

Cici Wu

"Upon Leaving the White Dust"

47 Canal

18.04. – 27.05.2018

When Korean-American artist and novelist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha's unfinished film *White Dust From Magnolia* (1980) was screened at New York's Museum of Art and Design in 2017, Cici Wu was in the audience, capturing it with her *Foreign Object No. 1, Fluffy Light* (2016). This artwork – a functional, globular sculpture – records light data at twenty-four frames per second. The result of Wu's recording, converted to digital video, is the centerpiece of "Upon Leaving the White Dust", her first solo exhibition at 47 Canal. The pacific flicker of the thirty-minute looped projection of the movie sans images frames an ensemble of sculptures, almost all of which are small, acutely allegorical objects laid in a grid on the gallery's floor and refract Cha's literary and artistic accomplishments. In 1982, Cha left behind *White Dust* following her unjustifiable death at the age of thirty-one. A film and historical novel begun in 1980, it tells the story of a young woman who is Korean yet resides in China following Japan's 1909–1945 occupation of her native land (Cha's parents grew up in Manchuria, present day northeast China, in exile). She is also known for the experimental novel *Dictee* (1982) and edited *Apparatus: Cinematographic Apparatus* (1980), with contributions by Roland Barthes, Jean-Louis Baudry, Maya Deren, and Cha herself, among others. This volume approached film theory through the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist lenses then being developed in France, underlining the ideological significance of the mechanics of representation, and the nuanced political meanings of the viewer's relation to filmmaker, camera, screen, image, and so forth.

This anthology, as well as Cha's unfinished work, provides the conceptual underpinning of Wu's project. Her sculptural works, arranged in columns representing the eleven pages of Cha's *White Dust* storyboard and bathed in the

beam of the projector, cast enigmatic shadows that appear in somewhat jumbly, unfamiliar compositions on the gallery wall. Psychologically loaded, these have an unruly, disruptive implication – most people aren't happy when some object interrupts the hypnotic reverie of what Barthes called the "cinematographic cocoon". Shadows index a cinematic apparatus, yet their presence is traumatically unresolved and politically impartial, hinting towards the fleeting constitution of the dream-screen, and its entrapment of the spectatorial subject. Every so often, for a fraction of a second, the light brusquely drops as a scene changes in *White Dust*. The effect is quietly destabilising.

All handmade (with the exception of a half-arched section of a model train track), the sculptures constitute a translatory reading of Cha's notes for *White Dust*, and score certain thematics of her practice more largely. A scattering of LEDs in hand-blown glass bulbs are connected by enameled wire, glowing with the conviviality of jellyfish. Unglazed ceramics make the majority of the installation's recognisable elements: aeroplanes (one grounded, yet without wheels, another wingless), steam trains, tenderly crossed hands, and strange,

cuboid clay cartons with glass drinking straws. Across many scales, these represent techniques of overcoming distance, from touch, most simply, to industrial and globalised modes of transportation. Yet a corollary of each of these technologies is displacement: in a psychoanalytic mode, that of desire, as structured by the relation to the mother, and, in a geopolitical mode, that of diaspora, as introduced in Cha's work, and Wu's in turn. The installation holds these forces in uneasy equivalence.

A flag, made of rice paper and plastic, droops from the ceiling, with Chinese inscriptions reading "woman, man" on one side and "father, mother" on the other. Deliberate, tantalisingly detached, and romantic in its logic of fuzzy metonymy and formal transformation, the exhibition complicates the individuated subject that is formulated by dominant apparatuses of representation, delicately undermining some of the slippages of post-structuralist thought. In its afterglow is a paean to the legacy of a non-white postmodern avant-garde in the US, in which a social and psychological distance regarding Asia is troubled, a poetics of displacement collapsed.

Harry Burke

Cici Wu, *Upon Leaving the White Dust*, 2017/2018

Ceramic, clay, handmade glass, silicone, plaster, white fabric, rice paper, ink, plastic drop cloth, sponge, mop, Lehmann Gross Bahn train tracks, white LED, enameled wire, dupont connectors, arduino, video, dimensions variable

CRITIC'S GUIDE - 01 MAY 2018

Your Guide to the Best Shows to See in New York

Senior US Editor Andrew Durbin selects his highlights of the shows in the city during Frieze Week

BY ANDREW DURBIN

Cici Wu, 'Upon Leaving the White Dust'

47 Canal

18 April – 27 May

The Korean-American artist and novelist Theresa Hak Kyung Cha once described memory 'as a collective source, as almost having physical and organic dimensions ... It represents a body of time [...] within which our existence is marked like a wound.' At the time of that writing – which artist Cici Wu quotes extensively in the press release to her show 'Upon Leaving the White Dust' – Cha was attempting to finish

her 1980 film *White Dust* from Mongolia, with her brother James in South Korea. Neither the film nor its accompanying novel was completed when a New York City security guard raped and murdered Cha in 1982. In Wu's astonishing exhibition – her first solo show at 47 Canal – the artist returns to Cha's unfinished work in a melancholy installation and film that presents, as homage, the wounds left by memory and time.

Wu's show features small, mostly white, plaster-cast objects arranged in a grid on the gallery's blonde wood floor: hands posed atop one another, bare feet, a mop, a train's locomotive car, Lehmann Gross Bahn train tracks, an airplane and small, globular lights that pulse faintly in the half-dark. The objects are partially lit by a stark white film which fluctuates in brightness based on light data collected from Cha's *White Dust*. In the dimly lit gallery, one might be tempted to first refer to the space as 'dreamy' or 'dream-like'. It isn't. Instead, Wu's pieces crackle with the presence of history and the obscure mysteries that lie within them. 'Upon Leaving', with its 'plurality of entrances', as Wu writes, recalls Freud's interpretation of the uncanny as the familiar which the subconscious has made unfamiliar. Here, world-historical narratives have plunged into small objects, endowing them with pasts – and futures – the present has scrambled to suppress.



Cici Wu, 'Upon Leaving the White Dust', 2018, installation view, 47 Canal, New York. Courtesy: the artist and 47 Canal, New York

10 Galleries to Visit Now on the Lower East Side

By HOLLAND COTTER APRIL 26, 2018

Galleries, small and midsize, are having a rough ride. Rents keep climbing. So do art-fair fees. And certain people who might help pay the gallery bills — collectors, big-museum curators — keep not showing up except at a handful of spaces with social cachet and publicity machines. Plus, a sizable portion of the art audience has taken to doing its looking online, raising the question: Why have physical galleries at all?

Because they're the only places where you truly see new work, experience it. Scale, texture, light, air, mood; all that changes when you're physically present, shifting positions, moving in close, backing away, hearing noise from the street. Most of the galleries on the Lower East Side are still storefront-size, scaled for shopping, and open on Sundays. They put you in intimate contact with objects, sensations and ideas so you can examine them, stay with them, make them your own.



"Upon Leaving the White Dust," an installation by Cici Wu at 47 Canal on Grand Street

47 CANAL through May 27; 291 Grand Street, second floor, 47canal.us. The American artist and writer Theresa Hak Kyung Cha (1951-1982), one of the most intriguing figures of the 1970s, seems to have dropped from view for a younger generation. So it's great that Cici Wu, who was born in 1989 and came to the United States from China in 2012, pays tribute to her in a show, "Upon Leaving the White Dust," that sculpturally evokes a film, "White Dust From Mongolia," that Cha shot on a trip to her native South Korea and that was left unfinished when she died in New York City at the age of 31. Against a flickering projection of white light, Ms. Wu sets an assemblage of small objects that refer to images in the film: trains, an airplane, a mop, the silhouette of an urban skyline. "Memory, time, silence, words, and whiteness" were the essence of Cha's art, wrote the art historian Moira Roth, as they are of Ms. Wu's homage.