

flash art page

Valdez, Sarah. "Theresa Chong", *Flash Art* Vol.XXXI, Summer 1998, p.139, illus.

Seven square-formatted works on paper, seemingly no more than varying shades of gray on first perception, comprise Theresa Chong's latest exhibition, "Works on Paper." Closer inspection reveals the intricacy of near-transparent sheets of Korean rice paper layered, painted with grid and squiggly lines in black and white gouache, suggesting the ordered chaos of say, the veins of a leaf, particularly when the sun shines through, or maybe a cell beneath a microscope. Some of the papers have a slight black background, and direct attention to the white paint causes a darker overall impression, while, in others, black paint is more forceful, and perspicacious eyes have to strain for the white. They are enticing patterns demanding curiosity and attention, representing everything, and nothing, that we know.

The impossibly balanced sheets of paper are separated by millimeters, and light reveals the natural thinning and thickening of Chong's slow-crafted lines, which have the web-like quality of droplets of water falling down a window, catching one another, pausing, going forward. The paper has its own structure too, delicate strands of weave resembling the scribbly lines crafted by Chong's hand. The grid lines, as such, come to seem contrived, like they, quite literally, painted themselves onto wet paper adhered to a smooth, sanded, gessoed board. Chong sets loose a quantity of paint that runs down the face, leaving surprisingly straight vertical (or horizontal, once dried and flipped) stripes.

The process, though highly contrived, has everything to do with the nature of her medium and the passage of time. There is something to do with presence, as well, in viewing Chong's work. For better or worse, these paintings are interesting, though nothing like themselves, in slide or photograph format.

In the tradition of abstract art, there is the "I could have done that myself " component to Chong's paintings, and, perhaps it's true, if only patience were present. And, in the tradition of the snowflake, it only happens once, and remarkably through Chong's individual idea.