Cong Ma

MFA Thesis Metal

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My work is an investigation of the relationship between body, object, and action. My understanding of jewelry is not limited to adornment; I explore the idea of “jewelry by accident”.

I open the freezer, and an ice cube adheres to my index finger: could the ice cube be considered an accessory? I ask the audience to rethink the purpose of jewelry.

As an artist, I observe moments that happen in people’s daily life, and I consider these “frozen moments” when I am designing my work. When something unusual or absurd happens on the body, I consider it “jewelry by accident”. My work is an abstract interpretation of forms and occurrences on the body.

I explore the symbols created by body movements, especially the folds of. I notice that when people move their limbs and torso, forms emerge like magnified symbols. I first worked with clay to capture the shapes that look like symbols. Then I developed this idea in copper. I collected all kinds of symbols from figures, forming the copper as if it
was a soft cloth. I created symbols that emulate the landscape of the body. When the symbols are assembled together, they comprise a new language that describes the actions of our everyday movements. The symbol that I captured from inside the knee are meant: Squat, which actually reflects the form itself. Every symbol have their own specific meaning, like: wrench, cross, stretch, throw, etc. Even some of them evolve to an adjective. People unleash their imaginations when seeing some unknown things, just as the mysteries symbols I created that only can be read by me. The partial of the flesh itself are looks erotic, because its fleshly and unknown shape that people likely imagine where that part comes from. The copper makes the creases and folds glossy, also gives it mysterious.

I am interested in the way people wear jewelry. Many jewelers take into consideration whether their work looks like a "wearable piece of jewelry" - for example, how comfortable it is, and whether it would be considered as a functional piece. I also consider the relationship between the work and the wearer. But my work is slightly different because the concept directs the form, which supports my ideas, In other words, I change the form to be conceptually functional.

One of my pieces, Ring Maker, is an ice tray made of metal, which relates to the interesting phenomenon of cold metal that adheres to our skin, and sometimes our tongue if we choose to lick it and take the risk. During the winter, soft flesh can bond to the surface of the cold metal when certain temperatures, moisture and touch are involved.
Thus I regard the ice adhered to the skin as a jewelry piece that emphasizes my fashionable science.

At the very beginning, I got the inspiration from news that a cow got its head stuck in a chair’s handle. By recreating this absurd imagery in my mind, I considered the handle as a necklace for the cow. This story is just a catalyst, as are the many films I watched that inspired my thesis. German Expressionism and Dadaist cinema are the main sources that helped me to manifest these ideas. The film Entr’acte (1924) by Rene Clair, gave me a unique point of view. The artist used captivating techniques such as displaying people running in slow motion and then in reverse. There was an interesting scene as I watched an egg over a fountain of water get shot and then become a flying bird. I realized that the art had more than one meaning of the expression. Dadaist movies have no theme or plot. It is purely a game of formalist; a whimsical performance in pursuit of bizarre effects. I took what I learned from this art form and applied it to my craft and the video, which is full of fantasy, and this is generally what a classic bizarre Dadaist movie look like. The ring that I created was more than a fashionable piece of jewelry: it was a statement and also related to the idea of ice cold temperatures, which made my piece unique.

“Un Chien Andalou” is a surrealist film directed by Luis Bunuel and artist Salvador Dali. The chronology of the film is disconnected. The artists focus on Dream logic throughout the entire story. I remembered a detail from the story: a young man standing beside the door while staring at his hand, which had a hole in the palm from which ants emerge. In
Dali’s paintings there always appear to be ants, because in his childhood he saw a cluster of ants around a lizard’s body. From then on, it became a nightmare in his mind. The ants in his pictures symbolize corrosion, death and often times reflect the feeling of anxiety. The film does not necessarily express the specific ideas: all of the scenes from the film are not rational, there is no psychological or culture explanation as well. Surrealism is playing word and mind games that always have multiple obscure meaning.

I was influenced by the way that he shot the movie: it was totally unconventional. I broke the traditional way to wear jewelry, as it is not just a decoration around us. One of my works is a chair with real cow hair on it. It was a functional object originally, but I changed its function to a giant, impractical necklace. I want to lay the chair on the ground as if it is the scene of an accident, creating the illusion that a cow’s neck was previously tangled into the chair’s handle. I made an accompanying video, which breaks the limitation of time as a non-linear narrative. There are three actions generally, and I subdivide more actions - the cow walking around a plastic chair, someone opening the freezer, two hands playing cat’s cradle, taking the ice cube tray out, the cow trying to touch the handle, etc. Those actions are presented as a loop on a vintage monitor.

I always ask myself how functional my work will be. People have many different reasons to wear jewelry, but I believe the cow does not. The accidents that happen to us are actually unconscious. Salvador Dali was influenced by Sigmund Freud, who is the founder of psychoanalysis. I think Dali’s montage cut technique is connected to the stream of consciousness and psychoanalysis. The narrative of Dali's film is not in
chronological order, but through the free association, the viewers individually organize the story. The past, the present, the future always cross and repeat. In Remembrance of Things of Past Marcel Proust identifies the unconscious as a basic concept of Freudian Psychoanalysis (Proust). The Id, Ego and Superego and the Analysis of dreams comprise a theoretical foundation for the stream of consciousness literature. Similar to playing cat’s cradle where one person holds the rope, another play and then they exchange. We think these are physical actions, but they are the process of psychological activity exchanges. One person is active and then becomes passive when holding the rope again. I explore the beauty of people doing things unconsciously and then becoming accessories for themselves.

I explore the idea of time, and ephemeral work, for example, some jewelry is worn temporarily. Such us daisy chain, tiara, corsage, we cannot dismiss the value even though they can be used transitory. But they are playing on an important role at certain times. Ordinary jewelry can be used repeatedly, even as an heirloom, passed on through generations. The heirloom could be a jade bracelet, a pocket watch, or a trophy. Not only can witness the honor or disgrace of a family through the time variation but also can manifest its historical depth and the aesthetic feeling. In addition to its own value, there are human love and treasure. Compare to nowadays, Jewelry represents a time in our lives when we wore this art, and the ice ring is beauty held within just the 60 seconds we have. Someone would ask, how can something wear for 60 seconds be considered a ring? For instance, if we wear a ring for 20 years and we live for 80 years, it is a quarter
of our life. 60 seconds compared to a mayfly’s life is long. We are small and short-lived in the universe. It is also a Symbol of the era, everything is speeding up. In a way, my art shows the relationship between time and beauty. Jewelry becomes something we can only remember once its life has reached an end; like the ice, it becomes a puddle, evaporates and is gone.

People wear jewelry purposefully: some wear pieces for decoration while others for expressing their personalities. In history, there are multiple meanings of wearing a necklace in different cultures. In the difficult living conditions of primitive society, people’s neck is a place for hanging their prey (Torntore). After the invention of the basket, the neck is barely used for work. But in order to show their strength and capabilities, people decorate their neck with animal remains, symbolizing their success in the form of animal bones, and sometimes teeth. Some of the most precious jewelers came from mining mussels and using the pearls as informal statement pieces. In the ancient, they were often naked when they collected mussels. For convenience, a clever person put a rope around his neck and picked up the pearls to wear. Later, people found pearl beads as beautiful, so they imitated each other and this lead to a fashion trend. In fact, far from four thousand to five thousand years ago, our ancestors began to use shells and pearls as a necklace or other decoration. The necklace has been become a special accessory for women. So the earliest jewelry is the necklace and its powerful meaning for the people as it represented so many things like success and femininity. Today, the necklace has many social functions. In my point of view, people can wear jewelry unconsciously.
The chair with cow hair that I made could be a necklace and also a real chair. The ice tray could be a ring and could cool down the whiskey as well. I encourage the viewer/audience to rethink the purpose of the jewelry, and I question whether jewelry can only be a limited accessory. Are we free enough as a society to allow the spirit of tolerance that I pursue in art and in jewelry? I want people to accept that there are many ways to express an idea. In my work, I ask the audience to combine video and object and moment in order to engage my idea. Without any one of them, I am nothing.
Works Cited


Bibliography


3 Entr'acte. R. Clair, 1924.

Artist statement

Cong Ma

I investigate the relationship between body, object, and action. My understanding of jewelry is not limited to adornment; my work explores the idea of “jewelry by accident”. I open the freezer, and an ice cube adheres to my index finger: could the ice cube be considered an accessory? I ask the audience to rethink the purpose of jewelry.

Literature, German Expressionism, and absurdist drama inform my inspirations. I observe people’s behavior and actions, creating objects from unusual situations that capture fleeting moments from daily life.
Resume

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Education
2009-2012 Bachelor of Fine Art, Chinese Painting, Capital Normal University, Beijing, China
2013-2014 Fine Arts, Metalsmith, TsingHua University, Beijing, China
2015-                Master of Fine Arts, Metal, State University of New Paltz

Exhibition
2010 Charity and Sale, Chinese Painting, TaiGuLi ,Beijing,China
2012 Thesis Exhibition show, Chinese Painting, Capital Normal University
2014 Solo Exhibition, QiaoFu FangCaoDi ,Beijing ,China
2016 Display, Artbar Gallery, Kinston, New York
2016 Practice/play, SUNY New Paltz, New York

Publications
2015 100 Drawings: Adorned Spaces-SUNT New Paltz@SNAG Boston

2015(Book)
Work Experience

2010      Interpreter for the contemporary of Holland Artist, SongZhuang art zone
2014      Architectural Design for ShanXi Science and technology Museum
2014      Assistant for XiangHan professor, Lacquer Art

Artistic Skill

*Metals*
Enameling, forming, forging, electric-forming, chasing.

*Painting*
Chinese painting, oil painting, acrylic painting, charcoal painting. Lacquer art

*Ceramics*
Throwing, sculpture ceramic, slip casting, glazing, firing, luster

*Sculpture*
Mold making, plaster casting

*Photography*
Photographing artworks

*Computer*
Jewelry CAD, 3D printing, Photoshop, AI

*Film*
Film making, Film editing

Language

English, Chinese, literature in Korean