

THERESA CHONG

Leffingwell, Edward, "Theresa Chong at Danese", Art in America, May, 2004

Surrendering to the control of a steady hand, Theresa Chong's pencil glides and loops through computer-generated, batiklike fields of quarter-inch-square boxes randomly deployed on 25-by-33-inch and 38-by-46-inch sheets of rice paper. The paper is either deepest indigo-black or a white that seems burnished and almost waxy, like fine drafting vellum. In each drawing, Chong navigates a random course through vast fields of these little boxes, each of which is filled with white or blue-black gouache laid down with a fine brush (the color of the gouache contrasts to the color of the paper). On close inspection, the soft trail of graphite seems almost molten in contrast to the opaque gouache. Most often, the pencil line connects one box to another. The few unconnected ones seem cast off, like archipelagoes or bits of foam breaking from a wave in a Hokusai print.

Previous works in series have explored the notations and intervals of music and chance, the legacy of Chong's interest in John Cage and her training as a cellist. All dated 2003, these new works express her understanding of the importance of gesture in abstraction. She finds gesture not

only in the work of de Kooning and Pollock but in the clear, sure line of Lichtenstein. According to the gallery, she makes coded allusions to these artists in several of her titles, Light for Lichtenstein, DK for de Kooning. One of the smaller drawings, DK 3, consists of two layered sheets of rice paper, the top one lightly inscribed with a grid. Superimposed on the grid are small blocks of gouache that resemble musical notations. Parallel ribbons of pencil introduce line after line of a continuous, looping, leaning gesture that resembles the structural features of Arabic script. In other works, Chong abandons this tightly conceived patterning by eliminating the layering of paper and employing a computer program to lay out the field of open blocks that frame the gouache, though they are executed by hand.

Chong alludes to the casual nature of the pencil line in an drawing designated FRED, for "free doodle"; others, called SAM, acknowledge a faculty residency at Anderson Ranch in Snowmass, Colo. Passages of SAM 4 seem to resolve into figures in the field, one of them languorous and supine, picked out among the free-flung squares of gouache and intimately connected by Chong's tracery. The larger of the drawings on white suggests the concentricities and elevations of geodetic survey maps, while those on black, perhaps inevitably,, suggest galaxies and constellations. All contain implied messages, encrypted in the making and not easily transcribed, but worth the pleasure of the reading.