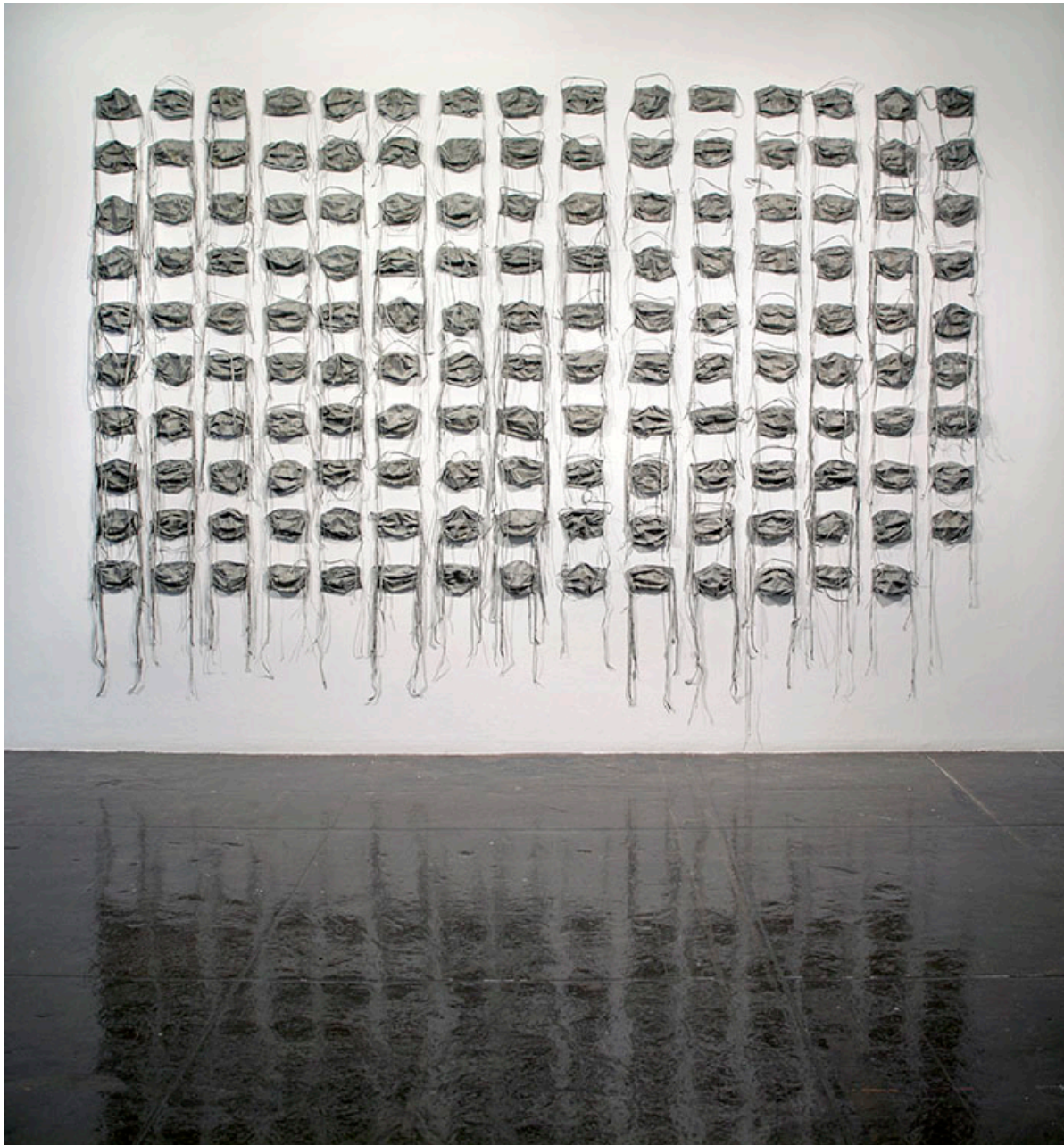


# PASSAGE

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## A Breath

BEILI LIU



BEILI LIU  
A BREATH  
2020

COTTON MASKS SEWN FROM PRAYER FLAGS, GROSGRAIN, CEMENT, AND SEWING  
NEEDLES  
180 X 95 X 1.5 INCHES



There is a Chinese saying: "Life starts with a breath, and ends with one." This breath is a constant, threading seconds, minutes, days into a lifetime.

Measuring, with my own—17 breaths a minute, for 8 minutes 46 seconds, it totals 149 breaths. The absence of 149 breaths is what it took, for life to depart from a human being, George Floyd.

How would we try to begin to fathom, and to heal? It starts, perhaps, with a breath of our own. 2020 had been a year centered around breathing, or, the inability of doing so. In this air that we share, for life and for death, a breath connects us all.



### **Notes from curator Annette DiMeo Carlozzi:**

From a place of deep empathy, Beili Liu makes installations reflecting on matters of hope and loss, determination and transience. Inspired by the metaphorical and physical materiality of everyday items, she transforms them through laborious artmaking tasks that she designs and undertakes. Her allegorical works—exquisitely responsive to their environments—are usually monumental in scale and comprised of multiple units that cry out to be touched. But we resist. It seems enough to know, to intuit that her hands, her body were given in compassionate service to this delicate new form, this butterfly-from-a-chrysalis. We observe, we sense Liu's bodily experience, her corporeal understanding of pain's toll, and we take it into our own selves, the communication expanding. If the human body can be a conduit for cultural memory, so too can we provoke understanding through art's transmission of energy and essence.

*A Breath* was made in response to the collective trauma of the global pandemic of 2020 and the precipitating international outrage following George Floyd's murder at the hands of police: the first a seemingly endless state of peril, the latter a specific tragedy unfolding over 8 minutes and 46 seconds. To better comprehend that singular duration, the artist counted her own breaths, taking in oxygen, letting it out, observing, enumerating from her comparatively safe space. 149 breaths until life left Floyd's body. 149 cloth masks, laid out in 15 rows of 10, minus one. Each mask stands in for the social contract we make to protect others. It serves as a calamity-filter for our lungs yet, here, the mask foils breath because of the watery cement coating that has rendered it impervious, hard and fragile. Beili speaks of that dipping and drying process as "taking the life out of the mask." Each breath, heavy in its absence, fraught, vulnerable, ghostly. Powerlessly witnessed then, tenderly commemorated now.



A BREATH (DETAIL)



A BREATH (DETAIL)

*Beili Liu's A Breath was created for the exhibition After Carolee: Tender and Fierce, guest-curated by Annette DiMeo Carlozzi at Artpace, San Antonio.*

*Born in Jilin, China, Beili Liu now lives and works in Austin, Texas. Liu received her MFA from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and holds the Leslie Waggener Endowed Professorship in the Fine Arts at the University of Texas at Austin.*