an uncanny snapshot of the natural world, one which implies the ways in which we are undermining our environment, but one which at the same time, captures the fleeting beauty of what we stand to lose. Particularly in this work the knife like quality of the feathers is important, and I was interested in transforming the feathers, with their soft and light connotations into a menacing presence that suggests force and density. I imagine these feathers cutting the wind—a both a violent and absurd gesture, (this gesture takes on more associations when you consider that in western theology the wind has often symbolized god’s presence.) For all of the feather works, the contradictory sensation of motion and stillness in the tableaux is important, and these works seem to inhabit a time space between both life and death. This sense is further amplified through the use of casting as a technique, which historically has been likened, (like photography), to death, and the embalming and memorializing of the dead. Casting is like an echo, the reproduction of something absent; it is a replica of life but is outside of life at the same time.

For *A Wish Cast in Midnight*, in a tree branch cast from coal sits a nest created from discarded threads found around my studio complex, while inside the nest rests a gold plated wishbone. Both foreboding and hopeful, this piece speaks to humanity’s degradation of the planet as the branch and nest are built from pollutants and trash, but also hints at the possibility of a transformation of our relationship with nature as symbolized by the golden bone. Yet, as alluded to in the title, major shifts in consciousness, be it individuals or societies, seem to happen at the darkest hour when all avenues of willful action have been exhausted. Despair and crisis often catalyze change, and precede a leap of faith into new ways of being.

In the work *Stumped*, a branch, has in an unnatural fashion, tied itself into knots. The piece touches on the ways in which we are altering nature and the paradigms we are establishing for the future.

* It is not a gross generalization to say all art comes from life and all life is set within our environment, our surroundings or our habitat. How heavily do ecological concerns or ideas related to the environment factor into the conception of your art?

I have been concerned about the ecology throughout my life, and this has also been at the core of my art practice for the last eight years. As a child I intuitively felt the contemporary world was out of tune with the natural world and that this disconnect would lead to problems. Philosophically my work is an extension of the romantic idea that decay, destruction and death are inextricable aspects of existence that cannot and should not be eliminated from our experience. This belief runs counter to many of the practices in world in which we live, in which, under the banner of ‘progress’ through science, reason and other avenues, humanity aims to banish what is unwanted. This is a Modernist idea that unconsciously informs a great deal of our policy and behavior. And yet, inevitably new problems inevitably arise and multiply. The degradation of the environment is evidence that our notion of progress is faulty and needs recalibration.

* To what extent do environmental issues shape the way you live your life on a daily basis? Or what are some of your thoughts on our planet’s environmental crises?

While living in New York, I believed if humans recycled, came up with new energy technologies, etc. we could reduce humanity’s impact on the planet and alter our fate; but upon moving to Mainland China I was overwhelmed by the sheer number of people and realized that humanity’s desire and consumption is almost an unstoppable force. I then reframed my thinking and no longer considered ‘saving’ the planet a reachable goal, but saw mankind moving towards a crisis point in which necessarily there will be a change. Its interesting how we discuss the environment, in terms of ‘saving’ and ‘protecting’ the planet, when I think we’re mostly talking about saving and protecting ourselves. Nature is resourceful and if we become extinct many life forms will likely continue in our absence. Humanity has put itself at the center of this world, and our discussion on the environment mirrors this perspective: we cause environmental degradation and we can possibly save it. Maybe, instead, we are just a species inhabiting this earth at this moment and either we will change, (not necessarily through our consciousness or will, but most likely by necessity), or we will become extinct. I’m less interested in the discussion about saving the environment, i.e. ourselves, and more interested in focusing our attention on phenomenon, processes and patterns that seem fundamental to our universe that we seem blind to.

* If a young art student were to act as a docent and offer a verbal explanation to exhibition goers (assume laymen), in order to assist them to better enter and understand your work, what should s/he say?

Maya Kramer’s work stems from a concern for humanity’s precarious relationship to its environment, and the artist often uses surprising and polluting materials to render images from nature. In this work: *Against the Wind* feathers cast of the dense and polluting material coal, are arranged into an agitated tableau. To create the work the artists makes molds of real feathers, and then pours a specially crafted mixture of coal and binder into the molds, and then arranges the finished feathers into a composition. In her practice, setting up contradictory states of lightness and density, beauty, and violence, and timelessness and transience are important. For instance, if feathers are usually associated with lightness, softness and flight, here the artist has chosen feathers for their knife like appearance and by rendering them out of coal, has made them seem dense and almost violent. The sense of motion and stillness in the tableaux is also important, and these works seem to inhabit a time space between both life and death. This is further amplified through the use of casting as a technique, which historically has been likened, (like photography), to death, and the embalming and memorializing of the dead. Casting is like an echo, the reproduction of something absent; it is a replica of life but is outside of life at the same time.

For *A Wish Cast in Midnight*, in a tree branch cast from coal sits a nest created from discarded threads found around the artist’s studio complex, while inside the nest rests a gold plated wishbone. The piece is both foreboding and hopeful and speaks to humanity’s degradation of the planet-- as the branch and nest are built from pollutants and trash, but also hints at the possibility of a transformation of our relationship with nature-- as symbolized by the golden bone. Yet, as alluded to in the title, major shifts in consciousness, be it individuals or societies, seem to happen at the darkest hour when all avenues of willful action have been exhausted. Despair and crisis often catalyze change, and precede a leap of faith into new ways of being.

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