

THERESA CHONG

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The woodcuts and paintings of Korea-born Theresa Chong follow an interesting trajectory, moving from work influenced by music and the chance philosophy of John Cage to paintings originally designed on the computer and printed on linen and vellum. As a graduate student in New York, Chong worked with the composer and conductor, Peter Kotik and met several times with Cage who considerably affected her approach to art. Some of her earlier work, dating to the late 1990's, is composed of repetitive arabesque curves, repeated over and over on paper. Then, for a series of woodcuts, Chong, who studied cello before moving into art, created a group of visual symbols-taken from Korean calligraphy, roman lettering and the patterns of dots on dominoes-that corresponded to musical notation. These symbols followed the music, in this case of the composer David Popper, so closely that, according to the artist, the musician who mastered them would be able to play the imagery. The precise detail of these woodcuts, printed on Korean-made rice paper, results in an apparently rational but also intensely lyric order, influenced in part by an eighteenth-century Chinese artist-Chujun, an engraver-whose work Chong encountered at an art fair.

In her more recent work, Chong has shifted from compositions with a strong Asian visual component to a more impersonal, modernist language. Working with the graphic computer programs Photoshop and Illustrator, the artist has produced a series of paintings in which the imagery is again highly arranged, in this case repeating geometric forms-circles, squares and triangles-superimposed on organic shapes that resemble, in total, a blueprint or urban design drawing. There is a marked contrast between the looping lines and coded symbols of Chong's earlier art and the supremely rational look of her present work. However, despite the differences, there is also a continuity. Both bodies of work involve an all-over patterning, which occurs without the development of a physically centered focus of interest. There is also, in the later work, a sense of structure that echoes the high planning of the artist's earlier efforts. In the paintings and drawings designed by computer, Chong is interested in pursuing an idiom removed from the vagaries of the hand; the imagery has the look of something thought out, considered. She is building a new vocabulary, which reflects, more than anything else, the continuous, often detached, rhythms of New York. Her art is, as a result, more engaging than ever.

Theresa Chong was born in Seoul, Korea in 1965. She spent a year studying cello at Oberlin College in Ohio, and then

went to Boston where she received her BFA from Boston University. She moved to New York to study at the School of Visual Arts, receiving her MFA in 1991. According to Chong, she knew as a young girl that she wanted to be an artist, taking lessons in painting when she was seven years old. Today she works in a studio in New York, where she composes complicated designs on the computer.