

Contradiction: Permanent Temporal

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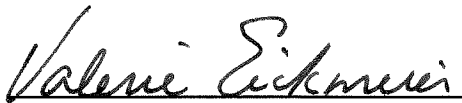


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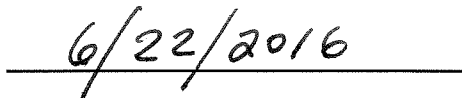


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Each individual utilizes memory and experience as the path to explore unknown, and memory functions even more significantly when one physically or mentally dislocated from the environment where the memory was created in. People always try to make memory more accessible by using or manipulating tangible objects, for example: photography, videotapes, and sound tracks. Not only to record life, but also to seek permanence since each human being only has limited time of consciousness. As memory, it's permanent, as experience, it's relatively temporary. As artists and designers, there's not much difference in terms of approaching memory, however by using different medias, the processes and outcomes are always more delicate and unique. I create objects also utilizing memories that inspires or and have influences on me. For me, it's a process of exploring the relationship between temporality and permanence.

Part of my childhood memory inspired 'P I&II'. I went to primary school in China from age of 6 to 12. Back to that time, every classroom in the school I went to was equipped with old cheap wooden furniture from the 80s. Traditional Chinese style desks and long stools, with all sloppily crafted through mortises, of which all tenons are either slightly bigger or smaller than the mortises. This tactual memory of those shapes remains with me that as a child that time, I used to use my fingers to touch and feel all the bad crafted tenons when I was bored or distracted in class. It almost became a pleasing distraction or even a habit during the time as a kid and this memory emerges from time to time for years.



I came here with neither hand making experience nor the skills to operate all the machinery and tools in the woodshop and this led me to start thinking about the making process of those sloppily crafted furniture. The idea of trying to remake those forms came up and seemed to be a good way to replicate the memory, meanwhile to gain hand-making experience, through which I also would be able to express my appreciation to the memory as well as craftsmanship. What I really want to achieve is trying to make my temporary experience permanent and to enjoy the making process as much as possible. The process of achieving these goals began with making all the through mortises with both machinery and hand tools, through the process of which I explored and recognized the tactual experience from old time.



There's also a cultural difference that shaped the design of 'P I&II'. In Asia, people neither sit on nor put their bags on the ground or floor because they don't want to get dust on their bags or pants. In 'P I&II', extra space is added to traditional Chinese stool form for people to place their carry-on items or things that they won't normally put aside themselves when they are sitting. It seems to be an unnecessary design, but I always think humans' subconscious and habits are important elements that should be analyzed and utilized when designing objects. Furniture should provide support, company and make people feel secure. I hope it's a good innovation and 'P I&II' will be seen as something that is able to create new memory and extra experience instead of just a bench or stool form.

I appreciate and get inspiration most from Japanese culture, philosophically and aesthetically. 侘び寂び(wabisabi) is one of the philosophies that I've been trying to perceive and apply to my design practice. It represents Japanese aesthetics and value

centered on the acceptance of transience and imperfection. The aesthetic is sometimes described as one of beauty that is "imperfect, impermanent, and incomplete". The idea is basically to convey that nothing lasts forever. It also explains the process of how mind and body coordinate when one's trying to find inner peace and maintain the calmness during the passing (away) of beings. To me, the way 侘び寂び(wabisabi) looks at imperfection as a form of beauty is also a type of aesthetic formed on the idea of enduring loneliness as well as facing or solving negative situations with calm. It contrasts and contradicts with the normal aesthetic sense within which everything should be visually (ostensibly) appealing.

The changing of my living and language environment caused the dislocation of my mind as well as individual behavior. I think of language as the unique ability of human beings, it functions as the matrix that shapes people's ideology and their ways of deliberation. My temporary situation of being caught between two different cultures can be sometimes stressful, overwhelming and frustrating but meanwhile also creates positive emotions like proud, confidence and fulfillment. Mitigation and neutralization are naturally formed when my personality is being reshaped and transformed. The process keeps repeating itself and becomes to a long-term practice of seeking inner peace as well as mental balance.

"T I&II" is the result of the process above. It is practice of applying 侘び寂び (wabisabi) and consciously turned out as a reflection or a metaphor of my current situation.



Wood is a material that has always been described with words like ‘warm’, ‘comforting’ and ‘mild’, all of which seem to be also part of my own personality that I got from my previous cultural background. At the same time, passion and freedom, which I think are the character of the western culture, have been filling and transforming the quietness inside me relatively fast since I started trying to fully put myself in this new context. A lot of mental activities have been taken place, accepting and resisting the new context initiated the mitigation process as well as neutralization. Raised in Asia, part of eastern value advocates keeping peaceful mind when changes happen in life. Handling changes by not reacting to changes (let it be) at all, even sometimes with the possibility of being hurt mentally, which I think is the opposite to the western way of being more self-conscious and protective.

Concrete has the opposite semantics to what wood presents and seems to be a good match for neutralizing the warmth of wood in the way of its imperfect texture,

coldness and weight. It creates a veiled, solemn and mysterious image, which I think is also part of the characters that eastern culture presents as well as the way sentiments are usually expressed in Asia.

The mental process was transformed into tangible forms that by putting the weight of concrete on top of the subtle elegant wooden structure, it creates a metaphor that the wood is representation of myself, the concrete is the mixture of all the difficulties or emotions I've experienced (both positive and negative) during my time here, which can possibly overwhelm me at any seconds.



I see “T I&II” as a documentary as well as memorial of my life in the past 2 years. It is a tangible form that embodies my memory and experience. Additionally, it has become something significant to me and definitely influences my future career positively. In a sense, it is something that is unquestionably significant and unique to me.

Architectural forms influence me as another source of inspiration in addition to my own life experiences. “B I&II” was inspired by 鳥居(Torii), which is traditional Japanese gate forms most commonly found at the entrance of or within a Shinto shrine. The presence of a torii at the entrance is usually the simplest way to identify Shinto shrines, and a small torii icon represents them on Japanese road maps. They are also a common sight at Japanese Buddhist temples, where they stand at the entrance of the temple's own shrine, called chinjusha and are usually very small. Torii were traditionally made from wood or stone, but today they can be also made of reinforced concrete, copper, stainless steel or other materials.

The function of a torii is to mark the entrance to a sacred space. For this reason, the road leading to a Shinto shrine is almost always straddled by one or more torii, which are therefore the easiest way to distinguish a shrine from a Buddhist temple. Also, because of the strong relationship between Shinto shrines and the Japanese Imperial family, a torii stands also in front of the tombs of each Emperor.

I found how torii works to be very interesting that it almost functions as a warning or a sign that conveys the message to people from a distance that there's a place that will calm you and let you find peace.

The work set “B I&II” is a portrait of my current life as well as a result of attempting to combine and find balance between two different materials (wood and concrete) with opposite characteristics. It can be seen as a continuation of “T I&II”, which is more emphasized on the process of trying to seek balance and calmness instead of the

result of finding balance.



In “T I&II”, the concrete and wood parts are mostly separate to each other with only a small proportion in contact in horizontal direction. It was still an exploration of combining wood and concrete, more focused on showing the process. Different from “T I&II”, “B I&II” seems to be a more mature result of the material experiment and exploration. In “B I&II”, concrete and wood are vertically contacted to each other with relatively bigger proportion, which is more structurally stable, meanwhile also more balanced. It represents the current me as well as my living situation after all the endeavor to overcome difficulties during my past 2 years and I finally found the subtle balance and the inner peace to handle the situation of being caught between two different cultures.

Both traditional hand making skills and modern technologies were applied during the making process of “B I&II” including CNC technology and vacuum bag bending.

Various kinds of problems happened including the CNC router malfunctioning during mode making process, having a hard time as well as one time failure of trying to get the concrete out of the mode, also both concrete parts were slightly cracked after been taken out from the casting mode. Instead of trying to cover all the flaws and making the pieces look perfect, I tried to keep all the cracking spots on the concrete since they mark every problem I encountered.



The entire making process can be seen as recurrence of me trying to handle and overcome all the difficulties in the past two years, which will probably be the time period I appreciate the most during through my entire lifetime since it's not only good memory, but also valuable experience that benefits me significantly.

The concrete part runs through both the top and the bottom wood structure. Different from "T I&II", the wood parts in "B I&II" can't exist by themselves without the concrete part. The concrete layer has already become an indispensable part of "B

I&II” as if all the difficulties that I’ve overcome have already become part of me and affected me.



From my understanding, furniture is something subsidiary or auxiliary, it’s something created for a type of specific environment and exists either as assistance or highlight. Different from “highlight piece”, which I think it’s capable to live and exist by itself, “Assistance piece”, to some extent, will lose its value once it’s abandoned from the subject environment and not be able to live without a specific environment, but both of them serve as companions to people and create memory.

I see furniture as a reversed form of architecture. Architecture appeared as cave forms at the very beginning of human civilization and functioned as shelter for people to protect them from bad weather conditions or natural disasters. If we look at each cave as a solid cubic form, take away each side of the cube one after another, then look from sideway when there’s only one facade left, the last image you see is a side of a

wall, or a big piece of stone that people used to sit on (the very first furniture form). If I look at it as a shape of a pillar or column, as individual element(s), pillars and columns are not capable of sheltering people from rain or strong wind. What a pillar really does is existing as companion, calming people, making people feel safe and peaceful, both physically and mentally. If we use modern architecture as the background and go through the subtraction process again, furniture will be the object left. Architecture creates space, provides environment to surround and enclose people, but furniture, as the 'organ' of the architecture, actually supports and has direct contact with actual human bodies that live in the architectural forms.

Another question would be what kind of value does my works add to the world?

The three sets of works not only embody my understanding of eastern values, but also turned out to be an attempt to express Asian aesthetic elements in my own way. I always feel good art or design should not be selfish, but somehow I inflicted all my personal emotions on the viewers. So on another level, it is also a selfish practice of me coordinating my emotions as well as my mind. Why does everything have to be made permanent? Especially in an age that everything expires so fast. I guess I've been and maybe still looking for the answer of this question through my design practice. The question reminds me of such things like magic pills in the classic Chinese novels that make you live forever and time machine in the western science fiction, all of which seem to show the same fact that people are always trying to create things that are able to make their memories last longer. Through this I see not only the endeavor of seeking permanence, but also the fear of loss.

My point is, nothing is permanent, or, everything is temporary. We can't possibly fulfill every desire and possess everything we want during the lifetime. People afraid of loss and always try to avoid loss, it is one of the ways to own more and gain more happiness. But avoiding is also a kind of loss. I've been attempting to embrace all of the positive and negative emotions when I own or lose something during the past two years since I think that's the only way to own as much as possible and make everything last longer. Instead of rejecting, embracing things properly always lets people own and gain more. Loss doesn't necessarily generate positivity, but I feel losing things are more important than things like excitement and happiness. Losing something, for example, beloved ones, always creates trauma that lasts longer, as experience, it will eventually become part of one's memory, and as memory, it's relatively permanent. As an artist, I will continue my attempt and see it as an artistic process to balance out this contradiction without knowing a potential outcome; as a designer, I will try coordinating materials with honesty and create good products. The artistic process is temporary. The product is permanent.

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