

# THERESA CHONG

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For Korean-born, New York-based artist Theresa Chong the abstract gesture remains of interest, despite the fact that today such imagery carries as much, if not more, historical weight than it does contemporaneity. Chong who studied cello for a year before devoting herself to art—she received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Boston University in 1989 and a Master of Fine Arts from the School of Visual Arts I New York in 1991—has often been described as using music as a visual source for her work. In an earlier exhibition at Danese Gallery in New York, for example, she exhibited woodcuts, the compositions of which contrived to present the visual equivalent of the etudes of the composer David Popper, claiming that the correspondence between notes and imagery are so close that a musician could 'play' the visual imagery and remain true to the arrangement of the music.

Yet Chong is quick to explain that music no longer serves as a metaphor for her intricate patterning and brilliant color schemes. Instead, the primary concern of her new work—paintings and drawings realized on the computer with Photoshop and Illustrator software—is with the nature of the gesture as part of our immediate legacy of abstraction. Of

course, the gesture demonstrates the nature of the hand, revealing the skill and fluency of the artist's brushstroke. But what would happen if a painter switched the medium from painted canvas to computer-drawn imagery, attempting to retain the semblance of hand-worked composition? The result would be a tension between the personalized traces of human contact and the impartial, dispassionately rational intelligence of the machine. Given that so much contemporary art is drawn to new technology, it seems more or less inevitable that someone like Chong, although in dialogue with the history of abstraction, would turn to the computer as a way of realizing her complex imagery.

The imagery in Chong's new work is intricate, interwoven with repetitions that fill the entire space of the linen or vellum. Interestingly, the cumulatively rational design of her new art has its origins in the manner of the hand. In a number of cases, the floating arabesque lines derive from Chong's doodling on the computer, her jottings translating elegantly onto the canvas. Chong has acknowledged that her interest in abstraction recognizes the historical nature of such imagery; nevertheless, she attempts a new revision of the gesture, produced by the computer's eminent impartiality. Her new work resonates with the way we now live our lives, eclectically seeking out whatever works without remaining tied to either new or archaic ways of seeing. Chong's eclecticism, so different from the stunning

traceries of her earlier work, in which an Asian aesthetic is much more obvious, seems to have moved towards a more generally modernist, rather specifically Asian, paradigm. The decision Chong has made—she has said in conversation that she will continue to work with the computer—lends itself to the recognition that her art now reflects the international atmosphere of New York.