

Hyeyoung Shin

To encounter the work of Hyeyoung Shin is to enter into a theatrical experience. Her art is formed by a variety of approaches – drawing, papier mâché, printmaking, and even performance art. She embraces whatever is necessary to put human vulnerability on stage.

“I want people to see themselves in my art,” she shares in her studio on a cloudy day. Life-sized self-portrait drawings line the walls, a series created in response to the election of Donald Trump as president. Even if the viewer is not a female born and raised in South Korea, the postures are recognizable to us all – contemplation, grief, and self-protection.

Surrounded by these figurative images, the viewer becomes immersed in emotions, unconsciously adopting the stances to experience the feelings depicted. Making emotion visible is an important aspect of her artwork. In *Confusion*, despite the face of the female figure being covered by the drape of her hair, the inward slope of the shoulders and hung head reveal the feelings the title suggests.

Family is present in much of her work, if not as the subject then as the inspiration. Her works of papier mâché frames were created after she lost the last of her immediate family members, her father. They had a relationship marked by distance, both physical and emotional. After she had to throw out his frame collection in South Korea, she left with a question – “What can I do with my regrets?” She sought to recreate memories by using frames as sculptural paper molds embedded with two-dimensional printed imagery.

The image of a chrysanthemum inside of the frame was also inspired by family; it was her mother’s favorite flower. But due to her protracted illness and the scent of the flowers, she was unable to have them around her. It is a popular funeral flower in South Korea and Shin’s use of it combined with the frames of her father, offer a vision of the complicated nature of family and love. *Still* encompasses this by the bright floral tones bursting from the frame in contrast to the solitary and faceless female form.

Through the theme of loss, which she describes as a “hopeful depression,” a sense of empowerment emerges. In the recreation of her memories and regrets she literally reframes the stories of her life. In *Where We Were* four pairs of feet invite questions about relationships, loss, grief and identity.

Audience participation in her past work has included performance art in the form of foot washing. This invitation was a personal one in which it wasn’t uncommon for her recipients to cry as she washed their feet. As a part of the body that is often kept covered and hidden, her focus on feet highlights the vulnerability her work explores.

Through the art Shin is creating and whatever new idea is brewing, she wants to create time for the viewer, time away from work, away from distractions, away from thinking about achievement. It is here we can have a conversation about life's big questions.

Molly Krause