

# THERESA CHONG

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by **Robert C. Morgan**

Korean-born artist Theresa Chong manipulates concepts in relation to drawings. There is a certain tension between this idea and material that appears completely integrated in her work. She uses black and white gouaches on multiple layers of rice paper. These linear, web-like configurations weave through the space of the various surface planes. While a description of Chong's work may make it sound formal, the actual feeling of these delicate tendrils is not. Chong's integration of several elements into a unified whole suggests a considerable discipline. In fact, is the discipline of a musician.

Chong began her career as a cellist at Oberlin Conservatory in 1984 then switched to a fine arts major upon entering Boston University a year later. She went on to receive a master of fine arts at the School of Visual Arts in NYC in 1989. Chong is possessed of a deeply felt understanding of musical tone and rhythm. Music is, of course, an art of time. Music moves through time as time moves through it. Yet their reference to time in Chong's gouache drawings is about space, or, better, about spatiality. Her sensibility with the regard to space is one of perpetual transformation through an accumulated overlay of lines that intensifies the surface. A nearly invisible grid within the square format functions as her compositional guide. The grid directs the course of all her linear movements.

On viewing these astonishing subtle drawings by Theresa Chong, I sense the integration of what the aesthetician Nelson Goodman, once called the "allographic" and the "autographic." Whereas the former is the kind of notation in time, as in musical composition, the later is more given to the visual signature, the gesture, the mark in pictorial space or the space of a particular form. Chong combines both of these. Her drawings are

compositional in the sense of rhythmic time or tempo and in their immediate reference to pictorial space.

The refinement and concentration of these calligraphic filaments further suggests a comparison to the American painter, Brice Marden. In fact, the extraordinary quality of Chong's drawings provokes a reevaluation of Marden's recent work as it relates to Asian painting. The resemblance of course, may exist only in the realm of appearance; yet somehow the source of Chong's structure carries an authenticity that gives us another perspective on the gestural abstraction practiced in advanced Western painting since mid-century.