



Installations by Holly Wong and Stephanie Leitch Create Liminal Experiences at OCA

By Heather Hopkins on August 19, 2023



The soaring ceilings and commodious galleries of Ogden Contemporary Arts make an ideal environment for large-scale installations. Two simultaneous exhibitions on view right now prove the point. The staff at OCA, along with independent curator Kelly Carper, have brought in two artists who are well established in their own large-scale practices to share the space. Having two artists whose work can make an impressive statement solitarily coming together could present a myriad of logistical issues. If such issues arose in the installation process, all kinks were eliminated as the show comes across as intentional and cohesive.

Before one makes it through the OCA entrance, they are met with the work of San Francisco artist Holly Wong. Through the OCA's crystalline front windows, sunlight penetrates her enormous and airy work, "Guardians of the

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY



Spirits.” Wong utilizes textiles and light-reflective thread to quilt together small fragments. Materials in these fragments range in texture and transparency, offering viewers the gift of visual uncertainty. After creating smaller sections to work with, Wong then cut them again, and reassembled them into the kaleidoscopic final work. The end result is a 22-foot suspended, immersive sculpture.

Wong is a self-proclaimed feminist artist, so it is no surprise that the inspiration for this work can be traced back to her reverence of women and the boundlessness they encompass. Speaking of her feminist inspiration, Wong notes: “... it is one of the primary reasons I work large. Much of contemporary culture focuses on women having small bodies and fitting within acceptable norms for beauty. My installations are large and expansive, often including commonly ‘feminine’ materials because I am trying to take the power back,

thinking big, and saying that our bodies are beautiful as they are and that we are stronger and more powerful than we know.” It is Wong’s hope that her work can act as a safe space that may be utilized for healing. With the immersive element of “Guardian of the Spirits,” this becomes a physical reality as viewers can be engulfed by the sculpture.

Though “Guardian of the Spirits” takes up the most real-estate in the exhibition, Emergence doesn’t end there. Wong has presented three additional sculptural works mounted to the walls at either end of the gallery. These three works are part of a series known as Shadow Bodies. By assembling hundreds of pieces of tulle with reflective thread, Wong creates work that again plays with our sight, perspective, and even reality. Viewers may find themselves blinking to reorient their eyes when looking at the apparitional works. As noted in the wall label, Shadow Bodies serve as proxy for the spirit of Wong’s mother, who died at the young age of 47, as well as a celebration of aging female bodies.

Now at the age of 51, Wong has surpassed her mother in life lived, which adds unique layers to the emotional grappling that aging women in our society experience. Wong states: “I work with light, reflective, and transparent fabric because it reminds me of the permeable separation between the living and the dead. ... The colors visually diffuse and layer in the work as a metaphor for wisdom; the sense that things are sometimes not what they seem, and that truth or experience changes over time.”



On OCA’s second floor, viewers will find “Spell Field,” by an artist well-known to Utah’s art community. Stephanie Leitch’s multidisciplinary work and large-scale installations, informed by the artist’s OCD, are rife with symmetry and pattern. Spanning the length of two entire gallery spaces, Leitch’s pendulous “Spell Field” is sure to stop viewers in their tracks. Pipette tips, acrylic discs, and glass beads affixed to EDM wire hang in a perfectly harmonious “field” above a base of hundreds of copper BBs. If Leitch’s exacting process contrasts with Wong’s more organic methods, the artists echo each other in creating a visual illusion. “Spell Field” is at once solid, and aura-like. Both interior and exterior. It overwhelms the senses, while calming the nervous system.

BRIDGETTE MAYER GALLERY

A rather unique component to Leitch's practice is the implementation of spellwork, or the creating or casting of spells. Though it has been part of the artist's practice for six years, it came to the fore in the wake of the pandemic. "When I couldn't be in the studio as much during the pandemic, I found myself drawn to the intricate inner workings of spell work at home. What started as a layer of encoding that was erased through other means in a process-piece, became outright markings and drawings." The spell in this piece is "Entrance" or "EN+RANCE." Though the spell is etched 20,352 times onto the suspended acrylic discs, due to several factors it is easily missed by viewers. Hiding things in plane view is something the artist enjoys utilizing. An excerpt of the "Spell Field" artist statement reads: "You as the viewer activate the spell by experiencing the work. And here we stand at the Entrance, at the threshold between the end and the beginning."

It is evident that optics are not the only similar quality Wong and Leitch's artworks share. A throughline of transitory emphasis tethers the work of the two distinctive artists. Curator Kelly Carper, director Venessa Castagnoli, and the staff of OCA have initiated a conversation on liminality with this exhibition pairing.

Holly Wong: Emergence and Stephanie Leitch: Spell Field, Ogden Contemporary Arts, Ogden, through Oct. 15

The exhibits include an optional interactive component, which encourages visitors to create their own artwork based on their personal ideas of "safe space". This part of the show was inspired by workshops Wong lead with the Youth Impact Center and YCC Family Crisis Center in Ogden.

All images courtesy the author.

Full article: <https://artistsofutah.org/15Bytes/index.php/installations-by-holly-wong-and-stephanie-leitch-create-liminal-experiences-at-oca/>