

Zhou Documents

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Lin Tianmiao

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China

Beijing

Lin Tianmiao

New Works was Lin's first exhibition in Beijing and it was small. She presented only two pieces, *The Proliferation of Thread Winding* and *The Temptation of St. Theresa*, each alluding to similar themes: women. To say that her installations explored the nature of women raises the thorny question of this nature being one inherent to women, or one that society imposes upon its female half, the objects she used being entirely synonymous with women. It is a question that Lin's work served to highlight, but did not seek to answer.

The Proliferation of Thread Winding comprised a simple iron bed frame, spread with a mattress, and a pillow at the head. The usual cotton covers for both pillow and mattress were replaced with those made from rice paper. Each cover was hand-sewn but held firmer at the edges with a line of five-inch needles. A video monitor was set into the pillow and relayed the mesmerizing, looped image of female hands engaged in winding string into balls of thread. The pinkness of the hands provided the only hint of color in the piece. The filmed motion captured what was the greater part of the preparatory work; the winding of approximately 2,000 ping-pong-sized balls of string.

In *The Proliferation of Thread Winding*, these balls lay on the ground at the foot of the bed, spread out like a mantle of hair. The loose end of each ball was threaded through the eye of a needle; two thousand needles ranged in a dense nest of more than 20,000 individually placed in the upper surface of the paper mattress cover. This mass effected a loose reference to the female sexual organ yet this was not a consciously preconceived arrangement.

The main elements of Lin's work revolve around a

contrast between hard (male/yang) and soft (female/yin), here represented by steel needles on a yielding base. This was slightly over-stressed in the giant fifteen-meter long paper trousers hung from the ceiling close to the end of the bed. They were an obvious allusion to dominance with the open fly, surrounded by a massing of pins, echoing the mass of needles on the bed. One leg slipped under the clustering of balls on the ground and interrupted the flowing motion of the threads, intruding on the bed as a whole.

Thread was the passage between the two opposites, linking, joining, uniting. The process of making the balls was a vital aspect of the work; the physical and laborious motion of winding thread by

hand required help, bringing together a group of willing men and women. This forced attention on tasks that traditionally reside in the domain of women; sewing, weaving, crafts, the home. The time required for the work provided the opportunity for focused consideration of the installation as a whole. For this reason it evolved on a slight tangent from the original idea. The result redolent of the patience, labor, and devotion required to produce such objects alone emphasized certain general qualities that distinguish female from male.

The second piece, *The Temptation of St. Theresa*, was made up of six wooden workmen's tool carriers suspended at eye level. Each contained an over-spilling quality of facial cream, the cheap, chemically

colored—white and cochineal pink—and harshly fragranced kind. For Lin, these colors intimately relate to women—as traditional shades of underwear—as well as to beauty care as a necessity that is pumped down the throat of any modern woman. Again, the hard texture and form of the boxes provided a striking contrast to the soft, gloopy nature of the cream. St. Theresa exemplifies a life-long devotion to God—female subordination to a male she will serve unquestioningly, and in St. Theresa's case, without the time or the inclination, to be tempted to beautify herself at all.

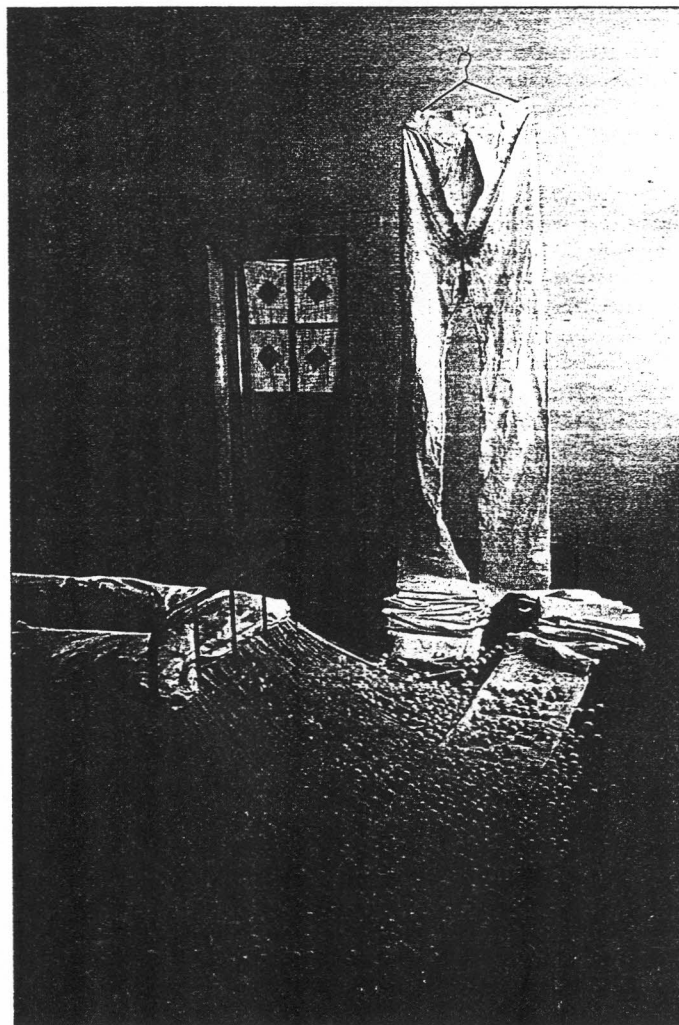
Karen Smith

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Wang Gongxin

What are you looking at?" asks a voice from the center of the room. "What indeed," we ask, for on first sight the room in which we are standing in Wang Gongxin's home is completely empty. But from where we stand in the doorway, there is a further emptiness not visible until we take a step nearer the center of the room. A one-meter square chunk of tiled flooring has been removed and placed at a diagonal on the space it previously covered. Here, the surface is pierced, a hole is revealed beneath and down in the depths of the earth, the blue "sky of Brooklyn" glows up at us. In full daylight it is easy to see that this is the screen of an upturned television set, a video of the sky playing a continuous loop along with a soundtrack that sends it questions up to the viewer as they peek into this meter-deep hole. As evening falls, the illusion of a passage through the earth is awarded increasing impact.

It is a tale recounted often in childhood that, if you dig deep enough, you can pierce the earth, tunnel right through to the other side. From America, the opposite pole is China, and the phrase used, "go dig a hole to China," emphasizes the inanity of such an undertaking, a



Lin Tianmiao, *The Proliferation of Thread Winding*, 1994, installation, paper, needles, bed, thread.