

Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and condition our lives.

Joseph Beuys

Background & Development:

I perceive myself as an artist participating in the continuous construction of society. By my nature I am a maker, I build, I manipulate, I create. The making process is what appeals to me. I attempt to align the making process with conscious intent, trying to make things for a reason. This process leads me to making many different things, each made a response to a certain set of circumstances. I work on my house, I determine the arrangement of space based upon its intended use. I work in my community, I organize systems to affectively address current issues. I work on my garden, arranging, trimming and planting to create a place of respite. I work on paper making images to develop a commentary and dialogue on our current state of existence. In every process the intent to affect change exists. In every process I am aware of my intentions. In every process I am open as the creative process suggests new paths. In the end, what I make is a manifestation of my creativity, intuition and will.

Over the past fifteen years I have worked to develop myself as an artist by positioning myself as a rebel, an agent of change. I have approached art making in terms of creating objects and images that begged for confrontation and questioning. My goal was to openly address social and personal issues to affect change. Working in such a vein I often felt isolated and unheard. To challenge the dynamic of the lone artist I reached beyond the normative role of an artist and became heavily engaged in community development work as a creative act. While I continued to make more traditional art in a secondary manner my main thrust was from the Beuysian

perspective, an active maker of my world. Despite finding the work and the results rewarding there was still something lacking which led me to return to academia.

Upon returning to the academic environment the confrontational work of my younger years no longer interested me in the same way. Yet, making work that was merely ornament also lacked appeal. To jump start the process I determined that delving into a process that I had no experience in, wood cuts, would allow me the freedom to explore a process without worrying about content. I quickly became enamored with carving the wood blocks, the physicality and plasticity of the process spoke to how my hands work, reminding me of how I made the choice as an undergrad to study clay. As I began carving simple, naturalistic images of birds and flowers I found great joy in it. As I explored where the joy stemmed from I began to understand what I enjoyed, that I was pursuing beauty.

Context:

Pursuing beauty had never been an intention in my work prior, in actuality it was antithetical to my earlier work. As I explored the idea of how I view myself as an artist and the idea of beauty it occurred to me that, when you look at the contemporary cultural implications, our current state of visual chaos, what is more radical than the idea of beauty. What is more radical than pursuing an objective that our culture has determined is without value? Images of gore, violence, pain, misery, misogyny, suffering, aggression – these are not shocking in a world raised on *reality* television, mainstream movies and *interactive* video games which propagate violence as a normative act. Social norms change as quickly as technology advances to provide new venues and access. While access to information is increasing connectedness and responsibility to each other, our communities and the world is decreasing. In this context beauty is perceived as individual taste void of meaning or the potential to influence our existence in a

positive way. Contemporary society is more apt to understand beauty as a marketing idea, something that can be bought and sold, not the naturalistic ideal of the past. My return to the age old pursuit of beauty is in this context highly rebellious.

My intent is not a matter of nostalgia for the past but a mirror to our present. In pursuing beauty I am attempting to emphasize what we are overlooking in our culture, its transformative power. As an artist I see myself as an agent of change. I believe that in my role as an artist I have the ability and responsibility to affect culture. In making work that poses questions about the values of our culture I am attempting to spark a conversation. My process, although inclusive of a meditative, cathartic making process is about anything but isolation. My intent is to engage with contemporary culture, to shape it by interjecting points of beauty, spaces of contemplation, into our world of visual chaos. I place my work in the context that informs much of Eastern philosophy, being based on the concept of seeking balance. If something is out of whack then the treatment is to introduce its opposite, to bring it back into balance.

My work is informed by my link with Eastern culture, art and philosophy. As an undergrad I became intrigued with Eastern philosophy and pursued a minor in such. My studies led to my first international experience, studying abroad in China for two months. Since then I have taken the opportunity to travel more of Asia including India and Nepal and became further intrigued with Asian cultural variations of universal concepts. Being immersed in Asian cultures the differences in perception became obvious. Where Western culture attempts to draw distinctive lines Eastern culture provides allowances for a host of implications. Where the West focuses on rules and laws the East focus is on roles and connections.

A primary connection between Eastern thought and the intent of my work is the concept of seeking balance. Eastern thought has developed precise and detailed ways in which to seek balance over many millennia. The idea is that there is a point of stasis in which a healthy person

interacts with a healthy world, everything is in balance. However, nature and people are in a constant state of change so seeking balance is vital to obtaining happiness. This is not the transcendental idea of bliss and enlightenment as often perceived by Western minds. You do not have to be a Zen Master or a Buddhist Monk to seek balance, all healthy beings should be seeking balance all the time. Seeking balance also does not mean sitting in front of a candle chanting a mantra, it means taking the actions to bring balance to your life, your world. I am making art that is seeking beauty to help bring balance to a world that is increasingly overwhelmed and obsessed with ugliness.

One of the distinctions between East and West is the idea of who is responsible for the creation of culture. In the recent history of the Western Art World artist have often attempted to escape the current state of culture rather than actively engage with it. The artist, alone, in his studio working on his masterpiece is an accepted ideal both in our culture and in the world of Western art. In the West we have a tradition that culture is the domain of the elite whereas in the East culture is created by the active participation of all. In India great effort is made make their homes, neighborhoods and cities holy in some way. This is generally accomplished with ornament and decoration including anything from lining the streets with pigments to spending hours making flower garlands to hang above door ways. This desire to make their community sacred extends to everyone regardless of caste or income.

Every person is responsible for creating the balance. We are now living in a global, interconnected, pluralist world. The images and traditions and religions that once occupied a single point on the globe have now scattered like seeds and sprouted in all the corners of the world. As a Westerner I have had the opportunity to study and assimilate information from a wide breadth of sources. At the same time I have been able to make connections between many cultures and customs and have found a certain universality that a pluralist world would seem to

deny. The use of ceremony and symbols crosses geographic, religious, cultural and time boundaries. Designs based on the circle or mandala, the lotus, hands, arms, eyes, flowers, numbers, planets, months – these can be found everywhere, they are a common history. I use these same motifs in my work to reference spiritual traditions and the ways that humanity has come to know and understand itself and our world.

Visual Language:

*Filling to fullness is not as good as stopping at the right moment
Over sharpening a blade causes its edge to be lost*

Tao Te Ching

My images have a straightforward, graphic nature which is a reaction to our contemporary culture of visual chaos. We are bombarded on a daily basis with information and images, layer upon layer. Television, the driving force of information and images in our culture, provides our only cultural training in understanding the visual. If you analyze the amount and speed of visual information presented to us via this media is astounding. Take, for example, what a typical cable news channel is putting out at any given hour of the day. The primary image is that of a talking head, adjacent to the talking head is a series of images illustrating what is being talked about, in another corner of the screen is the network logo, another corner may post the time and weather info, and on the bottom of the screen is a constant ticker tape of other information.

This is our daily existence, continuous information bombardment. In this context I place my work as an antithetical statement. It is simple, clear and plain. It is a resting spot. It is a quite background to the chaos. In the making process I use a rule of economy, using only what is necessary. Inasmuch I avoid the use of color in favor of a black, white and grey. The black, white and grey color palette allows all colors to exist, all three being the result of all colors, without

being overpowering, as is the mode of our current state of visual chaos. My choice to be frugal with the visual information I present is not focused on stripping an object down to its essential components but to shape a viewing experience that allows for respite.

The specific images I present exist in a world between fantasy and reality, between the ideal and what exists. This manner of making is akin to the literary tradition of Magical Realism, where non-normative elements are presented in a context of normality thereby creating a scenario where the reader, or viewer, is able to accept the non-normative as a logical element. I present my work as components of our everyday environment hoping that, when they are found, they feel like they belong to the space they occupy. These are “illogical” elements that I want people to accept in their environment. The elements offer the viewer a new experience, new ways to use the space that they use on a daily basis. In all three pieces I present, guiding the physical movement of the viewer is a vital component, as I am interested in creating an open dialogue between the viewer, the work and the space.

I leave an intentional openness in my work. The idea is not to prescribe a specific reading of the work but to present a framework in which viewers can project upon it their understanding and experience or, more vitally, step beyond their understanding and experience something new. In this simple, organized space I hope to present an opportunity for the viewer to re-engage with what the Taoist refer to the creative or what in the West one might think of as God (religious) or the universal (secular). I see my work as a tool to affect change, to re-tune our psyches and brains, to re-learn to read subtly, to understand seeking.

My intention in my work is not to proselytize but create beauty that speaks on its own accord. Although my work has religious themes it is not meant to convert. My intention is to provide a moment of respite, beauty, or pause to those who are willing to stop and interact. Although my beliefs are tied to Eastern thought, with strong emphasis on Hinduism and Taoist

understanding, I am not attempting to represent a specific tradition. I believe that divinity does not have a proxy held by any single tradition but works in its own nature. I also have decided to follow this spiritual/religious mode of making to challenge myself, as it is subject matter that often makes me uncomfortable. Much of the contemporary religious or spiritual based art I have come into contact with seems to rely on iconographic representation as its source for content. This form of making is prescriptive in nature, presenting a forgone conclusion that will only be received by a single audience. My mode of making and presenting is about developing a conversation about meaning and an opportunity for viewers to contemplate their own perception of the divine and divine attributes.

*Work toward emptiness and openness
Cultivate stillness
Breathe harmony
Become tranquility
As the then thousand things rise and fall, rise and fall
Just witness their return to the root*

Tao Te Ching

Projects:

One Thousand Arms:

I conceived of this piece when a series of events in my personal life required a great deal of compassion of me. The image is derivative of the One Thousand Armed Bodhisattva of Compassion. A bodhisattva is a person who has reached enlightenment but chooses to return to the physical plane of existence to help others. Bodhisattvas are often given special powers and attributes upon their return, and the Bodhisattva of Compassion was given 1000 arms to be able to offer more compassion to humanity.

In developing this piece I took on a specific making process, that the entire time I worked on the piece I would contemplate compassion. Additionally, I decided that it was vital to the meaning and purpose of the piece that I make each piece without assistance. The process entailed carving the original wood blocks, printing them and scanning them to produce a screen for screen printing. The screen printing process included cutting all one hundred and fifty yards of fabric into manageable sizes, ironing the fabric, and printing. After printing each piece was cut out, a backing piece of fabric was cut out and the two pieces were sewn together. The backing fabric is of various patterns and colors which provide for subtle shifts of color on the surface.

In conceptualizing the installation of the piece I was concerned about how people would interact with the piece. I decided to place a bed at the center of the piece to allow people to enter and participate. The piece is laid out with 998 pieces, allowing the participants arms to complete the 1000. The bed also becomes a mode that allows the viewer the ability to suspend disbelief by perceiving the installation as a dream, or from a dream-like state. In a dream we are willing to accept impossible feats and circumstances as rational. In a dream we allow ourselves powers and abilities that a much greater than we are. In offering this piece a component of the viewer's dream I am inviting the viewer to accept what might seem impossible as being possible.

The viewer/participant plays a key role in the completion of the piece, their action is required for the piece to come to fruition. Conversely, the participant can never see the completed image. The idea of action is central to the idea of compassion. Compassion is an active state, not an emotional state. Compassion is to suffer for, with, on behalf of another. Compassion is to take on someone else's suffering for them, to carry the load, to provide them relief from their burden. The viewer's participation is symbolic of the act of compassion.

Sound and video play a role in the installation of this piece. As the viewer circumambulates the piece the sounds change. The sounds represent the five elements of earth,

fire, water, air, and aether. The sounds of fire, water and air are fairly obvious. I chose the sound of “white” noise for aether and “black” noise (silence) for earth. The video component is an exploration of other ways of presenting. A small video camera is set up with a motion detector to capture viewer’s participation with the piece. These videos then are downloaded to my website and to You Tube. The use of video and web resources is an attempt to engage with a spectrum of our culture whose understanding of the visual is connected with contemporary media and technology forms.

One Thousand and Eight Hands:

Utilizing the general form of a mandala, I present 1008 hands screen printed on black velvet. The specific impulse for this piece centers on the idea of seeking, seeking knowledge, seeking, connectedness, seeking enlightenment. The eye-in-hand symbol is fairly ubiquitous across many cultures throughout time. This symbol is associated with the idea of seeking, of coming to know. I chose to use a scientific cross section of the eye to challenge the viewer to “read” the image and to present the idea of the multiple modes that seeking takes. We understand through many different methods - science, philosophy, religion, observation, intuition – knowing is accessible from them all.

The choice to print on black velvet was twofold – one, the weight of the fabric allows it to lay flat while providing a surface of interest – two, the cultural construct of the valuelessness of black velvet paintings provided an opportunity to redeem the material for what it is , a material, offering a challenge to the viewer’s preconceptions. The juxtaposition of material and meaning opens the door to understanding where knowledge can be found and the many places we refuse to look for knowledge due to our training or notions about where knowledge exists.

One Hundred and Eight: Mala

The Mala (beads) is a chain of prayer beads associated with Hindu and Buddhist practice containing 108 beads. The practice of printing each of the 108 prints in this series was akin to the meditative practice using prayer beads. The series is set up as twelve prints of nine plates, representative of the twelve months of the year and the nine planets, for a total of one hundred and eight. These simple woodblock prints are printed on beautiful, handmade Kitakata paper, a symbol of preciousness. As the preciousness of all things physical is something to be transcended in a spiritual practice I had to force myself to get over the preciousness of the paper. I did this by pulling proofs on the paper itself versus using a cheaper paper. The second hurdle was to sew the pieces of paper together to form the chain of the mala, thereby violating the precious nature of the paper but also allowing it to become something greater than its individual piece.

Emulating the form of a set of prayer beads is used as a device to invite the viewer to come to the piece in a tone of meditation and contemplation. In hanging the piece from the ceiling in the atrium the viewer is able to explore the piece from many vantage points. The piece takes on a lighter than air quality as the viewer moves around it. Once the viewer has decided to engage with the piece the viewer is directed by the piece and follows it around the building.















