

GENTLE DAYLIGHT

ASHLEY YEO

22.08-13.09.20

MIZUMA GALLERY





Ashley Yeo's intricate works can be discussed in so many ways. As she refers to them as "objects" (defying descriptions as sculpture or art) she opens up the way we can single out any number of signifiers that will direct us to meanings from big fields of knowledge such as material culture.

For example, the tessellations in these geometric expressions resonate with mystical or cosmological insights such as the finite and the infinite, the linear time against the non-linear, multitude and unity, dispersion that leads back to connectivity of all things through space and time. The mandala, in *A soft spring*, invokes the mystical concept of Many into One, One into Many. I draw parallels to the decorative forms seen inscribed in Sufi arts as an example. However, unlike such arts seen in public spaces, buildings and institutions, there is a personal and almost private intimacy intended in her miniatures (like something precious to be held close to oneself).

In another way, her work gives breath to alliances with Agnes Martin's tiny grid drawings. In Martin's "errant ephemeral behaviour of drawing: it is a space of contemplation, of immateriality, and yet it is also a space of labour, repetition and meticulous labour" (Fer 182). Unlike Martin's work, which draws from the "aesthetics of the thrown away or marginal," referring to the disposability of drawings (Fer 181), Ashley's work rides familiarly on craft and the decorative arts.

The craft labour invested in the work, intended for the art gallery, offsets the mass production and low-art category of attributed women's (arguably "feminine") labour in weaving, lacemaking or embroidered domestic items such as papercut or other festival decorations, doilies, table cloths, curtains, or pillow cases.

One cannot be immune to the dexterity of Ashley's making processes. They have been learnt over many overseas residencies and courses: Japanese watercolour woodblock in Japan, Chinese Meticulous Painting in China. Gradient painting techniques learnt in China were gingerly applied in the coloured works *Take care of you* and *The untouchable solitude of someone else*. Ashley skirts around material tensions that arise because of the thinness or the grain of the paper, the density of negative over positive areas in the designs, all which may declare the work's breaking points.

But despite the utter fragility of thinly cut trellis, her work is not ephemeral.

It is not ephemeral by the inclusion of constructed acrylic encasements. In this endeavour, as the papercuts are always at risk of effacement by damage or destruction, Ashley also provides a means of preservation, and extends the relationship further to the white space, the gallery and the institutionalisation of art, ironically displacing its "objecthood."

Over and above all, detracting from these readings, of the flowers (she names camellias, daffodils) that inspire the floral and trellis motifs she confesses she likes: "the visual, the fragility, joy, without being calculative. Just for the simple pleasure of looking at something beautiful." Floral arrangements appeal to her.

I draw from an old statement of hers: "And so we go back to nature, to nature, my comfort. They were the manifestation of the whole. Crystallization, like dying, has become a process of living." (Wong 18). As nature, they are beautiful, comforting, civilised, in contrast to a Nature, wild, frightening, sublime.

Her works are telling of *ikebana*, in the way the pristine papercuts and other elements are arranged or suspended in a space, preserved and boundaried by the acrylic panels. The papercuts do not exist alone (these are "raw" to Ashley), but exists in relation to its extended and imagined space, like lines that do not end at the fringe of paper but leaps beyond, like the floral sprays of *ikebana*.

Ashley's work necessitates long periods of self-imposed solitude. It demands that same degree of contemplation from the viewer.

One has to set aside thought in order to meditate on the form. How dense intricacy of form, the fragility of material, makes the objects precious. One has to contemplate Ashley's objects, like Japanese rock gardens or *ikebana*, not born of thought and lofty intellectual ideas, just comforting in their presence.

Even if with thought, we cannot but appreciate the calculated repetitions, lines, arcs, which perform as drawing gymnastics in the hands of their maker. In *The untouchable solitude of someone else* and others, how neatly and precisely patterns meet at corners without breaking the floral repetitions.

The work is both the detail and the whole: small enough to see the whole work at once but compelling enough to scrutinise and meditate on the fligreed effort, and to wonder at the maths. And through material, it becomes metaphysical nouns like infinity, perfection, bliss. What is geometry but an attempt to express the imagined infinity?

Here the digital world and Adobe software facilitate the design templates or "botanical symmetries" that Ashley created. The formidable geometric hoops succeed, especially in the work that folds in corners and extends into depth. Here one can again think about the technology-aided processes, and the place of technology in today's production of art, and the irony of artists' inclination and sheer determination to produce by hand.

The imperfections appear (as Ashley herself points out—in the varying thickness/thinness of the lines) and the tense effort to perfection is what stokes the pleasure of looking at.

The tiny proportions of the work, in miniature—flatly refuses the scale of spectacle. Intimacy extends to your, the viewer's, relationship with the object—perhaps the way your body and eye has to bend and squint in unison to see the work. Even the largest work on exhibition, the installation of porcelain droplets, 4.22 x 2.4 x 1.2 m, is a miniature—a miniature waterfall.

In earlier days, Ashley was once focused on how to make objects appear light, revolving the materialised work around the idea of floating or flight. In the same way today, lightness is still apparent. The object is robbed of its weight and opacity by the dense negative areas, to become light, suspended in space literally, allowing for flight, and in defiance of gravity.

Likewise, the suspended "waterfall" and the porcelain allusion to the water spray, suggests some of that: how water takes flight, and the configurations of the flight of each droplet, create patterns that evolve.

Ultimately, to wring a singular reading of a made object is always futile and does not do the work justice. Ashley shares a quote by Wu Tsao¹: "vague poetic feelings/ that I cannot bring together." It is things-in-the-making, things that shift and evolve in our minds, as we contemplate it, that is the poetic. As we struggle to make

sense of this process, we also allow pleasurable resonances to seep into our consciousness; it is this that gives these "objects" their value.

Susie Wong, August 2020

¹ From *Bitter Rain in my Courtyard*, circa 1800. Wu Tsao was a 19th century Chinese female poet.

References:

Fer, Briony, "Drawing Drawing: Agnes Martin's Infinity." *Women Artists in the Millenium*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006.

Benjamin, Walter. *The work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction*, 1935.

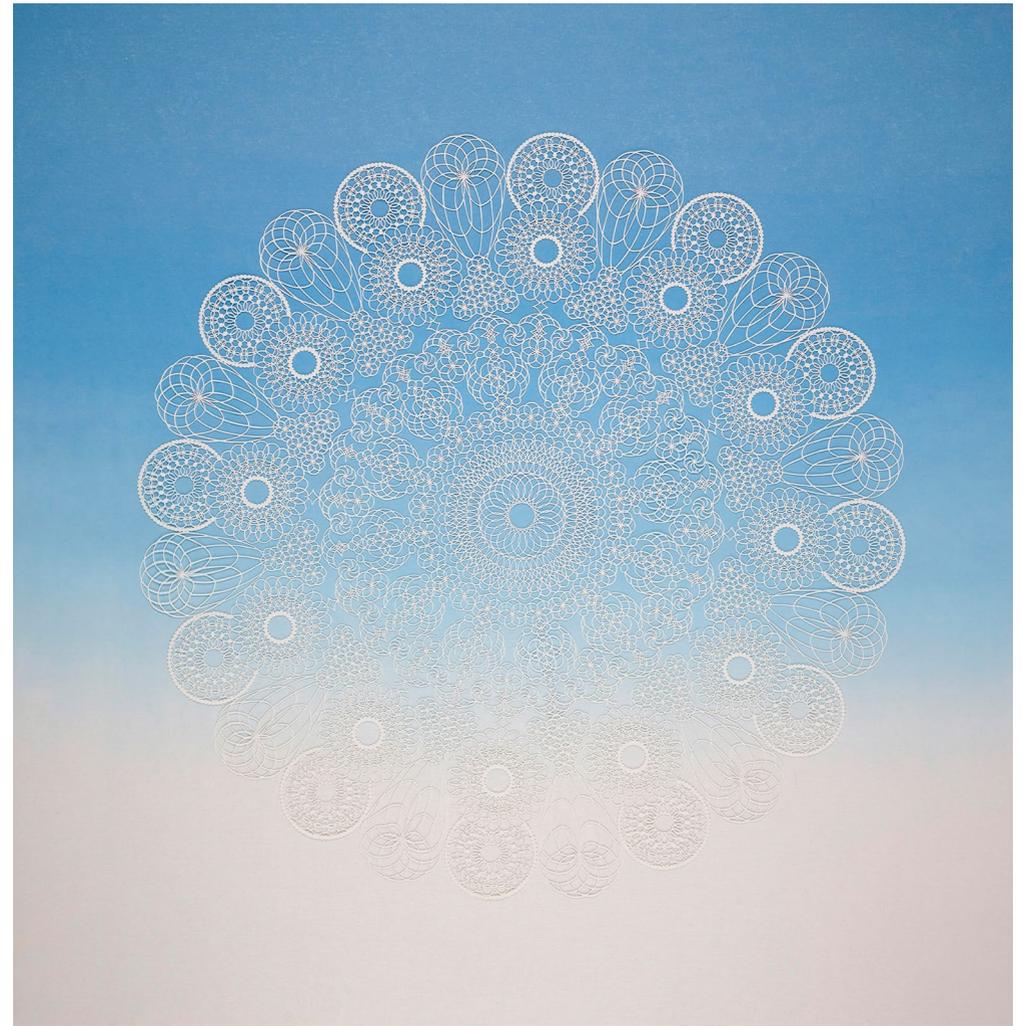
Wong, S (ed). *[The Machine] Contemplating the Body*. SGH, 2012.



Where is away
Japanese paper, porcelain, beads, crystals, weights
422 x 240 x 120 cm
2020



Take care of you
14.5 x 3.6 x 3.6 cm
hand-cut paper with glitter particles, alcohol-based pigment
2020



A soft spring
44.5 x 44.5 cm
hand-cut paper
2020



Non
3 x 6 x 3 cm
hand-cut paper with glitter particle
2020



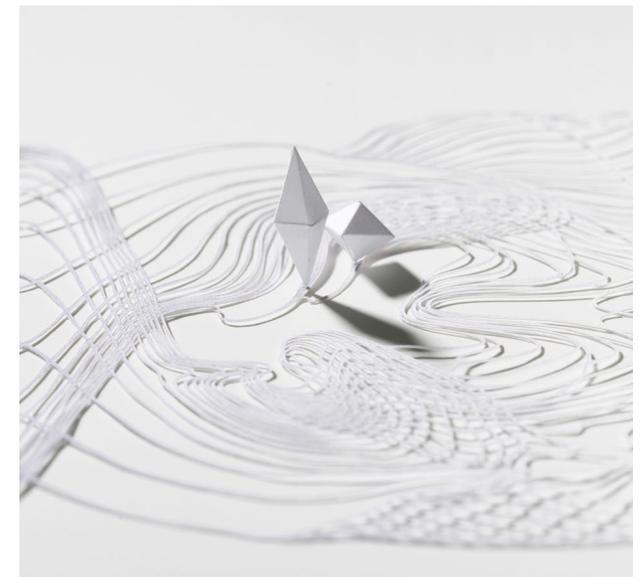
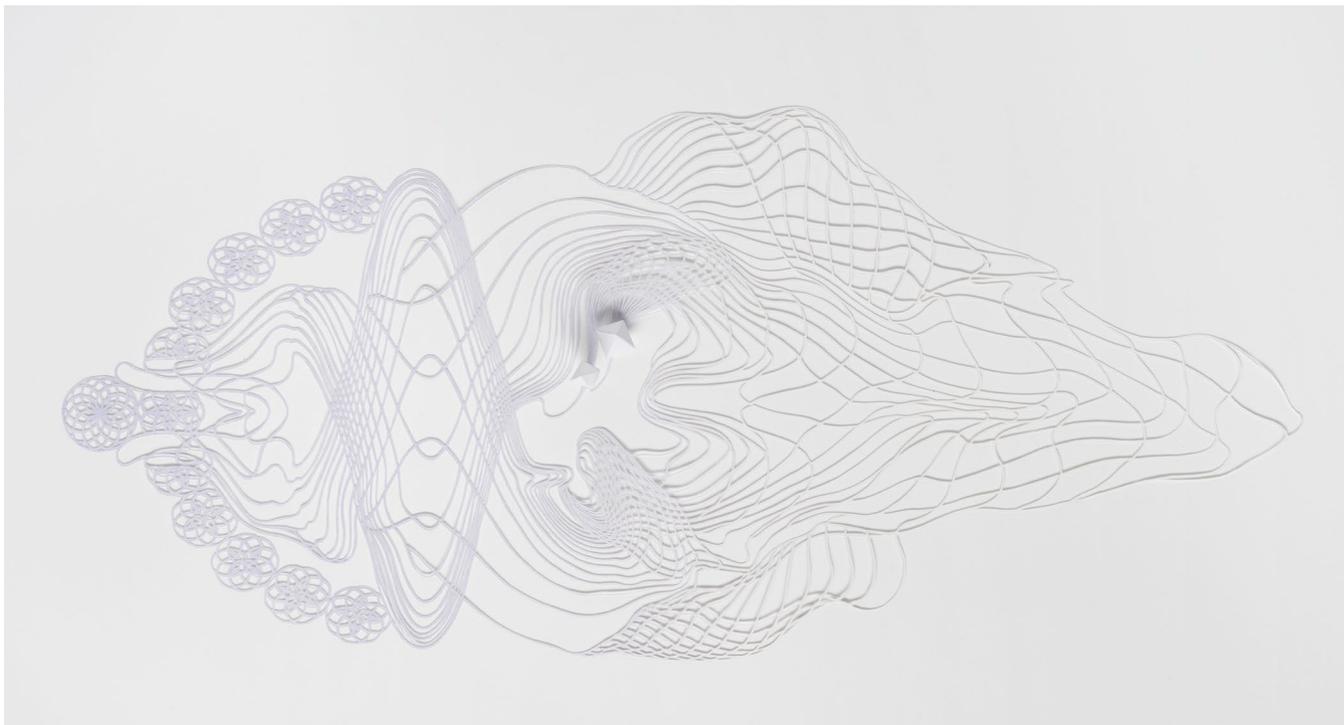
The untouchable solitude of someone else
hand-cut paper with pigment
4 x 4 x 4 cm
2020



Morning
11 x 5 x 5 cm
hand-cut Japanese paper with pigment
2020



A space between those spaces
9 x 18 x 5.2 cm
hand-cut paper
2020



Pale violet
hand-cut paper with pigment
1.5 x 13 x 28.5 cm
2020

ASHLEY YEO	EDUCATION	2019	2013	<i>I AM WHAT I AM</i> , Sculpture Square, Singapore	RESIDENCIES
Born in Singapore, 1990.	2012	<i>Bloom</i> , iPreciation, Singapore	<i>Found</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA@Loewen), Singapore		2018
Lives and works in Singapore.	MA Fine Art, Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London, United Kingdom	<i>ON/OUT OF PAPER</i> , Mizuma Gallery, Singapore	<i>Popin Criss Cross</i> , The Art House, Singapore	<i>Minutes of Meeting</i> , Praxis Space, Singapore	Jeju Culture and Art Foundation, Jeju Island, South Korea
	2011	2018		AWARDS & GRANTS	Light Grey Art Lab Creative Residency, Light Grey Art Lab, Iceland
	BA (Hons) in Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore	<i>Loewe Craft Prize Exhibition</i> , London Design Museum, London, United Kingdom	<i>Mini Buku</i> , Mi Casa Su Casa, Singapore	2018	2016
		2017	<i>Dialogue, The Promise</i> , CMU Art Center, Chiang Mai, Thailand	Shortlisted, LOEWE Craft Prize, London, United Kingdom	2016
	SOLO EXHIBITIONS			2017	Studio Kura Residency, Fukuoka, Japan
	2020	<i>Ashley Yeo and Xiaofei Yue: Recent Drawings on Paper</i> , Waterlon Galerie, Chicago, United States	<i>Night as Mine</i> , Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore, Singapore	Marketing and Development Grant, National Arts Council, Singapore	Japanese Watercolour Woodblock, Mokuhanga Printing (Mi-Lab), Kawaguchiko, Japan
	<i>Gentle Daylight</i> , Mizuma Gallery, Singapore	<i>Skin</i> , Becky Art Space, Jeonju, South Korea; Mokuhanga Lab, CfsHE Gallery, Tokyo, Japan	<i>Looking for Time</i> , The Private Museum, Singapore	2013	Foundation in Interaction Design, Copenhagen Institute of Interaction Design (CIID), Copenhagen, Denmark
	2016	2016	<i>Future Map</i> , Lethaby Gallery, London, United Kingdom	Capability Development Grant, National Arts Council, Singapore	2014
	<i>The haze in their eyes</i> , Becky Art Space, Jeonju, South Korea			2012	Arctic Circle Residency, International Territory of Svalbard
	2015	<i>Imaginarium: An Odyssey</i> , Singapore Art Museum, Singapore	2012	Presentation and Participation Grant, National Arts Council, Singapore	School of Visual Arts Summer Residency, New York, United States
	<i>You must imagine Sisyphus happy</i> , FOST Gallery, Singapore	<i>In their Oceans</i> , Jendela (Visual Arts Space), The Esplanade, Singapore	<i>project:showcase {ART}</i> , Push!, London, United Kingdom	2012	Finalist, Griffin Art Prize, London, United Kingdom
	2012	2015	<i>Chelsea Salon Show</i> , Round Chapel, London, United Kingdom	2011	Recipient of LASALLE College of the Arts Academic Excellence Award, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore
	<i>The Lost Children</i> , Gallery du Monde, London, United Kingdom	<i>The Measure of your Dwelling: Singapore as Unhomed</i> , Ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) Gallery, Berlin, Germany	<i>Foul Perfection</i> , Castle Pub, London, United Kingdom	2010	National Arts Council Scholarship, National Arts Council, Singapore
	<i>Room</i> , Foxriver Gallery, Singapore	2014	2011	2010	Travelogue Practice, The Winston Oh Travelogue Award, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore
	2011	<i>Echoes of Anticipation</i> , FOST Gallery, Singapore	<i>Minimart</i> , The Substation, Singapore	2013	2013
	<i>A Thousand Words and more</i> , Orchard Central Kartestudios, Singapore	2010	<i>The Sketchbook Project</i> , Art House, New York, United States	2013	Vermont Studio Centre, Vermont, United States
	2010	<i>Art on Paper Biennial</i> , Weatherspoon Museum, North Carolina, United States	2010	2013	Elsewhere Museum, Greensboro, United States
	<i>Silent Infatuations</i> , Trispace, Singapore	<i>Smallness</i> , FASS Gallery, Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey	<i>Take Away</i> , Sabanci University, Istanbul, Turkey		
	GROUP EXHIBITIONS		<i>France + Singapore New Generation Artist</i> , Alliance Francaise, Singapore		
	2020	<i>Echoes of Anticipation</i> , FOST Gallery, Singapore	<i>The Persistent Illusion</i> , Forest Rain Gallery, Singapore		
	<i>Time Passes</i> (forthcoming), National Gallery Singapore, Singapore	<i>(Machines) Contemplating The Bodies</i> , Singapore General Hospital, Singapore			

Executive Director Sueo Mizuma established Mizuma Art Gallery in Tokyo in 1994. Since its opening in Gillman Barracks, Singapore in 2012, the gallery aims for the promotion of East Asian artists in the region as well as the introduction of Southeast Asian artists to the international art scene. From 2014 to 2019, the artist residency space “Rumah Kijang Mizuma” operated in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, providing a new platform for dialogue by supporting exchanges between East Asia and Southeast Asia. In 2018, a new gallery space, “Mizuma & Kips” in New York, USA, as a shared collaboration between Mizuma Gallery from Tokyo and Singapore, and Kips Gallery from New York.

Mizuma Gallery features the works of Japanese artists including Aida Makoto, Aiko Miyanaga, Amano Yoshitaka, Ikeda Manabu, Tenmyouya Hisashi, and Yamaguchi Akira. Moreover, it showcases the works of renowned East Asian artists such as Ai Weiwei, Du Kun, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Ken + Julia Yonetani, and Zhao Zhao. The gallery also features the creations of prominent and emerging artists from the region including Agan Harahap, Albert Yonathan Setyawan, Angki Purbandono, Entang Wiharso, Gilang Fradika, Heri Dono, indieguerillas, Made Wianta, Mark Justiniani, Nasirun, Budi Agung Kuswara, Robert Zhao Renhui, Zen Teh, Ashley Yeo, and Ben Loong. Mizuma Gallery participates annually in international art fairs including Art Basel Hong Kong and The Armory Show New York, promoting Asian artists on an international art scale.

Set in a former military barracks dating back to 1936 and surrounded by lush tropical greenery, the Gillman Barracks visual arts cluster was launched in September 2012. Jointly developed by government agencies, the Singapore Economic Development Board (EDB), the National Arts Council (NAC), and the JTC Corporation (JTC), Gillman Barracks' vision is to be Asia's destination for the presentation and discussion of international and Southeast Asian art. For more information, please visit www.gillmanbarracks.com

With the support of



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