



THREE THOUSAND TROUBLED THREADS

Beili Liu, Los Angeles,

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Los Angeles, California – “Three Thousand Troubled Threads,” the Beili Liu show at the new Tarryn Teresa Gallery in the ever-evolving downtown arts enclave, is refreshing, elegant, and readily reflecting the new look of the old vanguard district surrounding 7th and Mateo Streets. The gallery moved from Bergamot Station last fall and reopened here in these stunning vaulted chambers that amplify with the breath and breadth of Liu’s installations, mixed media works, and video.

The video piece, *Tie-Untie*, is a remarkably innovative yet simple play on the genre in general, and a poignant expression of the artist’s chosen theme in particular. With a large nest of string on the floor and the projector pointed straight down upon it, the dark room itself takes on an instrumental role. Focusing all attention into the vibrant pool electrified with light and the imagery of a pair of hands articulating colored yarn back and forth, hither and away, in and out of the frame, the matter is mesmerizing. Furthermore, upon realizing that this meditative mirage takes place underwater, the whole thing seems to float and sink into the floor at the same time. The combination of the submerged action — with the color, the skin, and digits working the yarn with the soft highlight of the projection upon the nylon pool — is pure magic.

Practicing an art that is very culturally bound, Liu, in “Troubled Threads,” may bifurcate between tying and loosening those bonds, but she is clearly and very intricately weaving her oeuvre into who she is. Born in China, she acknowledges that there is a dichotomy in approaching life in the West that most Asian artists face when moving to America.

Liu states: “As someone who comes from the East and lives in the West, I have experienced two distinct and often contradictory value systems.”

This yin and yang is perhaps best exemplified in *Origin*, a large circular wall piece made of “spirit money” rolled up and mounted in opposing forces with clean regular rolls on one hemisphere, and charred and offered ones comprising the other. As with fine jewelry, the dainty elements — silver and gold hints beckoning from the edges — provide currency not only for the living, but also, in this case, power to those spirits moved on into the afterlife.

Lure #1, a vast, hanging installation, is comprised of what must be the thousands spoken of heretofore. Red thread makes a delicate forest of suspended coils balanced slightly above the floor that, upon closer inspection, are grouped in pairs. I was lured and magnetically pulled in to trace the organic contour in a meditative walk.

I have recently pondered the hallmarks of young female Asian artists. What is it, I wonder, that makes common ground between the touchstones of their work? The exploratory nature is a strong theme; much of it traverses great terrain while consistently harking to a tangible past swollen up in the craft (that divisive word used most complimentary). Here with Liu, however, is a departure that simultaneously broadens the conversation as well as transforms the approach to working with everyday materials in a singularly transfixing energy.

Miasma, another suspended piece, this one made primarily of wool and thread, extols the virtues of the transfixed state. Mystery shrouds the work. It could be made of many a thing: hair, cotton, shredded rubber, etc., and in its presence, one feels at a great loss to know the many stories it could tell. Yet it is the X factor ingredient of acrylic medium that pulls and stretches the wool and thread into an unrecognizable and unworldly realm. Both erotic and ghostly, the hanging strands mark an arrival at such a precise and wonderful choice of materials that you almost give up trying to figure the thing out. “By playing with the material — testing, manipulating, experimenting, and examining, even leaving it for months — I watch for the moment of surprise...” Liu states.

The incendiary work of Cai Guo-Qiang, albeit an older and male Chinese artist, comes to mind as Liu prefaces in her artist statement: “My work depends on a genuine connection to the material.” As seen in Cai’s retrospective, *I Want to Believe*, viewed at the Guggenheim in New York last spring, beyond the explosive theatrics of his enormous collection, there is a relative and prominent parallel between each artist’s gaze on the collective, multiple-content artwork and the almost mundane, everyday material that makes them. Cai is also an artist now living in the West.