Brilliant Ideas Episode #39: Tiffany Chung

Layers of history and culture laid out on maps
The diaspora that the artist experienced

Vietnamese-American multimedia artist Tiffany Chung engraved her name in the international art scene with her map artworks. Born in Da Nang, Vietnam, she moved to America with her family after the Vietnam War, studied in

Being an artist, a researcher, and a historian at the same time, Tiffany Chung studies the conflicts regarding historical and cultural memory, immigration, and change of cities. Brilliant Ideas Episode #39, presented by Bloomberg and Hyundai Motor, features Tiffany Chung, the contemporary artist who
California, and returned to Ho Chi Minh City. Her experiences as a refugee greatly affected the establishment of her artistic world. Tiffany Chung covers a wide range of media including maps depicted on the canvas, map drawings, installations, videos, embroidery, and sculpture.

Various approaches to various subjects

Having experienced the Vietnam War and immigration to America in her childhood years, Tiffany Chung creates works that deeply explore the collisions and conflicts related to historical and cultural memory, immigration, and development and change of cities. Her father, who had been a helicopter pilot, was once caught and shot in Laos and imprisoned in the northern part of Vietnam. These events that the artist experienced herself and the resulted trauma along with the geographic change of a nation hurt and impacted by wars and environmental destruction caused by humans or by natural disasters are the main subjects of her works. Her study about the growth, deterioration, and disappearance of towns and cities is focused on urban development, environmental catastrophes, and humanitarian crises. Even on different subjects, her research and works never miss a reference to historic places.

Tiffany Chung chooses various ways to express her artistic ideas. Among many media including multimedia, mixed-media installation, and drawing, map drawing is most representative of the artist. Her map drawing reflects the impossibility of depicting and representing most of the places as accurately as in a map, comprising layers of topographic maps of deserted regions. Beyond the time and space, the maps also reveal the relationship between imperialist ideology and visions for modernity. With the exceptional use of colors, aesthetic value as well as the significant meaning is included; Tiffany Chung’s maps constitute the future predicted by historical and geological events along with spatial and socio-political changes and researches. Her works expand to the area of imagination and fantasies as
well as geography. Combining the international treaties and local histories, the artist revives certain memories that had been denied to be officially recorded. She also digs into the layers of various incidents created by history and culture, rewriting the chronicle of places in her own way.

**Things that exist beyond the maps**

Completed with the help of Australia’s Campbelltown Arts Centre, <The River Project>(2010) is about the Asia-Pacific river systems, looking into how the Mekong River has affected the surrounding region and residents. Drawn with the micro-pigment ink and oil paint, each of the maps consists two layers of imitation vellum and paper. <Dubai, 1973>(2010), also includes the past and future of the city that are compared with each other. The artist presented the map of Dubai in 1973 and <Dubai, 2020>(2010), a map of the future Dubai in 2020. Dubai’s map for the year 2020 did not exist at the time; the artist created it with her research team at Berlin. Predicting various plans and delivering suggestion, she came up with a concept of the city and made it into one satellite image.

One of the significant projects the artist carried out besides the map drawing is the project on houseboats (houses built in floating boats) in the Asia-Pacific region presented at the 2011 ‘Singapore Biennale.’ As a response to the predictions that the countries in the lower Mekong river basin can face a severe flood in 2050 and the pouring media reports about the sea level rise due to global warming, Tiffany Chung came up with “alternative urbanism”, which centers around the “floating way of life”. To become familiar to the houseboats on the Mekong River in Vietnam, the artist started to study other regions with houseboats including the Tonlé Sap Lake in Cambodia, Ha Long Bay in Vietnam, Sangkhla Buri in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Sausalito in America, and Yamaguchi Prefecture in Japan, exploring the structure and architecture of the traditional houses in the regions. After collecting local architectural
designs of houseboats, she changed and combined them to create a new village.

Except for the most basic components of ecological architecture such as rainwater harvesting and non-use of electricity in every design, she borrowed features from each example and mixed them. Thus, the floating imaginary village was completed. In a scale of 1:50, it was hung from the ceiling of the exhibition place as if actually floating. In this work, the artist questions and twists the aforementioned components of ecological architecture. Tiffany Chung has presented the works in which regions and their history are analyzed and studied from various points, with her direct experiences of facing the conflicts and change between regions and cultures functioning as her artistic foundation in various terms. The maps she created are not just for representing geographical features but for introducing something beyond that to the viewers. We are curious and looking forward to how far the artworks of Tiffany Chung will expand beyond the things we see in front of us. ■ with ARTINPOST
<Hiroshima> 2010

Embroidery, metal grommets and buttons on canvas 110×82cm
Multimedia artist Tiffany Chung is one of the Vietnamese diaspora who moved to America after the Vietnam War. Due to migration during her childhood, Chung's works often describe conflict, migration, city development, changing relationships in history and cultural memories. She handles various medium creating embroidered canvas maps, cartography drawings, performances, videos, and installations. Among her unique works, the map drawings are especially worthy of notice. It consists of multiple layers, with each layer presenting a different history of a devastated region and this reflects how impossible it is to make a perfect and accurate map.

Born in 1969, in Da Nang, Tiffany Chung studied photography at the California State University, Long Beach and studio art at the University of California, Santa Barbara. After graduation Chung returned to her homeland and she works mostly in Ho Chi Minh. She has had several solo exhibitions including exhibitions at the Hitachi City Museum, Ibaraki, the Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, the Galerie Christian Hosp, Berlin and the mc2 Gallery, Milan working across many cities. Now she is undoubtedly one of the artists who receive attention from around the world.