

Lee Mingwei: The Art Must Go On

By

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ABSTRACT

Versatile in time, location and form, Lee Mingwei's works are characterized by themes of transience, temporality and transmission. Lee often orchestrates one-on-one situations that produce ephemeral relationships with his audiences, where he offers a small service or gift in exchange for their participation and trust. By being both relational and participatory, his works are meant to inspire introspection regarding relationships, our own and others. Although his projects are deceptively simple in appearance, often portrayed as familiar everyday actions of eating, sleeping, conversing, mending or gifting in company, there lies great psychological and spiritual depth to them. Therefore, as a method to unpack the rich underlying concepts behind his works, this study will relate Lee Mingwei's projects to prevalent concepts of Relational Aesthetics, Zen Buddhism and gift-giving tendencies.

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I'll keep this short and sweet –

Although one name figures as the author of this document, a thesis is not written with the nerve and resources of a single individual. To my supervisor Birgit Hopfener, thank you for your enthusiastic guidance, encouragement and criticism, you were an incredible mentor. To my close friends and family (especially Mom, Dad, Koukla and Jack), I am ever grateful for your emotional support, attentive ear and care that came in the form of food. To my defense committee, Penny Cousineau-Levine, Mitchell Frank and Ming Tiampo, thank you for your time and assistance in refining this project during its final stage, your insights are greatly appreciated. Finally, thank you to Lee Mingwei, whose work taught me that art is a gift that must always be passed on.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	2
INTRODUCTION: WITH LEE MINGWEI, PARTICIPATING IS “ART-ING”	4–8
CHAPTER 1: A SELECTION OF LEE MINGWEI’S PARTICIPATORY ARTWORKS	9–31
A Brief History of Participatory Art	
Participatory Art’s Political Agency	
Unpopular Opinion: Viewing Can Be Just as Effective as Participating	
Participatory Art: To be Art or Not to be Art?	
CHAPTER 2: RELATIONAL AESTHETICS AND ZEN BUDDHISM	32–58
Relational Art: Artwork-As-Encounter	
More Than Just a Money-Making Trend	
Mending as a Way of Understanding Each Other and Ourselves	
A Buddhist Case Study: <i>The Letter Writing Project</i> (1998)	
The Interplay of Relational Art and Zen Buddhism in Lee’s Works	
<i>Lee Mingwei and His Relations</i> (2014): Kataoka Mami’s Transcultural Exhibition	
CHAPTER 3: GIFT-GIVING TENDENCIES	59–79
Marcel Mauss: An Anthropological Perspective on Gift-Giving	
Lewis Hyde: The Gift in Modern Economy	
Lee Mingwei: Gifts That Live On	
CONCLUSION: CLOSING THE CIRCLE	80–81
APPENDIX	82–87
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	88–89
BIBLIOGRAPHY	90–92

INTRODUCTION: WITH LEE MINGWEI, PARTICIPATING IS “ART-ING”

Initiated in 2009, *The Mending Project* is an on-going participatory installation in which contemporary artist Lee Mingwei offers to mend the clothing of exhibition visitors. Using simple materials— a needle, thread and clothes—, Lee Mingwei builds relationships between himself, participants and his immediate surroundings. *The Mending Project*'s interactivity allows for the orchestrating of interpersonal exchange between mender and participant, where ephemerality and individuality romanticize each experience. Lee often offers his audiences a service or a gift in exchange for their participation: his offer can take the form of a meal, an unusual experience, a letter, a flower or – in this case – a mended piece of cloth.

Lee's works do not focus on the creation of an art-object. Instead, art-relations or art-experiences emerge from his projects, where the social exchange occurring between individuals, whether it be between himself and participants or between participants and strangers, is the main premise of the work. Lee is concerned with the following questions in his practice: “Can art be made out of attention itself? Can art be the attentive performance of simple actions? Can art be the manipulation of attention itself, the bringing of greater awareness to ordinary things, thereby transforming our life and our perceptions of experience of the present, past, and future?”¹ Lee's personal involvement in his art projects and his emphasis on audience participation suggest a reading of his works through the discursive lenses of participatory art and relational aesthetics. In fact, socially-oriented projects such as *The Mending Project* are part of a long historical trajectory whose precursors took place over a century ago.

¹ Jacquelynn Baas and Mary Jane Jacob. *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 229.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, in response to the catastrophe of World War I and to the dynamism of modern life, avant-garde movements such as Futurism and Dadaism gained wind in Europe and in North-America, challenging the conventional status quo of art.² Futurist and Dadaist events incorporated spoken word, political rhetoric, manifestos, theatre and live music as a way of breaking with artistic conventions.³ From these movements burgeoned the mid-century art trends of Neo-Dadaism and Fluxus, where the merging of art and everyday life was promoted via the elaboration of “Happenings”⁴, performances and the inclusion of ready-mades within works. Neo-Dadaist and Fluxus projects did not only want to push “the boundaries of what could be considered art, but to obliterate them altogether, so that art and life were one.”⁵ George Maciunas, chief theorist of the Fluxus movement, went on to coin some of its works as “living art” since he defined human actions as artworks in and of themselves.⁶ Neo-Dadaist and Fluxus artists formed a loose community of international artists, musicians, designers, writers and activists that collaborated on experimental projects without restrictions to a specific medium or discipline. Their conceptual ideas were conveyed without art objects that needed to be visually assessed and marketed; for them, art was life, not a commodity. These movements promoted an anti-authoritarian merging of arts, life and politics, and represent the antecedents of contemporary participatory and relational art.

² Sam Phillips, *...isms: Understanding Modern Art*, (New York: Universe Publishing, 2013) 40-52.

³ *Ibid*, 40-52.

⁴ “Happenings” were collective Neo-Dadaist and Performance Art situations popularized by artists Allan Kaprow and John Cage in the 1950s and 1960s. Ranging across multiple art-disciplines, they were loosely-planned events that could occur at anytime and anyplace. They actively sought to include audience participation and relied on chance and improvisation during their elaboration, so repeated Happenings could have different outcomes.

⁵ Sam Phillips, *...isms: Understanding Modern Art*, (New York: Universe Publishing, 2013) 103.

⁶ *Ibid*, 103.

By the 1990s, the time during which Lee became active, socially-engaged art practices proliferated not only in practice but also in discourse, engaging artists, curators and art historians in both projects and debates. Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) pioneered a theoretical framework for artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster whose work focused on human relations and interactivity yet evaded pre-existing art history categories and discourses.⁷ Although Bourriaud's essay and curatorial work, like *Traffic* (1996), provided academic grounding for relational artists, his research and discursive framing did not go undisputed. Art critics like Claire Bishop and Hal Foster, as well as philosopher Jacques Rancière, resisted the popular "relational aesthetics" wave, determining that the works produced within it were not as democratic as they claimed to be. Relational art was –and still is– critiqued for creating elitist "microtopias" within institutions, for positing the artist as a celebrity and for excusing the unfinished and undefined status of an artwork without audience involvement.⁸ Therefore, rather than creating relationally democratic and inclusive art spaces, relational art has been criticized for producing socially exclusive and divisive art niches. The debate surrounding relational aesthetics is an extensive dialogue spanning multiple decades, and so, to focus my thesis, I will only concern myself with two questions relating to it: how does Lee Mingwei's participatory work fit within the relational art discourse? And what does he contribute to it?

⁷ In 1992, for *Untitled (free/still)*, Rirkrit Tiravanija converted a gallery space into a restaurant that served Thai curry for free and encouraged the development of social interactions with its seating arrangement. On the other hand, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster is known for her spatial installations like *TH.2058* (2008) at the Tate Modern that encourage people to form narrative connections, their own or other people's, from the exhibited artwork. *TH.2058* was an installation consisting of two-hundred bunkbeds with books atop of them that invited viewers to interact with the space and reconstruct the fictional narrative behind the exhibition.

⁸ Claire Bishop, *Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics*, *October* 110, (2004): 51-79.

To provide a concise yet encompassing argument, my thesis will discuss six participatory artworks of Lee Mingwei that range from the beginning of his practice to the present day: the selected works are *The Dining Project* (1996), *The Sleeping Project* (2000), *The Tourist* (2001), *The Moving Garden* (2009), *The Mending Project* (2009-) and *When Beauty Visits* (2017). This selection was established through their common denominators of one-on-one social interaction, transience, personalization and gift-giving.

Lee's works, by virtue of their social quality, establish short-lived relations between people that are subject to change, transience and transformation. In order to situate him within an art historical narrative, I will first contextualize these works in the conventional Euro-American discourses of participatory and relational art, as dominantly coined by Nicolas Bourriaud. I will then analyze them through alternative lenses of Zen Buddhist philosophies of transience and transmission, and relate them to anthropological gift-giving theories researched by Marcel Mauss and Lewis Hyde. In doing so, I am de-centering the leading Euro-American frameworks. I will be relating my arguments to the transcultural exhibition *Lee Mingwei and His Relations* (2014), curated by Kataoka Mami, as a body of work that exemplifies the ideas I am upholding within this thesis.

Participation art and relational art, in the context of Euro-American art history, challenged and came to replace the representational notion of art: “the essence of art had shifted from an artwork as a visible substance to a mutual ‘relationship’ between human beings, or a social context”.⁹ While the focus of Lee Mingwei's works is relational, he uses visible and physical devices to bring those relations about. Remnants of his projects thus extend to both material and immaterial documents.

⁹ Kataoka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relations: The Art of Participation* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2015), 027.

By invoking the theories of Diana Taylor and Philip Auslander on performance documents, I will also define Lee's gifts (both material and immaterial) as performative documents that carry the embodied memory of his short-lived relational encounters.

By analyzing Lee's works from an anthropological perspective of gift-giving and from a Zen Buddhist perspective, I am adding layers to the interpretation of his works, as well as shedding light on new aspects of participatory and relational art. I am also arguing that the gift component in his practice is an element that enables the relational encounters in his works to be activated and re-activated by participants outside of the initial relational timeframe. Therefore, although ephemeral, Lee's works and encounters live on, persisting in different forms.

CHAPTER 1: A Selection of Lee Mingwei's Participatory Artworks

The Dining Project (1996) originated during Lee Mingwei's first graduate year at Yale University. As a method to reach out to individuals and to connect with others, Lee posted hundreds of invitational posters on campus grounds with the prospect of sharing food over conversation to those that would be interested. The call proved to be a success, with 45 responses received at the end of the first day of his invitation.¹⁰

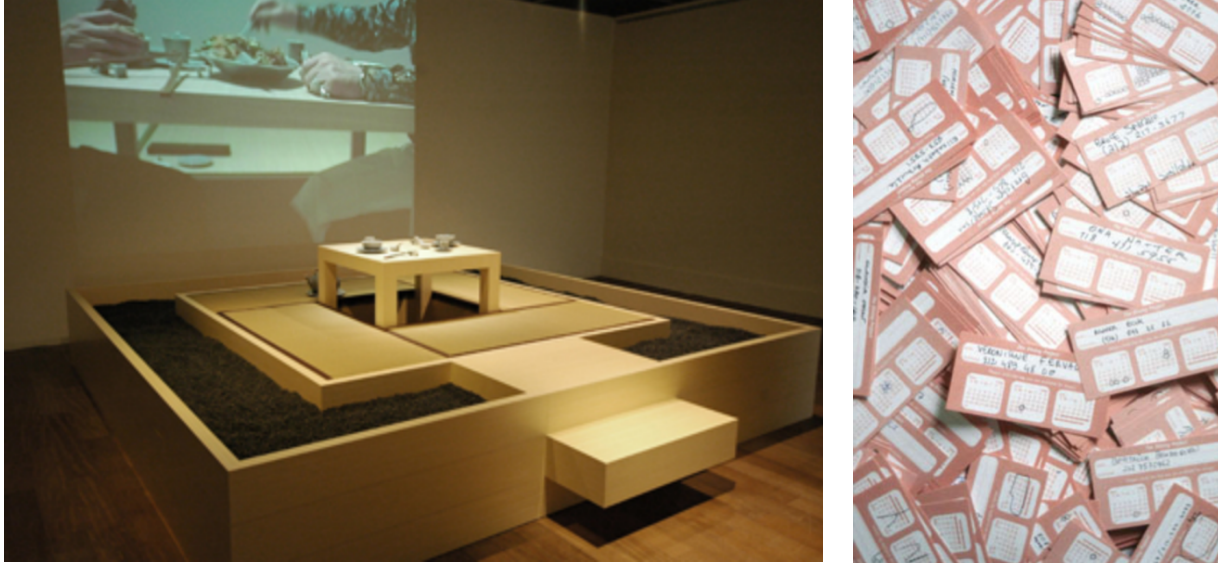
The project, when later held in an institutional context, was scheduled outside of the museum's operating hours while the dining was held within it. Those selected to dine with Lee were established through a lottery process, and they would share a private meal with him during the scheduled nights of the exhibition period. Lee personalized the meals according to the dietary preferences and restrictions of his guest four times a week. Food was used as the joining link between Lee and his guest, as a kind of medium for trust between strangers, functioning as a gift like the act of mending does in *The Mending Project*, which I will analyze in greater detail below.¹¹ In the exhibition of *The Dining Project*, viewers came upon an elevated platform where the table and cutlery Lee used for his meals were displayed. The table was set, ready to be used. Near it, a projected video with an audio component showed the table during a previous use. The video featured the dinners Lee had previously organized: the conversations of the private meals were recorded in their entirety but the visual components of the dinners were reduced to the framing of the food placed on the low table where they sat. Hands and partial clothing were the only visible elements of the figures. After every meal, the recording was played in the gallery the following day, slightly altered and barely audible to retain the guest's anonymity.¹² The screening of a

¹⁰ Lee Mingwei, "The Dining Project", *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

preceding dinner allowed every guest to experience the previous night's meal in conjunction with their own, like a continuum of experience.



Left, Fig.1: *The Dining Project*, installation view at Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, 2007

Right, Fig. 2: Ballots from the lottery selection process of *The Dining Project*

Like *The Dining Project*, *The Sleeping Project* (2000) found its origins forming years before its institutional showing and can be traced all the way back to Lee's young teenage years. As a young man, Lee travelled from Paris to Prague on an overnight train and an elderly Polish man was his roommate in the shared sleeping compartment. The man was travelling to Prague to receive compensation for having experienced the horrors of a Nazi concentration camp in the past.¹³ At Lee's request, the man relayed his memories and those of his kin, and finally shared that he was the only survivor of his family. He then bade Lee goodnight and slept soundly. Lee, on the other hand, did not— could not. The thought that “years ago, there were people traveling on these kind of nights, possibly on the same track, who would not live until morning” weighed down on his

¹³ Lee Mingwei, “The Sleeping Project”, *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

heart.¹⁴ As a response to the emotions and thoughts of that night, Lee created *The Sleeping Project*, in which the differences between “sleeping” and “sleeping with” are examined. He sought to repeat this asexual, intimate, influential experience with other people.¹⁵ The gift, in this case, is rather implicit. The Polish man began the giving process by gifting Lee with his memories, to which Lee paid tribute years later, with the creation of this project.

Participants in *The Sleeping Project* were also designated by a lottery process. The selected participants were asked to bring objects belonging to the space in which they usually sleep in before spending the night with Lee. Only one participant stayed with Lee overnight each time. The morning after, these objects would be left on the nightstand, along with a recording of the conversation from the previous night. These items, during the exhibition hours, would represent mementos of the interaction between Lee and the guest and would provide audiences with snippets of the nightly experience where trust brought together two strangers.¹⁶



Left, Fig.3: *The Sleeping Project*, from “Lee Mingwei and His Relations”, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2014

Right, Fig. 4: Additional example of nightstands covered with items from participants in *The Sleeping Project*

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

For *The Tourist* (2001), Lee was inspired by his six-year-old nephew Sean during a trip to Rome. While in the ancient city, Sean acted like his tour guide, explaining the city as seen through his young eyes. Sean's itinerary included the Roman Forum and locations where various groups of feral cats conglomered.¹⁷ This tour inspired Lee to repeat similar experiences in other cities within the context of a project, where individuals would take him on a tour of their own city that was based on locations and landmarks personally significant to them rather than popular tourist attractions. Lee perceived the tourist experience as a method to explore themes of personal identity, multiculturalism, memory and history. He was interested in how and why individuals select certain places to show others, as well as the dynamics between foreigners and locals. His project was an exploration of the roles of tourist and guide, guest and host; he was curious about the hospitality dynamics between guests and hosts, and how you could simultaneously be a tourist and explorer while embodying either of the two former roles.¹⁸

The Tourist travelled to several cities and took the tourist experience to another level: "While many tourists limit their outings in a new city to a few notable sights, Lee's excursions with his volunteer guides will occur regularly over a period of weeks".¹⁹ Individuals interested in participating in Lee's project could submit their information to the museum and were then randomly selected to take on the role of his tour-guide. Itineraries included popular tourist attractions as well as more idiosyncratic places within New York City. Every tour thus became embedded with memories, sensations and feelings, both old and new. In this dynamic and

¹⁷ Lee Mingwei, "The Tourist", *Lee Mingwei*,
<http://www.leemingwei.com/mobile/projects.php?id=15>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Rice Gallery, "Lee Mingwei: The Tourist Project", Rice Gallery, URL:
<http://www.ricegallery.org/lee-mingwei>

empirical process of telling and listening to stories, the cities become defined by the experiences it plays host to and delivers to its residents and tourists.



Fig.5: *The Tourist*, installation view at Rice Gallery, Houston (USA), 2002

Following the personalized tour, as both documentary evidence and as mementos of the personal exchanges, the contents of the tours were displayed in an exhibition. Exhibited items included photographic projects, collected objects, clothing and recordings of conversation. These items served as evocative tributes to the excursions and enabled exhibition-goers to re-imagine and partake in the touristic experience of Lee and his tour guide. The number of objects displayed in the show expanded with each new tour Lee's experienced in the duration of the exhibition. *The Tourist* is typical of Lee's process as it emphasizes one-on-one encounters and exchanges within the settings of the everyday. This project invited Lee and its participants to become more aware of themselves and of other people in regards to their surroundings and experiences.²⁰

²⁰ Ibid.

For *The Moving Garden* (2009), Lee was influenced by Lewis Hyde's "The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property", a modern-day classic examining the importance, origin and evolution of gifts. He became intrigued by Hyde's "examination of the effects of both our total immersion in a market economy and the myth of the free market on our views about gifts and our abilities to give and receive them".²¹ In other words, Lee was interested in analyzing the importance of gifts, as well as their circulation and impact on the modern capitalist market and individuals. And so, for the Lyon Biennial, Lee demarcated a space in a gallery where beautiful fresh flowers would be arranged and presented as an offer to the museum visitors. If visitors were to take one of the flowers, they were to agree to doing two things: the first would be to take a detour from their intended route once they leave the museum, and the second would be to give the flower to a stranger in need of it on their detour.²²



Fig.6: *The Moving Garden*, installation view from "Lee Mingwei and His Relations", Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2014

²¹ Lee Mingwei, "The Moving Garden", *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

²² Ibid.

Once the flowers left the museum grounds, it is unknown what happened to them since Lee chose not to document that final step of the process. After all, people's extension of kindness is not generally measured in day to day life. Lee trusted the audience to be kind and left the rest up to fate, where his only acknowledgement of the act was the comforting thought that "somewhere in Lyon, during the months of the Biennial, some strangers had connected through acts of unexpected giving and receiving".²³ The flowers acted as conduits for kindness, and in being circulated, disseminated the energy of the gift which Lee wished to set in motion.

The Mending Project (2009–) is an on-going participatory installation in which Lee offers to mend the clothing of exhibition visitors. Like many of his works, the time, location and duration of *The Mending Project* vary, and the project has been occurring for almost a decade. When entering its exhibition space, visitors come upon a long table with two chairs on either side. During certain hours of the day, the artist, or one of his assistants, is seated at one end mending various damaged textile articles that visitors bring to him. When fully mended, the articles are placed at the other end of the table alongside previously mended items from preceding sessions. This placement creates a small mountain of mended clothing and each individual article is attached to the exhibition wall via a spool and thread. Visually, the table is arranged in such a way that on one end, the artist and participant sit, whereas on the other end lies the display of mended clothing attached to colored spools installed on the wall. Ultimately, at the end of the exhibition, owners can come back to the exhibition space to collect their mended articles on the last day.²⁴

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Lee Mingwei, "The Mending Project" (Exhibition at the 2017 Venice Biennale, May 17th 2017)

The interactions held during this installation engendered not only connections between strangers through conversation, like *The Dining Project* and *The Sleeping Project* and *The Tourist*, but the intimate act of sewing onto someone else's garment represents an interpersonal exchange and collaboration between individuals that were otherwise not connected. This momentary relationship can operate on several different levels, to the point where the gifted service of sewing can be interpreted as a medium of trust and intimacy, as food was used in the *The Dining Project*.



Fig. 7: *The Mending Project*, installation view at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017)

When Beauty Visits (2017) concerns every person's personalized definition of beauty as well as their response to it. The project was divided into three stages. The first stage, which occurred before the exhibition, involved research on the part of Lee, where he collected stories from his surrounding friends and strangers on their different memories of encountering beauty. The second stage involved a costumed host with chiming bells at their ankles who would stroll through the galleries where he or she would approach a visitor to whom they felt a special connection and invite them to the garden. The visitor, at their arrival at the garden, would find a single chair

basking in the music of a summer insect song. Once seated, they were asked to wait and enjoy the surrounding beauty as the host would go and retrieve a gift intended for them. The host would return moments later with a small bundle for the visitor, which they would hand to them with the following specification: that they were to keep and open the gift after their next encounter with beauty, outside of the exhibition grounds.²⁵

The third stage relied entirely on the part of the visitor, which involved opening the gift's letter. Any encountered beauty, whether it be a child's laugh, a witnessed act of kindness or a returned smile, could be the catalyst for them to open the gift. Inside, they would find a story of another person's encounter with beauty, thus creating and repeating a continuum of beautiful experiences.



Left, Fig. 8: *When Beauty Visits*, installation view at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017)

Right, Fig. 9: *When Beauty Visits*, live event still at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017)



²⁵ Lee Mingwei, "When Beauty Visits", *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

The central concept of the “gift” within Lee’s practice extends beyond the sole purpose of being received. The gift represents a key component in his practice, manifesting in multiple forms and functions, whether it be an incentive to participate, an allegory of trust, a memento to keep, a consideration of others or a moment of introspection. Therefore, from what appears to be a small act of kindness on the part of the artist has more profound metaphorical and interpersonal effects, whether the participant is conscious of them or not.

A Brief History of Participatory Art

The canonized art historical narrative of participatory art has its origins in European Avant-garde art, namely Futurist and Dada performances that were designed to provoke and agitate the public. Like the military avant-garde at the forefront of a battle, both Futurist and Dadaist avant-garde pioneered experimental and unconventional ideas in art in attempts to activate and assemble audiences, influenced by ideas of utopian socialism that were born out of several European national revolutions.²⁶ For example, *The Variety Theatre* (an Italian futurist manifesto) of 1913 embraced chaos in variety theatre performances by encouraging audiences to participate with songs, ad libs, laughs and heckles.²⁷ Moreover, in the 1920s, ‘Dada-Season’ swept Paris with a series of manifestations where the aim was to involve the city’s public. The most significant manifestation involved an expedition of approximately one hundred people to the church of Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre in the pouring rain.²⁸ André Breton’s choice of location for this excursion contrasted the conventional tourist attractions of Paris and held the “implication and possibility that the everyday

²⁶ Sam Phillips, *...isms: Understanding Modern Art*, (New York: Universe Publishing, 2013) 40-52.

²⁷ F.T. Marinetti, “The Variety Theatre” in *Modernism: An Anthology* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 34.

²⁸ Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers” in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 10.

could be transformed into the spectacular and the sensational”.²⁹ In having a large crowd of participants travel to a monument of little cultural and historical value in the 1920s, Breton aimed to have people appreciate the beauty in the mundane, a characteristic that is currently found in Lee Mingwei’s work. Soviet Russia was also hit with a Dada wave: the Soviets held “mass spectacles that [assimilated] individualism into propagandistic displays of collectivity”.³⁰ *The Storming of the Winter Palace* was an event that involved thousands of performers who restaged important events leading to the Bolshevik victory. It occurred in 1920, on the third anniversary of the Bolshevik October Revolution. Proletarian working-class music accompanied these theatrical spectacles: mechanical noise was celebrated with the use of factory sirens, motors, turbines and hooters. The music was performed by hundreds of participants that were directed by conductors on rooftops.³¹



Left, Fig.10: Visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Paris, April 1921. (Collection Timothy Baum, New York)

Right, Fig.11: The Storming of the View from the Winter Palace, Mass spectacle, Petrograd, November 1920

When loosely analyzing its historic beginnings, two approaches are especially prevalent in participatory art: “an authored tradition that seeks to provoke participants, and a de-authored

²⁹ Julian Jason Haladyn, “Everyday Boredoms or Breton’s Dadaist Excursion to Saint-Julien-Le-Pauvre” in *The Everyday: Experiences, Concepts and Narratives*, eds. Justin Derry and Martin Parrot (2013), 22.

³⁰ Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers” in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 10.

³¹ *Ibid*, 11.

lineage that aims to embrace collective creativity; one is disruptive and interventionist, the other constructive and ameliorative".³² In both cases, participation in these collaborative (yet highly authored) experiences is almost inseparable from participating within a political agenda. Moreover, by the late 1950s, Happenings, events in which the audience was coerced into participating, were orchestrated by the artist Allan Kaprow. His Happenings were constructed out of daily experiences and occurred in unconventional sequences and locations in New York; they consisted of banging pots and pans, spreading and eating jam on bread, washing a car or holding one's breath.³³ In these situations, as in more contemporary ones, the artist is perceived as a collaborator or as co-producer of the event with the participating audience. These events tended to have an unclear beginning or ending and were incomplete without the interactions of an audience. Participatory art thus created –and still creates– a dynamic and flexible collaboration between the artist, the audience and the location.

Although occurring at different times and locations, Happenings, Futurists manifestos and Dadaist interventions all share a commonality: they demonstrate a significant shift in preference from the art object to the art action. Whereas art used to be contained within a frame or an institution, these movements enabled a work of art to be thought of as a situation, an action or an event characterized by chance, everyday life and improvisation.

Participatory Art's Political Agency

Claire Bishop pinpoints that participation art tends to follow one or more of the following agendas: the desire to create an active subject, the desire to create a more egalitarian work or the

³² Ibid, 11

³³ Eric Padraic Soderlund and Kelly Morrill. "Between Object and Interpretation: Allan Kaprow's Happenings and Environments." Order No. 3547299, University of California, Irvine, 2012. <http://proxy.library.carleton.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.proxy.library.carleton.ca/docview/1267776202?accountid=9894>.

desire to create a sense of community.³⁴ In creating an active subject, like in *The Variety Theatre* and in the Paris ‘Dada-season’, the objective is to empower the subject through physical or symbolic participation. The goal in this instance is to give the subject an empowered sense of self where they are “able to determine their own social and political reality”.³⁵ Therefore, in this agenda, part of participation’s objective is (hopefully) reached through a cause and effect experience of a work of art from an individual or collective audience.³⁶ In the second agenda, as perceived in the Bolshevik *The Storming of Winter Palace*, the act of relinquishing part or all the author control is viewed as establishing a more egalitarian artwork where the created work is not dictated by a single person.³⁷ It is important to point out that such projects necessitate a greater level of unpredictability and improvisation. Nonetheless, works involving collaborative participation aim to produce positive, non-hierarchical social spaces.³⁸ The third “communal” agenda, observed in the surge of the Fluxus movement and of Happenings, rose in response to an observed crisis in community spaces that was heightened with the rise of capitalism and consumerism. “These three concerns –activation; authorship; community– are the most frequently cited motivations for almost all artistic attempts to encourage participation in art since the 1960s”.³⁹ Participatory art has therefore been used as a means to restore social bonds “through a collective elaboration of meaning”, where the meaning is the artwork.⁴⁰ However, this

³⁴ Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers” in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 12.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 12.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 12.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 12.

phenomenon begs the following questions: what kind of meaning is elaborated? How is it elaborated? And for who?

Walter Benjamin himself was concerned with these questions and elaborated on the political agency of participation in 1934. He insisted that when judging the politics of a work, it is essential to look at “the position the work occupies in the production relations of its time”.⁴¹ With Soviet Russia in mind, Benjamin argued that a work of art should actively provide a framework in which viewers can involve themselves in the production process: “this apparatus is better, the more consumers it is able to turn into producers – that is, the more readers or spectators into collaborators”.⁴² Therefore, from his point of view, the more collaborators involved in a project, the better– a view with which Nicolas Bourriaud harmonizes, while I only agree with partially (an explanation will be provided further down in this text). Benjamin mentioned that the letters sections of a newspaper, where readers respond to articles, is an example, as well Brechtian theater.⁴³ Bertolt Brecht was Benjamin’s contemporary, and as a dramatist, orchestrated “situations” that interrupted a theatrical narrative with unexpected elements, like songs.⁴⁴ However, by way of disruptive montage and juxtaposition, audiences were incited to respond critically rather than emotionally to the protagonists: “Rather than presenting the illusion of action on stage and filling the audiences with sentiment, Brechtian theatre compels the spectator to take up a position towards this action”.⁴⁵ Mention of this past model is argument for how “constructed

⁴¹ Ibid, 11.

⁴² Ibid, 11.

⁴³ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 11.

situations remain an important point of reference for contemporary artists working with live events and people as privileged materials”.⁴⁶

Today, many would argue that the Brechtian model appears ineffective since it offers a passive mode of spectatorship.⁴⁷ Raising consciousness by having audiences critically think is mostly an invisible form of participation and impact, with little accompanying action. As years passed, physical involvement which sought to reduce the stage barrier between actors and audiences was added and became significant game-changer in developments of avant-garde theatre of the 1960s. These developments in theatre were paralleled by similar upheavals in visual art with the rise of Neo-Dadaism and Fluxus, movements that initiated a radical shift within modern art.⁴⁸ Thus, “in this framework, physical involvement is considered an essential precursor to social change”.⁴⁹ This equation for social change persists today but is subjected to much critique as ideologies of collective presence and community are dissected by philosophers and art critics for their dubious methods; the criticism extends to how the majority of contemporary art is produced collectively while a single individual retains the title of author; and how “participation” is a persuasive tool that is not only used to boost workforce morale and efficiency in business but also pervades the media in reality television and social media.⁵⁰ That being said, “as an artistic medium, then, participation is arguably no more intrinsically political or oppositional than any other” since it pervades almost all spheres of life.⁵¹ In other words, participation is no more political or oppositional than entertainment broadcasting, marketing, theatre, painting, etc.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 13.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 11.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 11.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 11.

⁵¹ Ibid, 12.

Unpopular Opinion: Viewing Can Be Just as Effective as Participating

Nicholas Bourriaud argues that relational art engages audiences in the form of collaboration, participation, intervention or community-based projects in both form and content of the works: the “works involve methods of social exchanges, interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered to him/her, and the various communication processes [...] serving to link individuals and human groups together”.⁵² While Bourriaud, in this quote, has pinpointed an active component of many relational works, there are a variety of “inactive” emotional objectives that relational participatory art can seek to evoke, such as those of trust, contemplation, reflection or introspection triggered by the relational event. After all, if “art is a state of encounter” that gives rise to an “arena of exchange” that varies on the degree of participation required of the onlooker by the artist, the desired result of a given project is thus variable.⁵³

In 1996, Bourriaud curated *Traffic* at the CAPC Musée d’art contemporain de Bordeaux, the first show that fully reflected his theory of relational aesthetics. The show united 28 artists whose works “highlight social methods of exchange, interactivity with the onlooker within the aesthetic experience proposed to him/her, and communication processes, in their tangible dimension as tools for linking human beings and groups to one another”.⁵⁴ In this exhibition, several artists who participated in the exhibition have now come to represent the relational art movement, like Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Angela Bulloch, Liam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Jens Haaning and Pierre Huyghe.⁵⁵ In *Traffic*, Tiravanija arranged tables and chairs from brown cardboard

⁵² Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 43.

⁵³ Ibid, 17-18.

⁵⁴ Kataoka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relations: The Art of Participation* (Taipei: Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2015), 27.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

packaging, each equipped with a free mini-bar of red wine and mineral water waiting to be used.⁵⁶ Gonzalez-Foerster also offered an intimate form of interaction in a séance room where participants could recall old memories to draw a floor-plan of childhood house. Associated thoughts and feelings of the household were complementary added, and the plan joined others on the exhibition wall.⁵⁷ Carl Freedman, a Frieze Magazine critic who reviewed the show and participated in Gonzalez-Foerster's project, remarked that "it was a pleasant experience and therapeutic in an uncertain way."⁵⁸



Fig.12: Artists from *Traffic* (curated by Nicolas Bourriaud at the CAPC Museum) Group photo taken by Carsten Holler, 1996.

⁵⁶ Carl Freedman, *Traffic*, (Frieze Magazine: September 5th 1996)

<https://frieze.com/article/traffic>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Lee Mingwei's position is to have audiences reflect on relationships between people, their own and others. In *The Dining Project* and *The Sleeping Project*, intimate actions, such as eating a meal and sleeping in close quarters, are put to test between strangers. *The Tourist* encourages participants to consider what is important to them in their own city and what would be of interest to a visitor. *The Moving Garden* has a two-step process which involves plucking a flower and then gifting it to a stranger; the element of trust is present in how Lee hopes participants follow his loose instructions and the element of contemplation is present in whom the participant decides to gift the flower to. *The Mending Project* tests participants' trust in allowing a stranger to sew an eccentric motif onto their garment while discussing its personalized history. Finally, *When Beauty Visits* is another two-step process project that involves following a stranger within a gallery in order to be gifted a letter that should only be opened after witnessing a personal experience of beauty. Following their implication in his projects or their viewing of his exhibitions, Lee hopes that individuals continue to ponder on their reflections and actions, as he does. Whether participants are physically implicated in Lee's projects are a witness to the aftermath, the project's 'spirit' and intent can still be carried, transmitted and transformed in some other way or form, such as in thought, memory or repetition. This recycled spirit, or energy, is an important factor within the gift-giving and Buddhist perspective and shall be discussed in further chapters.

The opportunity to participate in Lee's projects is not always available to everyone. Individuals might not be selected by the lottery process, they might be socially reserved or they might not be available at the specific time and location of the live event. If physical participation is not an option, witnessing the aftermath of an event in an exhibition, or simply witnessing the event in a more passive stance as an observer, can thus be valuable. Jacques Rancière, in his essay

“The Emancipated Spectator”, questions theories that equate spectacle with passivity.⁵⁹ With regards to Lee, since some of his projects are only experienced by a limited number of people, the “spectacle” component that enables passivity in audiences is present in the exhibition part of his work, where much documentation is showcased.

For Rancière, the binary of ‘active’ and ‘passive’ is an allegory of inequality since it divides an audience into teams of unequal power: those with capacity on one side, and those with incapacity on the other.⁶⁰ Moreover, he argues that the divide between ‘active’ and ‘passive’ is biased “with presuppositions about looking and knowing, watching and acting, appearance and reality”.⁶¹ He asks: “Why identify looking with ‘passivity’ if not by the presupposition that looking means looking at the image or the appearance, that it means being separated from the reality behind the image?”⁶² Translating this theory into Lee’s works, the “presupposition” of looking at the exhibition documentation can be read as “being separated from the reality [performance] behind the image” – a phenomenon which Rancière argues against. Comparing the history of spectatorship with the history of education, Rancière urges that emancipation (being separated from the live event) be the presupposition of equality, where everyone is capable of an intelligent response to a work of art, whether it be a painting, book, play, or in this case, Lee’s projects.⁶³ Therefore, rather than undermining art objects (that is, relational art documentation) for community-driven projects (relational art live events), Rancière argues that these art-objects, in whichever form they take, should be interpreted evenly with observation. The distance that conventional art-objects imposes

⁵⁹ Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Artforum International*, March 2007, 277.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers” in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 16.

⁶² Jacques Rancière, “The Emancipated Spectator,” *Artforum International*, March 2007, 277.

⁶³ Ibid.

is the requirement of any communication: “Spectatorship is not the passivity that has to be turned into activity. It is our normal situation. We learn and teach, we act and know as spectators who link what they see with what they have seen and told, done and dreamt. There is no privileged medium as there is no privileged starting point. [...] We don’t need to turn spectators into actors.”⁶⁴

Spectators are thus *active interpreters*.

If spectators are active interpreters, Rancière suggests that the politics of participation are not only found in community re-stagings or in physical activity, but in the very idea that “we are all equally capable of inventing our own translations”, no matter the artistic presentation.⁶⁵ Lee’s project, in both performed and documented form, communicate the principle of having audiences reflect on relationships, their own and others. For Rancière, artistic principle is not attached to a specific artistic medium and would not divide audiences into binaries of active and passive, capable and incapable. Optimistically, this principle enables everyone, participants and viewers alike, to appropriate performed and documented works for themselves and make use of them in ways that might not have been intended –or even dreamed– possible.

What kinds of situations might individuals actively participate or interpret? Rancière, in his essay “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art”, discusses how contemporary relational and participatory artists orchestrate situations that are meant to engage passersby in short-lived, unexpected relationships.⁶⁶ Rancière specifies that these situations can also be called encounters or invitations, and he references several relational artists previously featured in Bourriaud’s *Traffic* as case studies. In the exhibition *Voilà – Le monde dans la tête* (2000), a show held in Paris, artist

⁶⁴ Ibid, 279.

⁶⁵ Claire Bishop, “Viewers as Producers” in *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 16.

⁶⁶ Jacques Rancière, “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art” *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 90.

Christian Boltanski invited visitors to take a phone directory from the installation's shelves and sit at a table to sift through it.⁶⁷ Within the same exhibition, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster invited visitors to sit and read a book from a pile of pocket books atop of a carpet portraying a desert island as found in childhood dreams.⁶⁸ In another exhibition, Rirkrit Tiravanija invited audiences to prepare and eat disposable packets of soup in a camping setting; the seating was arranged to encourage discussion with the artist or with other exhibition-goers.⁶⁹ Exhibition spaces were not the only places to be transformed; urban spaces also underwent alterations through artistic interventions. Pierre Huyghe modified signs in bus shelters to transform to actions of everyday life into small adventures, whereas Jens Haaning reversed local and foreign relations in neighborhoods by showing illuminated text in Arabic or by diffusing the Turkish language through a loudspeaker.⁷⁰ Group A12 offered residents of a neighborhood an empty pavilion to which they could use as they pleased.⁷¹ Lee Mingwei's projects operate within the same vein as these works in that they encourage a social bond and a reconsideration of mundane actions and locations.

Participatory Art: To be Art or Not to be Art?

These projects can be conceived as relational art because “relational art [...] intends to create not only objects but situations and encounters”.⁷² However, the situation is not as simple as a debate between objects or situations within art spaces. The inclination towards conceptual situations points towards an underlying issue: “Art no longer wants to respond to the excess of commodities and signs, but to a lack of connections”.⁷³ A distancing from commodities allows for

⁶⁷ Ibid, 89.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

a proximity between entities and new forms of social relations. To quote Bourriaud, “by offering small services, the artist repairs the weaknesses in the social bond”, much like what Lee metaphorically does for participants in *The Mending Project*.⁷⁴

Rancière’s definition of critical art is aligned with the principal agendas of participatory art. According to him, critical art “is a type of art that sets out [...] to turn the spectator into a conscious agent of world transformation.”⁷⁵ However, Rancière describes a tension between formalist, commodified art and political art; the former is a withdrawal from the social while the latter is a dissolution within the social. As such, there is a clash between art and politics, yet they remain linked in several ways. Rancière considers politics in strongly aesthetic terms, describing it as “the transformation of the sensory fabric of ‘being together’”.⁷⁶ Politics has its own aesthetic: it invents scenes and characters as well as manifestations and statements different from art, sometimes completely oppositional. Art has “its own tension between two opposed politics: between the logic of art that becomes life at the price of abolishing itself as art, and the logic of art that does politics on the explicit condition of not doing it at all”.⁷⁷ In other words, art often struggles in remaining strictly art as it either becomes more like life or becomes a resistant political art-form. Therefore, for critical (participatory) art to be effective, Rancière suggests that art must negotiate between being art and non-art. The difficulty of critical art is not that of having to mediate between politics and art, but of finding a medium between the world of art and the world of commodity.

⁷⁴ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998) 37.

⁷⁵ Jacques Rancière, “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art” *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 83.

⁷⁶ Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetic Separation, Aesthetic Community: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art” in *Arts and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 2008, 4.

⁷⁷ Jacques Rancière, “Problems and Transformations in Critical Art” *Participation*, ed. by Claire Bishop (London: White Chapel Gallery and The MIT Press, 2006), 83.

Rancière argues that the true definition of the word aesthetics comes from a “regime of identification of art”, meaning that only in a certain historical or social context, art is identified as art.⁷⁸ Art is thus dependent on its perception within different periods or regimes, and what is perceived as art now might not be considered art in the past or future. In the aesthetic regime (the most recent regime), unlike the ethical or representational regimes, art is no longer defined by its place in society, nor by its skill and practice.⁷⁹ Therefore, due to its absence of location and visual form, aesthetic art, or participatory art, is constantly caught between being art and merging with other forms of activity and being – precisely what is occurring within Lee Mingwei’s artistic practice, whether it is eating, sleeping, reading or gifting. Rancière proposes the medium of collage as a “third way” to bridge the gaps within aesthetics art. The technique of collage is meant to combine meanings and effects, ordinary life and aesthetic strangeness. Therefore, Lee’s participatory and relational artworks, via their appearance as everyday actions, revolve around the use of aesthetic collage to bring together two seemingly disconnected universes –or people– and to discover a connection that was always present.

⁷⁸ Sophie Berrebi, “Jacques Rancière: Aesthetics is Politics” in *Arts and Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Summer 2008, 1.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 2.

Chapter 2: Relational Aesthetics and Zen Buddhism

In this chapter, Lee Mingwei's works are discussed in relation to Nicolas Bourriaud's writing on Relational Art, Claire Bishop's critique of open-ended artworks and Kataoka Mami's transcultural exhibition *Lee Mingwei and His Relations* (2014). Parallels between Relational art and Zen Buddhism are established through their shared denominators of intimated relationships and introspection, as well as their emphasis on the transient experience rather than the end-result of an event. *The Letter Writing Project* (1998) is examined as a specific Buddhist case study, and the actions performed in his works are characterized as transformative by enabling an emotional processing, often from a negative feeling to a more positive one.

Relational Art: Artwork-As-Encounter

Lee Mingwei's artistic practice has been conceived as Relational Art, Relational Aesthetics respectively, a term which was coined by the French art critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud in 1998. Bourriaud, in his book "Relational Aesthetics", defines the general term of "art" as being "an activity consisting in producing relationships with the world with the help of signs, forms, actions and objects."⁸⁰ A broad definition for an even broader term, art is therefore a conduit for the establishment of connections, whatever those connections may be. Relational aesthetics and relational art are closely related, the latter being a more specialized branch of the former. Relational *aesthetics* "consists in judging artworks on the basis of inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt"⁸¹, whereas relational *art* is "a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space."⁸² Relational art's objective is to thus

⁸⁰ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 107.

⁸¹ Ibid, 112.

⁸² Ibid, 113.

engender connections between people, a goal which pushes against the historical matrix of art, against the framed artwork, against the binary passive-active relationship often present in representational art. Rather than having an artwork's meaning contained in an object, Bourriaud defines the meaning of art with a different formula, where the artist is not the originator of an art object, but a collaborator of a relational connection, encounter or exchange.⁸³

Lee Mingwei's projects are generally one-on-one events where visitors contemplate notions of introspection and relationality with the artist through actions of eating, sleeping, walking and conversing. His works can be described as open-ended situations for everyday interaction where the completion of each situation is dependent on the involvement of participants. In an interview at the National Gallery of Victoria, Lee stated: "I often say that when an exhibition of my work opens it is around forty per cent complete, and only during the exhibition does the project take on a life of its own as a result of audience interaction, changing daily and becoming more complex and multilayered".⁸⁴ In other words, Lee's works are not only reliant on audience participation but they are also perpetually mutable and transient, meaning they can change and evolve during an exhibition process. When art is achieved through collaboration, "the subsequent form that each [person] gives to the relational product [the artwork] is not unalterable [...]. These artists perceive their work from a threefold viewpoint, at once aesthetic [...], historical [...], and social", and thus require the involvement of external forces.⁸⁵ Lee's external forces can extend to participants, bystanders, curators and exhibition venues, which are all elements involved in the constitution of his projects. These external elements become his mediums and because these "materials" are "full

⁸³ Ibid, 18.

⁸⁴ Serena Bentley, Interview with Lee Mingwei, *The Moving Garden – 2009*, URL: <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/lee-mingwei-the-moving-garden-2009/>, 13 Oct. 2016.

⁸⁵ Ravetz, Amanda, Alice Kettle, and Helen Felcey. "Collaboration through Craft." (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 46.

of changes and impossible to grasp, it demonstrates his work's insubstantial indeterminacy and, in a nutshell, its openness."⁸⁶ Audience engagement can be considered the most essential material to his projects since his works only come into full being through audience participation.

From Bourriaud's perspective, the artist can be considered as an "operator of signs", a catalyst of relational art rather than the sole creator of it, which is entirely justifiable in the case of Lee Mingwei.⁸⁷ Bearing in mind his National Gallery of Victoria interview statement, Lee considers his art as something that constantly evolves with the engagement of audience members who not only become participants, but also collaborators. In having participants act as collaborators, the conventional hierarchy of art-making and art-viewing is disrupted and places participants on equal footing with Lee. Moreover, during the 2017 Venice Biennale, Lee employed assistants as additional support in *The Mending Project*. These assistants took on his role as mender and engaged in conversation with individual visitors while mending a piece of clothing for them, thus relieving Lee of being the "center" of the artwork. In addition to hosting *The Mending Project* at the 2017 Venice Biennale, Lee Mingwei ran a second project titled *When Beauty Visits*, further embodying Bourriaud's notion of "catalyst" since he instigated the project without being physically present during its live events. In *When Beauty Visits*, a woman in a white robe with chiming bells around her ankles would present herself to a visitor and then lead them to a garden with a chair that had a stone on its seat. She would exchange a few words, leave, and then return bearing a letter on a tray for the visitor. The letter, which was the artwork of Lee Mingwei, was only to be opened "when beauty visits" the visitor, which could be at any time in the future. A

⁸⁶ Kuang-Yi Chen, "The Gray Area of Viewer Participation – On 'Lee Mingwei and His Relations'" in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 85.

⁸⁷ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 108.

mysterious and poetic performance to experience, *When Beauty Visits* and *The Mending Project* both prove that Lee Mingwei over-extends and democratizes his reach by employing and collaborating with assistants that aid him in sharing his artistic messages and endeavors.

Lee Mingwei uses a variety of methods to connect with his audiences, whether directly or indirectly and “these ‘relational’ procedures (invitations, casting sessions, meetings, convivial and user friendly areas, appointments, etc.) are merely a repertory of common forms, vehicles through which particular lines of thought and personal relationships with the world are developed.”⁸⁸ In other words, Lee’s approach to connecting with audiences, whether direct or indirect, is thus familiar and accessible. His approach draws on life as it is lived, on the fluid dynamic social environment, rather than on static representation. Almost anything could constitute a relational invitation: a communal meal, a discussion, a gifted service – all methods which have been employed by Lee within his projects. The common goal of most relational aesthetics projects is to create a social circumstance where the viewer’s experience of the fabricated social environment, which in this case is the interactive installation, becomes the art through engagement. The task of Lee Mingwei is therefore that of a “producer” for this social – often ephemeral– experience.⁸⁹

More Than Just a Money-Making Trend

In the 1990s, Bishop explains that there was a movement towards producing works of art that were simultaneously open-ended, interactive, and resistant to closure, and so works of art appeared as consistently unfinished, like a “work-in-progress” instead of a completed project.⁹⁰ Rather than

⁸⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 42.

⁹⁰ Claire Bishop, “Relational Aesthetics and Antagonism” *October*, Vol. 110 (Autumn, 2004): 52, accessed 14-10-2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3397557>

having a set object to observe and analyze, the work would seem in a constant flux of evolution, which Bishop deems as problematic since the identity and intentions of the work are unstable.⁹¹ For her, “such work seems to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the interpretations of a work art being open to continual reassessment, the work of art itself is argued to be in perpetual flux” – and therein lies the problem.⁹² The experimental quality of open-ended artworks allows them to be marketed as “laboratory spaces” dedicated to leisure and entertainment where an experience is sold, but the experience is unclear.⁹³ Bishop denounces that the quality of the experiences or relationships in relational projects are not properly examined or called into question.⁹⁴

Since the meaning in relational artwork is established collectively rather than privately (one of the postmodern indicators of breaking with modernism), Bishop points out that relational art is constricted to its environment and audience that is considered a community.⁹⁵ This phenomenon is a negative, limiting factor. Moreover, rather than a one-to-one relationship with the artwork, relational art orchestrates situations where participants are temporarily united as a collective social group in what Bishop coins as “microtopias in the present”.⁹⁶ These microtopias are derived from the word “utopia”, an imagined ideal, and from this definition, they are seemingly not real nor within reach.

Although relational aesthetics projects set the artist as experiential curator or producer, Bishop argues that they also negatively carry the association of artist-as-celebrity or artist-as-

⁹¹ Ibid, 52.

⁹² Ibid, 52.

⁹³ Ibid, 52.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 65.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 54.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 54.

experience.⁹⁷ Bishop argues that the “laboratory” of a relational project (which can refer to a museum or a gallery or an exhibition space) becomes a “marketable [...] space of leisure and entertainment” and derails from its original task of bringing people together to have an idiosyncratic social experience.⁹⁸ The social event is transformed into a *clever marketing strategy that seeks to replace goods and services with scripted and staged personal experiences*. She invokes Hal Foster in her argument and emphasizes that with relational aesthetics, “the institution may overshadow the work that it [...] highlights: it becomes the spectacle, it collects the cultural capital, and the director-curator becomes the star.”⁹⁹ The actual importance of the relational exchange is therefore argued to be lost and overshadowed by the showiness of the artist and the business of the exhibition.

In Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics*, the work of art is determined as the potential trigger for participation, however Bishop does not consider this determining aspect as a groundbreaking way of thinking about participation within art.¹⁰⁰ She points out that Happenings, Fluxus instructions, 1970s Performance Art and Joseph Beuys's declaration that “everyone is an artist” were all created on a similar basis, with “a rhetoric of democracy and emancipation that is very similar to Bourriaud's”.¹⁰¹ Bishop invokes Umberto Eco’s theory that “every work of art is potentially ‘open’” and pinpoints that Bourriaud only applies this argument to relational work, using it as a method to highlight its distinctiveness.¹⁰² While Eco regards the artwork as a reflection of the conditions of our existence, Bourriaud views the artwork as

⁹⁷ Ibid, 52.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 52.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 53.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 61.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 61.

¹⁰² Ibid, 62.

instigating these conditions, thus making art interaction more influential and superior to art viewing, a more passive form.¹⁰³ Bishop points out that since the “work of art is a ‘social form’ capable of producing positive human relationships, [...] the work is automatically political in implication and emancipatory in effect”.¹⁰⁴ Due to their positive objectives, all artworks that permit dialogue and democracy are assumed to be good, but Bishop asks: “what does “democracy” really mean in this context? If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?”¹⁰⁵

Lee attributes much thought to these questions as many of his artworks stem from an internal framework of thinking or feeling – like the premises of *The Dining Project*, *The Sleeping Project*, *The Tourist* and *The Moving Garden*. His personal experiences encourage him to create projects where he can repeat similar experiences to his own, but as encounters with strangers. Although Bishop’s critical statements of relational art might ring true in some cases, many of Lee Mingwei’s projects simultaneously combine the experience of a collective identity with a one-to-one experience within the artwork, and do not solely represent an elaborate marketing strategy.

Mending as a Way of Understanding Each Other and Ourselves

Using *The Mending Project* as a case study, I will adopt a biographical perspective to demonstrate that there is a lot of emotional unpacking behind its driving concept. The rousing force relates back to the events of 9/11. On the day that the World Trade Center was struck, Lee Ming Wei’s partner was working in the building and, after seeing what was happening on the news, believed that tragedy struck his partner: “We didn’t have contact with each other for about five

¹⁰³ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 65.

hours. I thought he was dead.”¹⁰⁶ As a reaction to this sudden shock and distress, Lee reports going through his partner’s wardrobe and beginning to mend his damaged clothing items. It is difficult to know the reason behind such a reaction, even the artist himself seemed uncertain while recounting the event in an interview: “Subconsciously I think I knew something was wrong and I needed to repair, but I couldn't repair anything else”.¹⁰⁷ How can this reaction be explained?

Griselda Pollock, in her essay “Art/Trauma/Representation”, provides some insight into the definitions of trauma and its relations to representation and art. Pollock explains that trauma is a “perpetual present” that is persistent in inhabiting a subject who does not, and cannot, know it is being inhabited¹⁰⁸. She describes it like an unconscious psychological state removed from time and space but that constantly remains in the perpetual present. Therefore, if trauma is a perpetual present, it is can also be understood as a permanent absence: “If trauma is a perpetual present, it is also understood as a permanent absence.”¹⁰⁹ In the context of art, Pollock explains that working with trauma involves placing a perceived yet intangible form within the structures of time, representation and subjectivity, and providing it with a formal presence that is not its representation, but the effect of its representation. This is something that has become apparent in twentieth century art; it is called a process. Lee Mingwei remarked in an interview that “it took [him] about nine years to really process that very highly charged moment of our lives and make it into something more poetic. That's how *The Mending Project* appeared.”¹¹⁰ And so, when placed

¹⁰⁶ Rosabel Tan, interview with Lee Mingwei, “Lee Mingwei on Creating Acts of Kindness”, *The Pantograph Punch*, February 8 2017, URL: <http://pantograph-punch.com/post/lee-mingwei-acts-of-kindness>

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Griselda Pollock, “Art/Trauma/Representation”, *Parallax* 15. no.1 (2009): 42.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 42.

¹¹⁰ Rosabel Tan, interview with Lee Mingwei, “Lee Mingwei on Creating Acts of Kindness”, *The Pantograph Punch*, February 8 2017, URL: <http://pantograph-punch.com/post/lee-mingwei-acts-of-kindness>

in an artistic context, the purpose of art in attempting to engage with trauma is different from the purposes of representation and generally manifest itself in a process, which can be correlated to a therapy of some sort.¹¹¹

The Mending Project, like Lee's other projects, was used to react to a negative or overwhelming experience by transforming it into something constructive, and it continues to do so. Most of Lee's projects are born from an internal framework of feeling and are not marketed as grand events, but as one-on-one encounters. *The Dining Project* came into being because Lee wanted to make friends on his university campus, so he offered food in exchange for "introspective conversation".¹¹² *The Sleeping Project* was informed by an encounter Lee had with a Holocaust survivor on an overnight train, and only years later was he able to create a project in response to the emotions he experienced that night.¹¹³ With the allowance of only one participant a day for both events and with implicit documentation of the works (identities of participants kept anonymous, objects as mementos), much of these experiences remained private. *The Tourist* developed out of an experience with a young nephew, and was mostly held outside of the institution, again in exclusivity. *The Moving Garden* was a rebuttal to the market economy by creating a gift market of flowers within the exhibition. *When Beauty Visits* was another socially-exclusive project, where participants were handpicked by performers and then gifted a letter. In his endeavors to establish a positive connection with participants, Lee "relies on face-to-face encounters" and previous "memories of close-in human connectedness".¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Griselda Pollock, "Art/Trauma/Representation", *Parallax* 15. no.1 (2009): 42.

¹¹² Lee Mingwei, "The Dining Project", *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>.

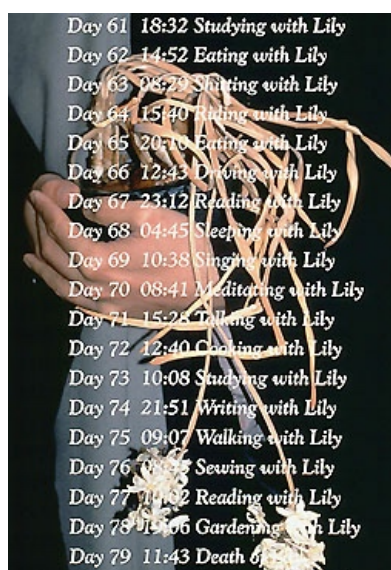
¹¹³ Lee Mingwei. "The Sleeping Project", *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

¹¹⁴ Harvey Molotch and Glenn Wharton, "An Art of Social Studies" in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 59.

Lee's projects outside of the scope of my thesis also channel negative experiences and feelings into positive ones, such as *100 Days with Lily* and *The Letter Writing Project*. The death of his grandmother had a great impact on him emotionally which Lee transferred and transformed into artworks. *100 Days with Lily* is a work where Lee focused on and documented in writing daily acts of walking, eating, cooking, meditating and sleeping while in presence of a lily. He lived with the lily (a symbol for his grandmother) for the entire duration of his 100-day project as a form of ritual grieving, from its blossoming till its death. Lee describes his grandmother as being an inspiration in his life, and when she passed, Lee was left with all these thoughts that he was unable to communicate to her. And so, he began writing a letter to her, which he explains as having a liberating "healing effect".¹¹⁵ He wanted to pass on this positive feeling to others and encourage them to delve deep and explore their interior lives and feelings, from where *The Letter Writing Project* was created. For this project, Lee asked people to visit the exhibition and write any kind of letter, but especially one of gratitude, insight or forgiveness. Once the letter was written, participants could seal it and place it aside, or keep it unsealed so that others might read it and share its experience. Participants were also given the option of posting it to a person by adding an address to it, and letters would be collected and mailed out by the end of the day.

¹¹⁵ Jacquelynn Baas, and Mary Jane Jacob. *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 233.

The actions performed in Lee's projects, whether they are eating, sleeping, grieving, gifting or mending, have emotional value that are transformed into constructive experiences with positive effects. For example, the act of mending in *The Mending Project* can be considered like emotional mending, for it accomplishes the action physically, visually and metaphorically. This emotional mending is highlighted by the use of colorful thread that is at odds with the fabric, as though to commemorate the repair. So, unlike a tailor who will try to hide the fact that the fabric was once damaged, Lee's mending was done with the idea of celebrating the repair, as if to say, "something good was done here, a gift was given, this fabric is even better than before".¹¹⁶ Moreover, the mended clothing items are then "displayed connected to colorful threads pulled from spools attached to the gallery walls, allowing the entire space to expand and proliferate in a way that visually symbolizes these relationships and connections".¹¹⁷ Therefore, although the encounters of



Left, Fig.13: *100 Days with Lily*, silver dye bleach print (ilfochrome).

Right, Fig.14: *100 Days with Lily*, installation view at Honolulu Biennial Foundation, 2017.

¹¹⁶ Lee Mingwei, "The Mending Project", *Lee Mingwei*, <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

¹¹⁷ Katoaka Mami, "Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations" in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 35.

The Mending Project are one-on-one events, all of them come together to metaphorically stitch the fabric of the social world and “serve as an emblem for all the connections of the universe”.¹¹⁸ Since many of his projects are born from a personal feeling and are personalized for audiences, I characterize his work as doing more than simply positing him as a celebrity in an elaborate marketing strategy that fails to bring people together. The involvement of institutions helps in establishing the relational trust between artist and participants since the projects are hosted within institutional frameworks adapted to conceptual and immaterial subject matter, like the formation of short-lived positive relationships and experiences.¹¹⁹

A Buddhist Case Study: *The Letter Writing Project (1998)*

Lee Mingwei’s work, particularly *The Letter Writing Project* can also be read through a Buddhist lens, which adds another layer of meaning to his work. During his monastic trainings, Lee’s teacher taught him that there are three different kinds of postures for meditation: “standing for gratitude, sitting for insight, and kneeling for forgiveness”¹²⁰. *The Letter Writing Project* is a work that incorporates and promotes these Buddhist postures. For this project, Lee asked people to visit the exhibition and write any kind of letter, but especially one of gratitude, insight or forgiveness, emulating the postures of meditation. Unlike *The Dining Project* or *The Sleeping Project*, Lee was not physically present with the participants during their writing process. In this work, the act of writing activates the three elements that create karmic energy, those of body, thought and speech. By enabling a situation in which people could partake in a shared feeling through a written letter, this desire to share an experience is a “form of exchange rooted in [Lee’s]

¹¹⁸ Ibid, 35.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 26.

¹²⁰ Jacquelynn Baas, and Mary Jane Jacob. *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 232.

Buddhist training”.¹²¹ At the end, Lee amassed around twelve thousand letters in his studio, many of which were letters to the deceased, like the letter he addressed to his grandmother.

Lee, by withholding specific instructions from audiences, had participants decide how they would approach and interact with the project. Although Bishop has criticized relational art for being unstable in identity and in approach, the open-mindedness in this work is not carelessness on the part of the artist; “the fluidity and versatility of these works that have become the target of Bishop’s criticism, for example, and the ideals of a microtopia that only privilege the ‘here and now’, are part of a body of Eastern philosophy that promises to be extremely useful in thinking about the idea of relationality – just as they are a central part of Buddhist thought.”¹²² In *The Letter Writing Project*, based on the position of the table in the room, participants knew which space was dedicated to writing, but it was up to them to decide whether they would use it, and whether they would be standing, sitting or kneeling. Most people did not know the core reasoning behind the project and probably thought that the installation was simply an aesthetic decision. For Lee, this detail did not matter. In having projects partaking in multiple artistic traditions, whether Eastern and Western, or more specifically, relational and Buddhist, interpreting correlations between the two different spheres is sound – after all, Lee consciously incorporates both in his practice.

¹²¹ Ibid, 233.

¹²² Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 32.



Fig.15: *The Letter Writing Project*, detailed view of the sitting and kneeling tents., Museum MACAN, 2018



Fig.16: *The Letter Writing Project*, standing tent, installation view from “Lee Mingwei and His Relations”, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2014

The Interplay of Relational Art and Zen Buddhism in Lee's Works

Lee's education and upbringing under Benedictine and Dominican monks taught him the benefits of listening to nature, appreciating the little things, meditating and living a healthy lifestyle.¹²³ The "Zen philosophy that Lee Mingwei came into contact with during his youth, especially its self-awareness of the everyday, compassion, and introverted disposition, might be said to form the foundations of a consciousness that would subsequently give direction to his artistic practice."¹²⁴ Lee's artistic ideas come to him during periods of conscious introspection while he is swimming, taking baths or listening to music rather than during intellectual pursuits.¹²⁵ His internal process for coming up with ideas resembles the Zen Buddhist enlightenment experience where introspection is prized over intellectual pursuits, a process which I will explain in detail below.

The etymology of the Sino-Japanese word 'Zen' comes from the Chinese character Chan, which originates as an abbreviation from the Sanskrit word Dhyāna.¹²⁶ When translated, the word Zen transforms into "meditation", "contemplation" or "immersion". In Buddhist practice, the word originally meant the "practice of opening oneself to the essential core of things, allowing space for the immediacy of perception, letting oneself go in the dynamic of elementary existential contexts growing out of tranquility and calmness".¹²⁷ Over time, Zen Buddhism has maintained its presence

¹²³ John L. Tran. *Lee Mingwei likes getting to know you*. The Japan Times, Oct. 23rd, 2014. URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/10/23/arts/lee-mingwei-likes-to-get-to-know-you/#.XDKlvc9KgWo>

¹²⁴ Katoaka Mami, "Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations" in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 32.

¹²⁵ John L. Tran. *Lee Mingwei likes getting to know you*. The Japan Times, Oct. 23rd, 2014. URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/10/23/arts/lee-mingwei-likes-to-get-to-know-you/#.XDKlvc9KgWo>

¹²⁶ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, "ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings." *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 13.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 12.

in Asian countries and has begun to exercise influence in America and Europe. Although the word “zen” has been adopted as a trendy term within Western popular culture as a noun or adjective generally suggesting “spontaneity or harmony with the world that transcends words”, Zen Buddhism has extended its reach far beyond its original source and continues to be a school of thought filled with inspiration and promise.¹²⁸ In fact, Zen Buddhism played a major role within the neo-avant-garde movements of the 1960’s that germinated current relational art. John Cage, a proponent of Fluxus (a movement that attempted to fuse art with daily life), drew his own philosophy from Zen thought, later influencing other artists like Allan Kaprow who went on to orchestrate “Happenings”.¹²⁹

Zen is one of several schools of thought and practice under Mahāyāna Buddhism. Classified as a branch rather than as a sect, its followers strive to reach a level of awakening or enlightenment through personal means of introspection and intuitive awareness that go beyond written doctrines and teachings since those methods are representational. The *satori*, the Japanese term for enlightenment, can develop slowly over time or can occur suddenly within the depths of one’s self, triggered by seemingly unimportant events. Enlightenment is a powerful personal spiritual experience; to be enlightened is to experience “all things of this world from within”, to be seized and taken by them in patient self-absorption until the soundless message of everything, animate and inanimate, becomes an absolute void beyond description.¹³⁰ Zen enlightenment is a paradox: it is a loud silent message, at once everything and nothing, both individual and collective. The

¹²⁸ Michelle Spuler. "What is Zen? Repackaging Zen Buddhism for the West." *Recherches Sociologiques* 31, no. 3 (2000): 33-47.

¹²⁹ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 36.

¹³⁰ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, “ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings.” *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 11.

enlightenment experience presents a dilemma since it is a difficult concept to rationally grasp and explain with words; theory, critical thought, as well as the study of language and of written teachings, although they are visual aids, cannot lead to transcendental enlightenment since they are static representations. A static representation cannot be transient, and transience is fundamental aspect of Buddhism, Zen art and, by extension, Lee's open-ended artworks. Only everyday consciousness enables an individual to attain *satori* as it fuses the body and spirit in one. The intellectual and analytical mind is not part of this process as it exercises attention outwardly, to the surface, to the unimportant, instead of inwardly:

*“To learn the Buddhist way is to learn about oneself. To learn about oneself is to forget oneself. To forget oneself is to perceive oneself as all things. To realize this is to cast off the body and mind of self and others. When you have reached this stage you will be detached even from enlightenment but will practice it continually without thinking about it. When people begin to seek the dharma [outside themselves] they are immediately far removed from its true location. When the Dharma has been received through the right transmission, one's real self immediately appears”.*¹³¹

A Zen experience cannot be accurately described with words nor can it be replicated between two individuals since its form and manifestation are ambiguous and intangible. Taught outside the realms of language and conventional intellectual teachings, it targets the mind to bring it to an elevated metaphysical state where “Being is Becoming, and Becoming is Being”.¹³² By simultaneously being and becoming, one can reach a constantly evolving, transient frame of mind

¹³¹ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, “ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings.” *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 13.

¹³² *Ibid*, 12.

instead of remaining at a static state, a characteristic found in Lee's artworks: "Lee Mingwei's works evade any simple idea of start and finish but here the ambiguity helps define their very character".¹³³ Each Zen experience is idiosyncratic, and can only be experienced and understood internally through self-integration, participation, contemplation and introspection. Since the fundamental Zen experience follows the process of "Being is Becoming, and Becoming is Being", in which the phenomenon (the "becoming") and the absolute (the "being") are united, it is possible to understand how religious content is depicted with secular subject matter. Zen ideology recognizes that every creature and object is part of the absolute and is inherently a manifestation of the Buddha Nature. Therefore, while a singular part of the whole universe, every creature or object, no matter what they are, comes to stand as the whole universe since all that exists does not require a specific visual symbol.

In terms of visual appearance, Zen art has remained free of the constrictions of specific formalized symbolism. Before the arrival of Zen painting in history, there were not many attempts to use complex abstract symbols in lieu of familiar sceneries. In fact, "it may even be said that Zen seeks to transcend any kind of traditional symbolism and thus attains a new symbolism on a higher level. Significantly, however, these symbols of a higher rank are precisely the most ordinary things chosen quite at random from everyday life".¹³⁴ Thus, Zen art represents familiar, commonplace things of everyday life such as flowers, nature, animals, domestic people and landscape. In presenting itself inconspicuously, the art becomes more readily accessible to viewers with its multiple references to reality. When comparing it to orthodox Buddhist painting, Zen art is more

¹³³ Harvey Molotch and Glenn Wharton, "An Art of Social Studies" in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 59.

¹³⁴ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, "ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings." *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 47.

liberal since it is free of official character. The Zen work of art “turns subjective and becomes an evocative opposite of the one viewing it”.¹³⁵ It is a personal testament; one that testifies to spirituality, origin, individual ties and experience that point toward the objective of enlightenment. On the surface, Zen works thus appear “this-worldly”, with no trace of mysticism, and for this reason, they are often hard to identify as works of art with religious inferences.

Although Zen art is visually recognizable because of its daily subjects, the old masters of meditation spoke in similes and metaphors to their followers and disciples. The masters wrote their messages on paintings in verse and prose, and they tried to render their enigmatic teachings comprehensible by using familiar imagery. To inspire responses and to educate their students, masters would teach with these images drawn from everyday life and they would combine such pictures with motivational shouts and meditation tasks. These teaching methods are like Lee’s artworks in that they are grounded in everyday day life through acts and images of eating, sleeping, writing, talking, sewing, etc. Moreover, although these everyday acts and teachings are seemingly banal, when placed within a context of conscious interpretation, like Zen teaching or a museum exhibition, their purpose and outcome changes. For example, in *The Dining Project* and in *The Sleeping Project*, the “act of having a meal with someone you are meeting for the first time in the non-quotidian space of the museum [...] and the act of sleeping in the same space, makes one aware of the nature of unconscious everyday rituals”.¹³⁶

Correlations can be drawn between Zen and relational art when analyzing the importance of relationships between Zen masters and disciples and the importance of Lee’s relationship as a relational artist to his audience, whom he usually meets during one-to-one sessions. The

¹³⁵ Ibid, 47.

¹³⁶ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 37.

transmission from master to disciple, from mind to mind and heart to heart, is crucial in both Zen Buddhism and in Lee's work. The knowledge and teachings of the Zen master intends to light the minds of his disciples like a flame passed from wick to wick. The immediate contact between master and disciple, through which literary and artistic interests are exchanged, is to be intimated, just like the relationship between Lee and his participants. The passing of the "Dharma Flame" from teacher to pupil is fundamental as that is the moment when Zen invades the body; this experience pervades body and spirit in its totality through the tranquility and calm of meditative absorption. The basic canon of Zen can be abridged to a stanza of four lines:

A special transmission outside the teachings

No dependence upon words or letters

Directly pointing at the mind of man

*Seeing into his own nature, man attains Buddhahood*¹³⁷

During the Song Dynasty (10th-13th century), some Zen masters understood the stanza figuratively while others understood it literally. The first two verses rejected systematic teaching and blind confidence in religious texts, thus promoting the dismissal of religious scriptures in favor of the "transmission from mind to mind", like a relational experience that relies on encounters.¹³⁸ This process encouraged the transmission of Buddhist knowledge from master to disciple and "this formula [...] has become a pivotal concept of Zen".¹³⁹ The master, with his enlightened spirit,

¹³⁷ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, "ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings." *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 13.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, 7.

attempts to enlighten the spirit of the disciple under his guidance, like a relational artist attempting to engender connections with every individual. However, like a relational artist that cannot obligate individuals to participate, it is important to note that the master cannot lead the disciple to enlightenment; it must come from the disciple's inner self and will. The master can only witness or provoke the spiritual experience by redirecting the disciple to his own mind. Such is the reason why "the masters of meditation keep emphasizing that ultimately, Zen can neither be taught nor transmitted; concepts such as "doctrine, transmission, mediation" [...] must therefore be understood as expedient substitute terms to name a process that, in final analysis, cannot be apprehended conceptually or intellectually"¹⁴⁰. Zen, like relational art, must be *experienced* to be properly understood.

Within Zen ideology, word is inferior to thought and thought is inferior to experience. The word is the final detritus of the experience, filtered down to its most basic atom. The importance of the experiential relationship between master and disciple is thus stressed in this case, proving that the individual journey to an enlightened state is the goal of Zen: "The elucidation of one's innermost self-permits experiencing the identity of one's own self with the absolute, the perception of one's own primeval completeness, the Buddha Nature"¹⁴¹. This final invisible destination, this utmost experience, is only attainable by the disciple.

Zen experiences and relational art are both fluid and non-representational, and this indescribability presents a dilemma in recognition and tangibility. In relation to his practice, Lee appropriately describes art as trying to describe the taste of water; water does not have a specific flavor but its taste changes all the time, and is thus in line with Zen's ideology of transformation,

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, 13.

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 13.

transience and intangibility.¹⁴² By defining art in such broad terms, it becomes difficult to pinpoint its true appearance (or taste), and Lee finds himself questioning its essence. It is not the art object which interests Lee, but its boundaries, which he is keen to broaden instead of tighten in his artworks. Basic interpersonal qualities such as consciousness and trust are key components in his art since Lee creates work conducive to reflection and contemplation in public spaces, where these relational components are crucial in establishing these vulnerable exchanges.

Zen art is demanding in what it requires from its viewer as “works of art partaking in the Zen spirit thus require from the viewer, such as hardly any other art form, silent, patient self-absorption”.¹⁴³ Although minimal and familiar in appearance, Zen works are multi-layered; to reach the final degree of interpretation requires a stripping away of all visual components until nothing but the silent message is left and felt by the beholder. In bringing daily rituals under the guise of artworks in the institutional space of a museum or an exhibition, “Lee Mingwei elicits a similar awareness”.¹⁴⁴ Both complex and minimal, Zen art and Lee’s artworks present a paradox that is meant to mirror the experience of life, where everyday occurrences and actions, under the guise of repetition and banality, hold depth and enrichment.

Lee Mingwei and His Relations (2014): Kataoka Mami’s Transcultural Exhibition

Chief Curator Kataoka Mami, in her exhibition *Lee Mingwei and His Relations* (2014), held at the Mori Art Museum, included a range of Western and Eastern¹⁴⁵ reference works to situate

¹⁴² Jacquelynn Baas, and Mary Jane Jacob. *Buddha Mind in Contemporary Art*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 229.

¹⁴³ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, “ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings.” *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 11.

¹⁴⁴ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 37.

¹⁴⁵ The terms “Eastern” and “Western” are used in this section with an understanding of their limitations and historical implications. However, although binary, these terms are used to depict a crossing and intermingling of different histories within the context of Kataoka’s exhibition.

Lee's practice, recognizing that there lies both Eastern and Western allusions in Lee Mingwei's art. This exhibition displayed a transcultural perspective in art, a crossing between relational art and Zen philosophy; it supports my thesis that argues that Lee's works simultaneously unravel and contribute to the dominant discourses of participatory and relational art since the exhibition is "an experimental attempt to break away from the restricted discourse surrounding participatory art since the 1990s".¹⁴⁶ *Lee Mingwei and His Relations* was a mid-career retrospective of the artist, and it was an exhibition that travelled to the Taipei Fine Arts Museum in 2014, and then to the Auckland Art Gallery in the spring of 2016. The exhibition presented fifteen major projects that spanned Lee's twenty-year career and the show represented the most thorough survey of Lee's brand of participatory art. Kataoka, in her catalog introductory essay, explains that Lee's projects attain their "completion through 'participation' at many levels, and in accordance with the instructions attached to each work".¹⁴⁷ Although the levels of audience participation varied, all visitors were encouraged to participate as much or as little as possible, whether participating on the spot or registering in advance by lottery.

In the exhibition, Kataoka constructed connections between artists and scholars that seemed unconventional upon first observation due their diverging histories and origins. She included not only pieces by relational aesthetics artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, but also works by Zen master Hakuin and Zen specialist D. T. Suzuki, as well as performance artists Allan Kaprow and Yves Klein (a full works list has been provided in the appendix). Through a juxtaposed approach, these reference works provided clues to understanding the historical and cultural context of Lee's work, both Eastern and Western, while simultaneously allowing visitors to develop a comprehensive meaning

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 33.

¹⁴⁷ Anne Doran. *Then Events Unfold: The art of Lee Mingwei*. Tricycle Magazine, Winter 2015. URL: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/then-events-unfold/>

of the word “connections” in art. Although not all the exhibited figures had a direct relationship with Lee, Kataoka asserts that “their philosophies and practices, which have served to deepen and intensify a variety of concepts derived from the idea of ‘relationality’, promise to produce a fascinating dialogue with Lee”.¹⁴⁸ Her choice of artists and scholars reflects her interest in the parallels between Buddhist thought and Relational Aesthetics, a point of view which I endorse. I liken Lee’s relational encounters with his participants to the relationships of Zen masters and disciples, as well as point out the intangibility of both Zen Enlightenment experiences and relational art experiences. She argues that “the potential of the relational art Bourriaud describes, in focusing on mutual human relationality, and in referencing an upheaval of modern values, is indeed somewhat close to the [Buddhist] concept of ‘connectedness’”.¹⁴⁹ Artworks and quotations from her selection of artists, religious leaders and thinkers aided in the public’s understanding of Lee’s practice by providing global and local contemporary art contexts, highlighting the feeling of (inter)connectedness that Relational Aesthetics and Zen Buddhism both strive to incite within the individual and the collective.

In the catalog essay for the exhibition, Kataoka argues that the social and cultural context around the development of participatory art in Asian countries, or its production by Asian artists abroad (such as Lee), should be granted a broader approach by Western critics. Zen practitioners, specifically from Japan, have traditionally “tended to understand and experience ‘all things’ of this world, animate or inanimate, from within, to let themselves be seized and taken by them, much more so than in modern Western rational thinking, where we try to comprehend and intellectually

¹⁴⁸ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 33.

¹⁴⁹ Anne Doran. *Then Events Unfold: The art of Lee Mingwei*. Tricycle Magazine, Winter 2015. URL: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/then-events-unfold/>

analyze from the outside”.¹⁵⁰ Such a tendency puts Western critics at a remove from experiences, which is what is encouraged to be pursued in Zen, and improperly characterizes certain artworks. The broad approach should be an open-mindedness in categorization, or an altogether avoidance of art labels. *Lee Mingwei and His Relations* was “an experimental attempt [...] to gain an overview of Lee’s practice from the perspective of the wider that includes insights provided by Eastern thought and philosophy”.¹⁵¹ Relationality and participation are not concepts exclusive to either Eastern or Western thought, and should – ideally – be interpreted from all perspectives, sans exclusivity or preconceptions of origin.

An avoidance of labels is encouraged by Lee himself, who has previously stated, in regards to his practice: “I’d invite them to put aside the Buddhist component. Later on, if they want to put that gloss back on, they are welcome to. But initially, put it aside and just look at the work.”¹⁵² Lee suggests that his art be contemplated, analyzed and experienced with a clear mind before being labelled a certain manner. Interestingly, Lee has noticed that when critics in the United States or in Europe write about his work, their writing describes how Zen Buddhism influences his process, while in Asian countries, they write about him through the relational aesthetics lens, or other Western-born movements, such as Fluxus or Happenings.¹⁵³ As it is understandable that the unfamiliar might appeal to reading audiences, Lee recognizes that depending on the background culture of the reviewer, he is exoticized in their interest to discuss an artist that is “different” from

¹⁵⁰ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, “ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings.” *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 11.

¹⁵¹ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 33.

¹⁵² Anne Doran. *Then Events Unfold: The art of Lee Mingwei*. Tricycle Magazine, Winter 2015. URL: <https://tricycle.org/magazine/then-events-unfold/>

¹⁵³ John L. Tran. *Lee Mingwei likes getting to know you*. The Japan Times, Oct. 23rd, 2014. URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/10/23/arts/lee-mingwei-likes-to-get-to-know-you/#.XDKlvc9KgWo>

those in their culture. In other words, Lee is both “othered” and “orientalized”, which means that he is often defined as the “contrasting image, idea, personality, experience” of either the European-Western Occident or the East-Asian Orient, a topic laced with cultural hegemony.¹⁵⁴ By relating Lee’s work to artists and thinkers of both Eastern and Western origin, Kataoka evaded the theme of exoticization and annulled the dialogue of cultural hegemony. Although Lee prefers to not be othered or Orientalized, he is at peace with being complex to situate in the discourse of art history since he thrives on difference: “I like to be different; maybe that’s because I’m an artist, or vice versa.”¹⁵⁵ Lee embraces difference and uses it to his advantage to appear interesting to audiences.

Lee’s work is part of a stream of art practice that challenges the conventional role of the artist and performer in relation to their audience. He contributes to that branch of interactive art-making that includes relational artists like Tiravanija, Yves Klein and Allan Kaprow, all of which are included in Kataoka’s exhibition. Although relational aesthetics has been accused of catering to a minority of elitist art-world participants, Lee’s works are known to easily involves participants due to their common everyday appeal. Rather than being community or group-driven projects, they have an unusual degree of intimacy due to their one-on-one set-up. While Lee was a graduate student at Yale, Tiravanija was invited to be a guest lecturer and he commented on the differences between their processes, describing Lee’s work as being more “extroverted” than his own since it involved more personal implications. Tiravanija specifically compared his cooking for a crowd, rather than cooking for a single person, like Lee in *The Dining Project*: “In my works, I serve curry

¹⁵⁴ Edward W. Said., excerpts from *Orientalism* (1978), in *Contemporary Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. (London: Arnold, 1996), 20.

¹⁵⁵ John L. Tran. *Lee Mingwei likes getting to know you*. *The Japan Times*, Oct. 23rd, 2014. URL: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2014/10/23/arts/lee-mingwei-likes-to-get-to-know-you/#.XDKlvc9KgWo>

to a great number of people. But my own role is merely to make the curry backstage, so to speak – which is an extremely introverted approach to take. In comparison, your project is extremely extroverted – it involves opening your heart and mind to the person you’re making the meal for, and arriving at an understanding [of] him or her through dialogue and conversation”.¹⁵⁶ Lee is not a proactive social artist that runs large-scale workshops or activist rallies. His style is more poetic – he is a collector and instigator of individual, personal stories.

¹⁵⁶ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 38.

CHAPTER 3: Gift-Giving Tendencies

This chapter focuses on the gift component within Lee Mingwei's practice, honing in on its multiple functions and analyzing it anthropologically, etymologically, judicially, socially, artistically and economically. By invoking the theories of anthropologist Marcel Mauss, cultural critic Lewis Hyde, as well performance scholars Diana Taylor and Philip Auslander, I argue that the gift establishes further links between Relational Art and Zen Buddhism by utilizing the metaphor of the circle as a symbol for its continuous motion. The gift also promotes relational connections through objects and services as they are inherently tied to those giving and receiving them. In defining a work of art as a gift that simultaneously circulates two markets, the gift economy and the market economy, the gifts in Lee's practice disrupt the conventional social and economic hierarchies within institutions and are used to reactivate his art endlessly.

Marcel Mauss: An Anthropological Perspective on Gift-Giving

Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1925) is a collection of five chapters that analyzes how the exchange of objects between groups, an action dating back to the very beginnings of human civilization, builds relationships between humans. Although Mauss (1872-1950) was a French sociologist, his essay became influential in other disciplines, such as law and anthropology, and has been attributed to being the foundation of social theories of reciprocity and gift exchange. Mauss is interested in how a gift can be a "total prestation" that comprises "elements of all dimensions of life", which means that, for him, a gift is not limited to a specific tangible form.¹⁵⁷ His perspective on the gift resonates with Lee Mingwei's practice of art, whose works revolve around the concept of gift-giving as a method of establishing short-lived relations. Lee's projects are grounded in the actions

¹⁵⁷ Marcel Mauss translated by Jane I. Guyer, *The Gift: Expanded Edition* (HAU; Expanded ed. 2016), 19.

of everyday life rather than within the representational art object, and seeing as how the gift comprises “all dimensions of life” for Mauss, both concepts, Mauss’ gift and Lee’s art, are thus familiar to the general population and mutable in form. Due to the multiplicity of social and cultural implications related to the gift, Mauss considers one trait of the gift in isolation to guide his ideas: “the voluntary character, so to speak, apparently free and without cost, and yet constrained and interested, of these prestations”¹⁵⁸. In theory, a gift is voluntary. In reality it is often proven to be obligatorily given and received, and therefore, not free. This paradox begs the following questions: “What force is there in the thing one gives that compels the recipient to return it?” This question is significant to Lee Mingwei’s practice as he endlessly repeats and studies this reciprocal dynamic in his projects.

Rather than attempting to answer this question directly, Lee responds to it with unofficial social experiment projects like *The Moving Garden* or *When Beauty Visits*, where a participant is gifted an object (a flower or letter) and is then expected to respond to it in varying degrees. Mauss, on the other hand, to answer his question, approaches the concept of the gift from multiple researched point of views, including etymological, anthropological, lawful and moral. Having initially written his text in French, the translation of certain terms presents conceptual difficulties for the English language. In summary, he speaks of the gift (*le don*) as the object itself in relation to its multiple guises and etymology. He addresses the implications to return and reciprocate it (*rendre*). Mauss loosely distinguishes the differences between the law and rights of gift-giving customs, where a right (*droit*) goes beyond being a simple custom. Finally, his mentions of *la morale* refer to moral teachings and learnings, whereas *la raison* refers to using our use of reasoning or rationale in the context of gift-giving.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 58.

Etymologically, the French language possesses a repertoire of words related to the notion of “gift”, from which Mauss employs four –*don, cadeau, présent, prestation*– in varying frequencies in his chapters.¹⁵⁹ The pitfalls of French-to-English translation of his text occur when words in French convey certain nuances not present in the English language. Although this glitch in translation is unavoidable, it does communicate the inherent slipperiness of the concept of the gift, which echoes the intangible characteristics of transience and exchange so central to Lee’s work, *Relational Aesthetics and Zen Buddhism*. Jane I. Guyer, one of several translators of *The Gift*, points out in her introduction that “the anthropologists’ view, descended from Mauss [...], [is] that “the gift is the ultimate shapeshifter” based on its “virtually incomprehensible intermingling of freedom and obligation”.¹⁶⁰

Moreover, another conceptual difficulty is the rendering of *rendre* in English. In this case, the French language has a single and richly nuanced word, while the English language has many partially comprehensive possibilities.¹⁶¹ *Rendre* usually implies “to return” or “to reciprocate”, sometimes extending “to counter” with respect to the “counter-gift”. This plethora of words also extends to the terms “to give back”, “to repay” and “to return the favor”.¹⁶²

Reciprocating is an integral part of gift-giving. By analyzing the economic practices of multiple archaic societies dating back to the Neolithic era, Mauss discovered that common to them as a central practice was reciprocal exchange.¹⁶³ This phenomenon, as well as age-old practices, are still relevant today. Reciprocal exchange revolves around the obligation to give, to receive and

¹⁵⁹ Ibid, 18.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, 19-20.

¹⁶² Ibid, 19-20.

¹⁶³ Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, (New York, 2002), xi.

to reciprocate between different parties. Mauss found that, in four important population groups, two or three practiced the *potlatch*: “the potlatch itself, so typical a phenomenon, and at the same time, so characteristic of these tribes, is none other than the system of gifts (*dons*) exchanged”.¹⁶⁴ Archaic forms of exchange thus resulted in “that of gifts (*dons*) presented and returns made”, with “the circulation of things in these societies with the circulation of rights and of persons”.¹⁶⁵ In other words, gifts extend beyond the simple acts of giving and receiving and necessarily bring about reciprocal exchange since they metaphysically tie both giver and receiver. The fellow artist Rirkrit Tiravanija characterized Lee Mingwei as being more “extroverted” in his practice due to the one-on-one nature of many of his projects (like *The Dining Project*, *The Sleeping Project*, *The Tourist* and *The Mending Project*) that enable deeper interpersonal exchanges – the aforementioned metaphysical tie linking giver and receiver is thus present, if not strong, in Lee’s works.¹⁶⁶ This idea of a metaphysical connection is also reflected within other concepts prevalent to Lee’s practice; in Zen Buddhism, the gift of knowledge and guidance from master to disciple not only creates a relational link between the two people, but an understanding that the knowledge should be passed on and bequeathed upon others when a disciple becomes a master, encouraging a cycle of reciprocal exchange. This metaphysical reciprocal exchange also resonates with Relational Art objectives of creating an “arena of exchange” where the meaning of an artwork is established collectively, as Lee does in his works.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Marcel Mauss translated by Jane I. Guyer, *The Gift: Expanded Edition* (HAU; Expanded ed. 2016), 112.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 144.

¹⁶⁶ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 38.

¹⁶⁷ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*. (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2002), 17-18.

Therefore, according to Mauss and in concurrence with Lee's practice, in the event of a gift exchange, the giver does not only give an object. They also give an indiscernible part of themselves since the object is integrally tied to them: the objects are "never completely detached from those exchanging them".¹⁶⁸ The gift is more than a commodity or a thoughtful service exchanging hands. The gift is a "total prestation" which represents every aspect of the society in which it finds itself. Therefore, the gift has power as it can be simultaneously economic, political, legal, magical, mythological, religious, practical, social, and personal. Mauss argues that by transferring an object through social expectations of gift-giving, the gift-giver (Lee Mingwei) rearranges the fabric and social relations related to the gift – and therein lies the foundation of the gift's power and its need for reciprocity. Therefore, because of the link between giver and gift, the act of giving creates a social bond where the obligation to reciprocate is felt on the part of the recipient.

When thinking of Lee Mingwei's work within the context of the 2017 Venice Biennale, where he presented *The Mending Project* and *When Beauty Visits*, his work – his gifts – can be read as trying to intervene within the conventional economic and social power structures of the biennale system with the use of free mending services and gifted letters. In terms of reciprocity, participants had several ways of responding to his kindness: in *The Mending Project*, they could leave their garment for the duration of the exhibition, thus contributing to his artwork; they could speak positively of his work to others via discussion or social media, helping him garner acclaim; or they could repeat his acts of kindness to their own acquaintances, continuing the cycle of giving. However, although such reciprocity might have been felt and acted upon by the participants, it was

¹⁶⁸ Marcel Mauss translated by Jane I. Guyer, *The Gift: Expanded Edition* (HAU; Expanded ed. 2016), 108.

not obligatory as that is a characteristic better attributed to past traditional societies that preceded money exchanges.

Although Mauss established that a similar social dynamic is prevalent in modern gift-exchanges, gifts in past traditional societies might have been more complex due to the multiplicity of collective expectations that pre-dated currency. Before the global transition into a currency-driven market, Mauss clarifies that “this principle of gift-exchange (*échange-don*) must have existed in societies that have gone beyond the phase of ‘*total prestations*’ (from clan to clan and from family to family), but that have not yet reached the stage of the purely individual contract, or the market in which money circulates”.¹⁶⁹ Gift-exchanges would occur mostly between groups, not between individuals, as they were a crucial effort to build not just wealth and alliances but social solidarity. The “gift” thus pervaded all aspects of society, and rituals like the potlatch enabled clans to establish superiority over one another when a reciprocation of gifts was unbalanced.¹⁷⁰

This pervasion of the gift within society extends to the fields of law and is perceived in the handling and writing of legal rights. Guyer, when paraphrasing legal scholar Richard Hyland, declares: “The law and the giving of gifts are largely incommensurable fields of human activity. Nonetheless, because the transfer of property is common to both domains... attempts to reconcile [them] have produced an intricate and instructive tapestry of comparative law, one that includes some of the most fascinating constructions ever imagined by the legal mind”.¹⁷¹ Hyland’s book, *Gifts: A Study in Comparative Law*, examines the law governing the giving of gifts by investigating

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 144.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, 144.

¹⁷¹ Ibid, 18.

into its historical background under both common law and private law systems. In a way, the intricacy of present-day law reflects the social complexity that gifts involved in the past.

Mauss explains that early systems of exchange center around the obligations to give, to receive, and to reciprocate. Moreover, “a considerable part of our ethics and of our lives themselves still exists within this same atmosphere of the gift (don), of obligation and of liberty mixed together”.¹⁷² By giving, one depicts themselves as generous and deserving of respect. The first step for the creation of social relationships is established. By receiving, one shows appropriate respect to the giver in accepting their generosity. By returning the gift, one demonstrates honor equal to that of the giver, as well as a will to maintain the social relation. Gift-giving is therefore steeped in morality and to not reciprocate often means to lose one’s honor and status: “the unreciprocated gift still renders the person who has accepted it inferior, especially when it is received without any spirit of return”.¹⁷³ In his text, Mauss lays the foundation for a theoretical understanding of the nature of human social relations, helping us understanding how Lee Mingwei’s works contribute to the discourses of relational aesthetics and gift-giving.

Lewis Hyde: The Gift in Modern Economy

Lewis Hyde’s *The Gift* is a book about property and the exchange of property, and how the art object paradoxically operates as both gift and commodity in modern economy. Examining the function of the art object, he philosophizes what distinguishes works of art from pure commodities. To tackle his question, Hyde initially proposes that artworks are gifts from the artist that exist in two economies, the market economy and the gift economy.¹⁷⁴ Artworks can emerge from inner

¹⁷² Ibid, 177.

¹⁷³ Ibid, 177.

¹⁷⁴ Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. New York: Vintage Books. Second Vintage Books Edition (November 2007), XVI.

talents, passions or external inspirations – all defined by Hyde as gifts in their respective form.¹⁷⁵ By analyzing how gift-giving has shaped societies and culture through the study of traditional ceremonies, folklore, contemporary marketing strategies, poetry and everything else in between, Hyde establishes links between gift-giving, society, the artist and the marketplace. His book is about how humans bear a relationship of give-and-take with the world and how what is taken or given shapes both the individual and the world in turn. Themes of reciprocity, exchange and transience are thus present in Hyde's ideology of the gift. Having established that these themes exist in Relational Art, Zen Buddhism and Mauss' research findings, with Hyde's perspective, I am able to add a subsequent layer to the web of ideas surrounding Lee Mingwei's work.

The beginning of Hyde's book delineates the theory of gift-giving by referencing cultural anthropology and folk tales. In summary, the gift should always be in motion; "the gift must always move"¹⁷⁶ since "a gift that cannot move loses its gift properties".¹⁷⁷ As such, a gift is never meant to be hoarded by a single person; a gift should keep giving, whether by being given away once more or by being transformed. By keeping the gift in motion, its spirit is retained. Visually, one could imagine the spirit of the gift in the shape of a circle, constantly shared among individuals.¹⁷⁸ For the Kula tribe in New Guinea, the shape of the circle eliminates the possibility of one person controlling the gift by always involving at least three people.¹⁷⁹ By encouraging the motion of the gift through circular movement, the gift brings wealth, generosity and positivity that is shared collectively.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, XVI.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 4.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 14.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 16.

The circle's importance in exchange also extends to Zen Buddhism: the Ensō (Circle) is “one of the most representative motifs of Zen painting” and “expresses the principles of the universe with a single brushstroke”.¹⁸⁰ In using the circle, “a geometric figure without beginning or end”, as an ideological device, there occurs an “elimination of all opposites into absolute unity”, a “the true void” that echoes the Enlightenment experience, where “to forget oneself is to perceive oneself in all things”.¹⁸¹ In this framework, the idea of a collective, circular unity is achieved by forgetting oneself and by letting oneself be seized by all things of the world. As such, the circle comes to stand as a metaphor of the workings of the universe that can be summed up with the popular saying “what goes around, comes around”: within a circular framework, gift exchanges discourage self-seeking tendencies by promoting social and collective feelings of gratitude, empathy and reciprocity on the part of both the giver and the receiver.

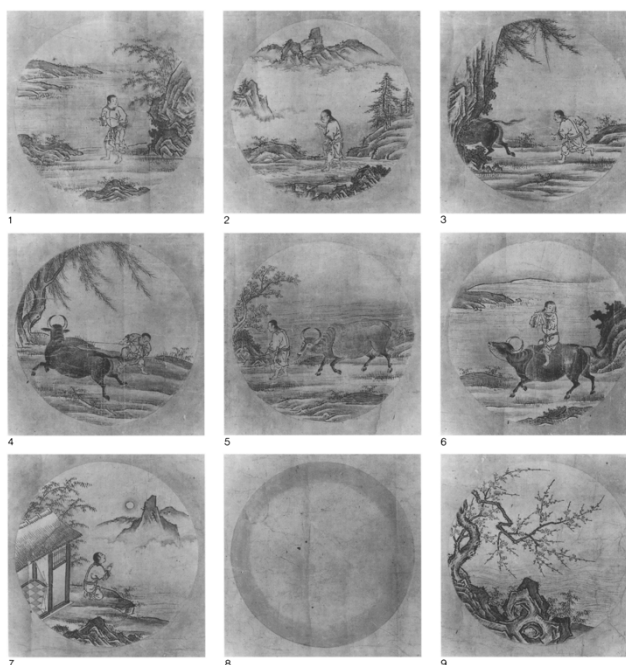


Fig.17: Shubun (active ca.1423-1460). Ten round paintings mounted as a handscroll. Ink and light colours on paper. 32 x 181.5 cm. Shokokuji, Kybto.

¹⁸⁰ Katoaka Mami, “Value of Invisible Threads: Lee Mingwei and His Relations” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 34.

¹⁸¹ Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, “ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings.” *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 13-234.

Hyde, like Mauss and Lee, proposes that what separates a gift from a commodity is that a gift establishes a social bond between its donor and recipient due to its motion: “It is the cardinal difference between gift and commodity exchange that a gift establishes a feeling-bond between two people, while the sale of a commodity leaves no necessary connection”.¹⁸² This “feeling-bond” escapes the market economy, forming instead a gift exchange community due to the circular motion of gift-giving. These markets are not always mutually exclusive: Lee’s projects in the 2017 Venice Biennale, *The Mending Project* and *When Beauty Visits*, tread in both markets since his gifts are given within a monetized international exhibition, which explains why the gift reciprocity aspect of the exchange was more of an option instead of an expectation. Moreover, considering that gifts have the power to establish and maintain relationships between friends and lovers, Hyde points out that “if we add to these a circulation wider than a binary give-and-take, we shall soon derive society, or at least those societies – family, guild, fraternity, sorority, band, community– that cohere through faithfulness and gratitude.”¹⁸³ Therefore, while individuals can continue the motion of the gift on a personal level, “gift exchange at the level of the group offers equilibrium and coherence, a kind of anarchist stability.”¹⁸⁴ This system is analogous to the manner in which Lee operates his projects as one-on-one encounters within the realm of Relational Art, a movement that encourages ideas of community.

The giving of gifts or property encourages social coherence and endurance by a contract of emotion. The emotional bond limits the community’s size since “the bonds that gifts establish are not simply social, they may be spiritual and psychological as well”.¹⁸⁵ This characteristic is not

¹⁸² Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. New York: Vintage Books. Second Vintage Books Edition (November 2007), 72.

¹⁸³ Ibid, 97.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 97.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid, 74.

associated with Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*. From this statement, we can deduce that a stronger emotional, spiritual and psychological connection is generally found in smaller groups rather than bigger groups, explaining why Lee's one-to-one relations delve deeper than large community-driven projects. The established gift community thus houses people of common belief where the thought of giving a part of themselves away, rather than hoarding it, benefits and strengthens the society, or in Lee's case, the relation. Such communities of exchange are kept alive with the refusal to allow a gift to stay still since holding onto a property gained in an exchange transaction is thought to bring stagnation. Breaking the giving chain thus inhibits the benefits of the whole. Hyde writes that "it is the talent which is not in use that is lost or atrophies, and to bestow one of our creations is the surest way to invoke the next"¹⁸⁶. Citing Homer's *Hymn to Hermes*, Hyde points out that Hermes invented the first musical instrument, the lyre, which he gives to his brother Apollo. Apollo, upon reception of the gift, is inspired to invent a second musical instrument, the pipes. From this tale, "the implication is that giving the first creation away makes the second one possible. Bestowal creates that empty place into which new energy may flow"¹⁸⁷. Therefore, in the event where an exchange is prevented, the alternative is scarcity, or writer's block.

Hyde also discusses how individuals can metaphorically become gifts, such as in wedding ceremonies. Wedding practices where women are given to a suitor are examples where the gift or property in question is in fact human will. However, there lies an imbalance of power in this relation since one person generally becomes subject to another: "Looked at structurally, in a patrilineal group, males do not become gifts when they grow up because they do not circulate [...]"

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 189.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid, 189.

but a young woman moves when she marries, and the gifts given for her stand witness to the fact that both she and the rights of her fertility [...] have passed to her husband's clan."¹⁸⁸ Moreover, Hyde establishes that gift exchange generally registers as a feminine type of commerce and market in modern capitalism. Commodity commerce, on the other hand, is perceived as a more masculine form of exchange; "to make the wider point here, what we take to be the female professions – child care, social work, nursing, the creation and care of culture, the ministry, teaching – all contain a greater admixture of gift labor than male professions – banking, law, management, sales, and so on." Interestingly, Lee Mingwei has stated that he has often been mistaken for a female artist because his first name is not gendered and his works are emotional and domestic in nature, where cooking, sleeping, sewing, conversing and gifting become opportunities for human exchange.¹⁸⁹ In a way, the gendering of the markets in which the gift circulates contributes to a muddling of the gift's essence.

Hyde pinpoints the Reformation as a historic event where the practice of usury, unfair loans and interest practices came to be authorized and laid the foundation for modern capitalism.¹⁹⁰ By examining the history of money-lending, Hyde explains how gifts, as well as art, became undervalued in the contemporary market since they do not encourage an increase in (self-)interest: "With the vector of increase reversed, interest is self-interest: it does not join man to man except in the paper connections of contract."¹⁹¹ The Reformation encouraged the privatization of property which negatively affected the emotional bond that would otherwise drive a society practicing gift

¹⁸⁸ Ibid, 125.

¹⁸⁹ Rosabel Tan, interview with Lee Mingwei, "Lee Mingwei on Creating Acts of Kindness", *The Pantograph Punch*, February 8 2017, URL: <http://pantograph-punch.com/post/lee-mingwei-acts-of-kindness>

¹⁹⁰ Hyde, Lewis. *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*. New York: Vintage Books. Second Vintage Books Edition (November 2007), 143.

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 178.

exchange.¹⁹² Legal contracts began replacing the feeling-bonds of gift exchange since “usury and interest are sisters to commodity; they allow or encourage a separation” through a skeleton of law and police.¹⁹³

According to Hyde, the work of the artist within contemporary art and society comes from a source of inspiration that is in and of itself a gift since it often lies outside their immediate control. Therefore, by acting upon the gifted inspiration and then producing something that they present to the world, the artist keeps the gift in motion: “Having accepted what has been given to him – either in the sense of inspiration or in the sense of talent – the artist often feels compelled, feels the desire, to make the work and offer it to an audience. The gift must stay in motion”.¹⁹⁴ Lee Mingwei, with his practice, is an artist participating in this giving circle. When producing a work from the fruits of his inspiration, this represents a transformative gift, in which gratitude is exchanged for the inspiration; in other words, the inspiration prompts Lee Mingwei with the impulse to work on the idea and pass the gift on to others.

Hyde states that the gift’s motion comes full circle (again, the symbolism of the circle resurfaces) when the artist offers insight as to how they came upon the gift and where the source of it lies.¹⁹⁵ Lee Mingwei is transparent about where the source of his inspiration comes from, citing events like an overnight train ride for *The Sleeping Project*, or a touristic adventure with a nephew for *The Tourist*. Invoking the process of poets Walt Whitman and Ezra Pound, Hyde brings into discussion the notions of the individual mystical genius (Whitman) and the individual influenced by tradition (Pound). For Walt Whitman, through close readings of *Leaves of Grass*,

¹⁹² Ibid, 143.

¹⁹³ Ibid, 143.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 188-189.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 189-190.

Children of Adam and *Calamus*, gift exchange represented a type of erotic commerce where the self and another are united, and come together to produce a deep sense of unity. Whitman is therefore an artist that is both gift-giver and gift-receiver– as is Lee in some sense. Lee gives the gift of the artwork to audiences and his audiences give him the gift of participation, allowing his participatory projects to come alive.

Overall, once the spirit of the artist’s gift is identified, the artist is free to respond in whichever way suits them, like by offering a work of their own creation in return. Such a system keeps the gift in motion and can contribute to releasing art from remaining a pure commodity or exchange in the marketplace. Rather than seeking to separate the gift economy and market economy – which is impossible – Hyde suggests that artists and creatives enter the marketplace without destroying the spirit of the gift and its circular motion.

Lee Mingwei: Gifts That Live On

In Lee Mingwei’s *The Mending Project*, since the interactions of the project are one-on-one, the experiences become personalized. As such, participants leave the exhibition with varying memories of the event, as well as varying mementos, which both communally participate in the recounting of the event. Their memories become embodied knowledge and experience which, when recounted, create an aura around the work. Invoking the theories of Nicolas Bourriaud, Diana Taylor and Philip Auslander, I will seek to define the functionality of the gift within Lee Mingwei’s practice as a documentation tool that embodies proof of performance, the collected memory of the audience as well as document performativity.

From a relational point of view, Lee Mingwei is a collaborator with his participants since he requires audience participation for his projects to be fully realised. Although he already bears the title of collaborator, he is also a performer since he inserts himself into the works and physically

entertains audience. Partially relational, participatory and performative, along with the possibility of receiving a gift as takeaway, his works offer numerous methods of documentation and recollection.

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor argues that performance is a means of storing and transmitting knowledge, whether it manifests itself as an organized event or as a happening of everyday life. Taylor divides the remnants of a performance into two categories, the archive and the repertoire. Archival memory is found in “documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, film, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change”.¹⁹⁶ The archive is text-based, whereas the repertoire is ephemeral and represents embodied memory; it is mostly found in actions one can do and repeat. The repertoire, as embodied memory, is found in spoken words, gestures, actions, dance, song, ritual theatre and other performances. It offers alternative knowledge from the documentary archive and is performed through “forms of repeatable behaviors [...] that cannot be housed or contained in the archive”.¹⁹⁷ With the archive and repertoire, performance is a situation that can re-play time and again. For Taylor, a performance’s meaning can be reconstituted from its remnants, whereas for like Bourriaud, the meaning is constituted in the act.

I was fortunate to have witnessed *The Mending Project* as an installation and performance. My takeaway from the experience is both archival and embodied. I briefly met with Lee Mingwei, but my mending session was with one of his assistants named Dimitri, to whom I gave a scarf. Since I would not be able to return to Venice at the end of the exhibition to retrieve my clothing article, Dimitri offered to simply stitch the memory of the exhibition onto my scarf instead of

¹⁹⁶ Diana Taylor, “Acts of Transfer,” *The Archive and the Repertoire*, 1-52. (Durham: Duke UP, 2003). Online Reprint: <http://scalar.usc.edu/nehvectors/wips/acts-of-transfer-1> , 9.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, 37.

linking it to the spooled wall. During the exchange, Dimitri regarded the article of clothing seriously. He asked me to model it for him to know where to lay his stitch. He asked details about the garment that I gave him, remarked that it was beautiful and asked of its origins. I admitted that it was my mother's and this sparked a conversation where we talked about mothers, his and mine, and how they both knew how to mend and sew while we did not (Dimitri revealed that he learned the skill while working with Lee Mingwei and he did not have much experience before that). We then bonded over shared heritage as we came to the realization that we were both Greek, and the conversation carried on and took a form of its own. At the end of the exchange, he returned my scarf, newly sewed onto, with a label commemorating the date of the experience.

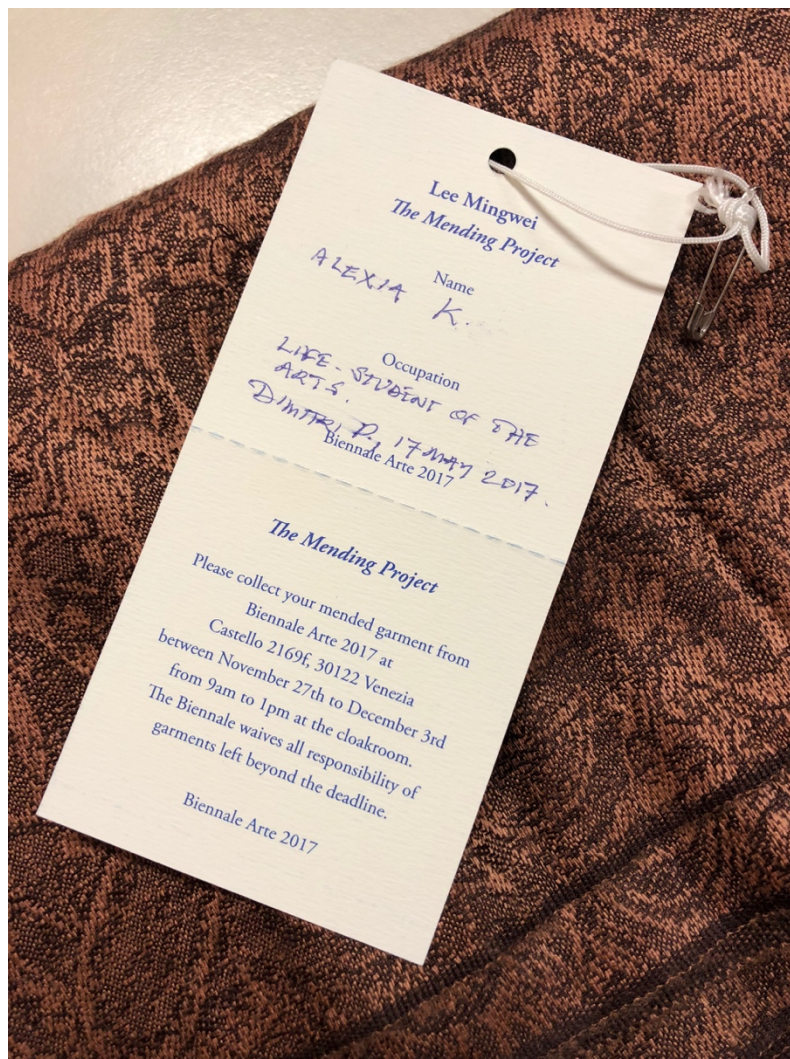


Fig.18: *The Mending Project* label, 2017, taken from my camera.

As proven by this exchange and in accordance to Taylor's and Bourriaud's point of views, performance is a "vital act of transfer" that gives place to an "arena of exchange".¹⁹⁸ My interaction with Dimitri transmitted social knowledge, culture, collective memory and identity: "Performances function as vital acts of transfer, transmitting social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated, or what Richard Schechner has called 'twice-behaved behaviour'".¹⁹⁹ Performance functions as an epistemology, a method of gathering and transmitting knowledge, where "populations [...] grow to understand each other through their performances".²⁰⁰ For Taylor, performance does not completely disappear. It remains, it persists, but transformed through the archive and the repertoire. The enduring documents of the archive and the ephemeral social practices and languages of the repertoire operate as systems of knowledge gathering, making and transmission. However, Taylor recognizes that written documents, especially in cultural and colonial history, have superseded embodied documents by being more authoritarian in their unchanging script. This phenomenon parallels the dilemmas in archiving and acquiring relational artworks: how can one properly archive something that is ever-changing? Although both the archive and the repertoire transmit memory, the archive has constituted a more hegemonic and unquestioned knowledge, especially when considering its contractual power. With regards to *The Mending Project*, the performance persists within the scarf (the document) and I am the activator of both the document and performance. The gift in this work thus operates both as a personalized, embodied memento as well as an object of an archive.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid, 1.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, 2.

²⁰⁰ Ibid, 1

Taylor “posits that the very aspects of performance considered to disappear persist as bodily practices and are therefore recoverable and reproducible”.²⁰¹ On the other hand, the archive, which prevents performance from disappearing entirely with its documentary remnants, is inadequate in terms of reproducibility: “The live performance can never be captured or transmitted through the archive. A video of a performance is not a performance, though it often comes to replace the performance as a thing in itself”, demonstrating its authoritarian power.²⁰² Witnessing a live performance is not the same as watching it on a screen, but most of the performances we experience come in documented forms. It has been argued that documentation distorts the original performance and viewing documentation *in situ* of the performance has thus been discouraged. Lee in fact discourages heavy documentation of his work because he wants the work to persist as an experience, rather than as a static, documented artwork.²⁰³

Philip Auslander contests Taylor’s view on performance documentation by analyzing the afterlife of a performance and by examining how documented performances are processed differently by audiences. Auslander argues that the documentation of a performance is as intrinsic to the performance itself: “the afterlife of performance is as important as the initial moment, insofar as that is when and where its meanings unfold, and that is where it generates transformations of the audience that are not strictly event-reliant”.²⁰⁴ Philip Auslander explores the phenomenal relationship between the spectator who experiences the performance from the document and the

²⁰¹ Philip Auslander. “Introduction,” *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018) 8.

²⁰² Ibid, 8.

²⁰³ Harsha Menon, interview with Lee Mingwei, “Threads of Generosity – The Work of Artist Lee Mingwei”, *Buddhistdoor Global*, March 17th 2017, URL: <https://www.buddhistdoor.net/features/threads-of-generosity-the-work-of-artist-lee-mingwei>

²⁰⁴ Philip Auslander. “Introduction,” *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018) 9.

document itself: “there is statistical evidence that most people, at least in the United States, experience most genres of performed art in what could be called “documented forms” far more regularly than as live performances. For this reason, if no other, to insist on the primacy of the live experience seems quixotic at best.”²⁰⁵ Works like *The Dining Project*, *The Sleeping Project* and *The Tourist* that select participants through a lottery process are experienced by the great majority of exhibition-goers through documentation.

Traditional definitions of the live posit it as the antonym of the recorded, and the common conception is that the live event is real, whereas mediatized events are secondary, artificial, removed from the real source. However, Auslander argues that there are no ontological differences between the live and the mediatized, since live performances are just as inclined to include media elements as the recorded. In fact, he goes so far as to state that it is through documentation which constitutes a performance as itself: “...performance art is constituted as such through the performativity of its documentation.”²⁰⁶ Auslander thus prefers “perceiving the playback of a recording [...] as a performance in its own right”.²⁰⁷ What does Auslander mean by “the performativity of its documentation?”

The term “performativity” was first defined by philosopher John L. Austin as the capacity of speech and communication to act or to consummate an action. In J. L. Austin’s most basic sense, the word “performative” constitutes an action, whereas the word “constative” describes the action without necessarily doing it.²⁰⁸ Traditionally, documentation images are considered as constatives

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 10.

²⁰⁶ Philip Auslander. “The Performativity of Performance Documentation” *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*” (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 26.

²⁰⁷ Philip Auslander. “Introduction,” *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*”. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 8.

²⁰⁸ Philip Auslander. “The Performativity of Performance Documentation” *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*” (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 23.

that describe performances, stating that they occurred. However, Auslander argues that documentation is performative, so the act of documenting an event as a performance is what makes it as such. Documentation is what makes a performance, a performance. Performativity gives documents a kind of “agency” in this sense.

The Mending Project's documentation is not limited to traditional still images; it comes in the form of a gift tailored to a person. Dimitri, by having me model my garment in the way I usually wear it before altering it, tailored his stitching to my person and personalized the item accordingly. I now wear the garment in ways to highlight that very personalization, comforted by the knowledge that it suits my style since he asked my opinion for his creative touch. The document, the scarf, is performative and is given agency when it is worn, just as when a video is watched. When people inquire about the colorful stitch, I tell them its story. And so, although people might come across an interview, an image or a video which documents Lee Mingwei's project, my version of the event is available through personal contact and represents an intrinsic part of the experience that is an extension of its core. Similar in how documenting a performance becomes the performance, talking about the performance also becomes the performance.



Left, Fig.19: Modelling the scarf, 2019, taken from my camera.

Right, Fig.20: Detail of the stitch, *The Mending Project*, 2017, taken from my camera.

The gift, the document, in Lee Mingwei's work is not merely a secondary iteration of the original event but a vehicle that gives us meaningful access to the performance itself as an artistic work. While the experience of a document is not the same as one would have by participating in a live event, it is still an experience of the performance.²⁰⁹ With documentation, "performance art does not only happen when and where it happens", implying that it also happens at other times and in other places.²¹⁰ With this understanding of documentation, *The Mending Project* experienced through documentation also becomes the performance, rather than a secondary imitation of it. Lee's "works generate relationships that, as they continue on, reveal. They teach him, the participants, and all those who experience them in real time, in memory, or in documentation."²¹¹ Lee Mingwei's works continue on and endure the test of time in traces, material or immaterial. Their lasting effect goes beyond their initial encounters, and may even go beyond his lifetime, as transformed and transient experiences.

²⁰⁹ Philip Auslander. "Introduction," *Reactivations: Essays on Performance and Its Documentation*. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018), 10.

²¹⁰ *Ibid*, 9 (said by Frazer Ward).

²¹¹ Harvey Molotch and Glenn Wharton, "An Art of Social Studies" in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 54.

CONCLUSION: CLOSING THE CIRCLE

Museums and art institutions are perceived as collectors of the static and unchanging, where “the financial value of the investments hinge on the things maintaining a specific shape and form”, a characteristic simply not present in Lee Mingwei’s works.²¹² In being temporal and transient, his projects challenge notions of permanence and impermanence, and present dilemmas of preservation. In truth, preservation was never the intended goal of any of his works; why keep the beds, the cooking pots, the maps, the flowers or the sewing needles when these objects are expendable tools in the elaboration of a relational encounter, which is the main objective? Even Lee himself is replaceable if he employs assistants in his artworks. These projects have their own lives and Lee is “only the person who brought them to this reality”. For him, it is important “for the audiences to know that it is not about Lee Mingwei doing this with you”, “it is about a stranger and it [sometimes] happens to be Lee Mingwei”.²¹³ Keeping in mind both Zen Buddhist and gift-giving notions of transience and transmission, if his art were to be reduced to a static, unchanging form, it would lose its spirit. In other words, it would lose its gift properties.

In contextualizing Lee’s works within the conventional Euro-American discourses of participatory and relational art, I have appropriately situated his work within a narrative that challenged and came to replace the representational notion of art. In analyzing his works through alternative lenses of Zen Buddhist philosophies of transience and transmission, as well as anthropological gift-giving theories researched by Marcel Mauss and Lewis Hyde, I have established that it is not the material stuff of his works that matters, but the engendered relations

²¹² Harvey Molotch and Glenn Wharton, “An Art of Social Studies” in *Lee Mingwei and His Relation*, ed. Yi-Ting Lei (Taipei Fine Arts Museum: Taipei 2015), 60.

²¹³ Ibid.

and the takeaway experiences, where the degree of participation and reciprocal exchange is determined by the viewer.

A tranquil disruptor of modernist hierarchy, I would characterize Lee Mingwei as a wholesome type of art anarchist. In collaborating with participants and assistants, Lee places them on equal footing with himself. In presenting relational, gift-driven projects within art institutions, Lee destabilizes the modern market economy by running a gift economy within it. With a foot in both economy worlds, he simultaneously operates within age-old and contemporary gift-giving tendencies. Therefore, although living in a world that is largely driven by a currency market, he distances himself from art as a commodity, from the static modernist concept that art's meaning and value is fixed within the artwork. Instead, he offers a performative, temporalized meaning of art in the form of a service or a gift, and this aspect resembles more archaic forms of giving where meaning and relations were established collectively rather than bought, like Relational Art endeavors to do. Due to this relational process that produces both material and immaterial documents of a live event, his works can be activated and re-activated by participants outside of the initial relational timeframe, thus enabling the art (the gift!) to remain in motion.

Appendix

リー・ミンウェイと その関係展

Lee Mingwei
and His Relations

参加するアート—見る、話す、贈る、書く、食べる、そして世界とつながる
The Art of Participation—Seeing, Conversing, Gift Giving, Writing, Dining and Getting Connected to the World

森美術館 2014.9.20[土]—2015.1.4[日]
Sep 20 (Sat), 2014—Jan 4 (Sun), 2015 MORI ART MUSEUM

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出品作品リスト

List of Exhibited Works

Section 1

リー・ミンウェイ
Lee Mingwei

プロジェクト・女媧 (ヌワ)
2005

竹、シルク、綿糸、アクリル絵具
350 × 112 cm

Nu Wa Project
2005

Bamboo, silk, cotton thread, acrylic
350 × 112 cm

Courtesy of Lombard Freid Gallery, New York

プロジェクト・繕う
2009 / 2014

机、椅子、糸、布製品
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション
ルディ・ツェン氏蔵

The Mending Project

2009 / 2014
Tables, chairs, threads, fabric items
Interactive installation
Collection of Rudy Tseng

往くと留まるのあいだ

2007 / 2014
砂、ランプ、サウンド
インスタレーション

Between Going and Staying

2007 / 2014
Sand, lamp, sound
Installation

石の旅

2012
石、ブロンズ、木
インスタレーション
各 20 × 70 × 8 cm
ルディ・ツェン氏蔵 | サイモン・ウー氏蔵 | レオ・シー氏蔵 | ロン・チュアン・チェン氏蔵 | ソフィア & レオン・タン氏蔵 | セザール・レイエス氏蔵 | ハーヴェイ・モロッチ&グレン・ウォートン氏蔵

Stone Journey

2012
Glacial stones, bronze, wood
Installation

20 × 70 × 8 cm each
Collection of Rudy Tseng, Simon Wu,
Leo Shih, Rong-Chuan Chen,
Sophia & Leon Tan, Cesar Reyes,
Harvey Molotch & Glenn Wharton

名匠の目

2004
11人の作家による創作模写
34 × 26.7 cm (× 11)
所蔵：国立台湾美術館、台中

Through Masters' Eyes

2004
Creative reproductions by 11 artists
34 × 26.7 cm (× 11)
Collection of National Taiwan Museum of
Fine Arts, Taichung

名匠の目

2014
観賞用アルバム
34 × 26.7 cm

Through Masters' Eyes

2014
Exhibition copy album
34 × 26.7 cm

石瀑

山水図
中国清代 (1694)
画帖 (8面のうち1面)
デジタル出力

Shitao

Landscape

Qing dynasty, China, dated 1694
Eight-leaf album
Digital print

「関係性」を考えるための作品

Works for Relationality

内経図

中国清代
拓本複製
120 × 51 cm

Nei-jing-tu (View of the inner dimensions)

Qing dynasty, China
A replica of a Qing dynasty rubbing
120 × 51 cm

白隠

Hakuin

隻手

江戸時代中期
掛軸 紙本墨画
42.5 × 50 cm
所蔵：久松真一記念館、岐阜

Sekishu (One Hand)

18th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
42.5 × 50 cm
Collection of Hisamatsu Shinichi Memorial
Museum, Gifu, Japan

無

江戸時代中期
掛軸 紙本墨書
39.5 × 38.5 cm
所蔵：久松真一記念館、岐阜

Mu ("No"; "Nothingness")

18th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
39.5 × 38.5 cm
Collection of Hisamatsu Shinichi Memorial
Museum, Gifu, Japan

円相

江戸時代中期
掛軸 紙本墨画
32.7 × 55.3 cm
個人蔵
* 展示期間：2014年9月20日-11月4日

Ensō (Circle)

18th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
32.7 × 55.3 cm
Private collection
* Period exhibited: September 20 - November
4, 2014

動中工夫

江戸時代中期
掛軸 紙本墨書
130 × 29.7 cm
個人蔵

Dōchū no kufū (Meditation in activity)

18th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
130 × 29.7 cm
Private collection

今北洪川
Imakita Kōsen

円相

明治時代
掛幅 紙本墨画
34.2 × 59.4 cm
所蔵：雲頂庵、神奈川

Ensō (Circle)

19th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
34.2 × 59.4 cm
Collection of Untyouan, Kanagawa, Japan

鈴木大拙
D. T. Suzuki

無心

明治—昭和時代
掛幅 紙本墨書
33.1 × 64.8 cm
所蔵：東慶寺、神奈川

Mushin (No-mind)

20th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
33.1 × 64.8 cm
Collection of Tokelji, Kanagawa, Japan

重々無尽

明治—昭和時代
掛幅 紙本墨書
38.9 × 60.4 cm
所蔵：東慶寺、神奈川

Jūjū mujin (Endless interrelationship)

20th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
38.9 × 60.4 cm
Collection of Tokelji, Kanagawa, Japan

無事是貴人

明治—昭和時代
掛幅 紙本墨書
91 × 30.1 cm
所蔵：東慶寺、神奈川

Buji kore kinin (The person with nothing to do is the noble one)

20th century
Hanging scroll; ink on paper
91 × 30.1 cm
Collection of Tokelji, Kanagawa, Japan

久松真一
Hisamatsu Shin'ichi

隻手音聲

昭和時代
短冊 紙本墨書
36.3 × 6 cm
所蔵：久松真一記念館、岐阜

The sound of one hand

20th century
Tanzaku (paper slip); ink on paper
36.3 × 6 cm
Collection of Hisamatsu Shinichi Memorial Museum, Gifu, Japan

白隠の隻手の声は耳も無く手も無く舌も無くてこそきけ

昭和時代
短冊 紙本墨書
36.3 × 6 cm
所蔵：久松真一記念館、岐阜

Without ears, without hands, and without tongue, hear the sound of Hakuin's "One Hand"

20th century
Tanzaku (paper slip); ink on paper
36.3 × 6 cm
Collection of Hisamatsu Shinichi Memorial Museum, Gifu, Japan

イヴ・クライン
Yves Klein

空虚への跳躍

1960
デジタル出力

Leap into the Void

1960
Artistic action of Yves Klein
Digital print

「ダイヤモンド (日曜)」1960年11月27日 (一号限りの新聞)

1960
新聞
55.6 × 37.9 cm
個人蔵

Dimanche, 27 novembre 1960

— *le journal d'un seul jour*
1960
Newspaper
55.6 × 37.9 cm
Private collection

「ダイヤモンド (日曜)」1960年11月27日 (一号限りの新聞) [英語バージョン]

デジタル出力

Dimanche, 27 novembre 1960

— *le journal d'un seul jour* [English version]
Digital print

展示風景：「第一物質の状態における感性を絵画的感性へと安定させる特殊化展」(通称「空虚展」) イリス・クレール画廊、パリ、1958年
デジタル出力

Installation view: "The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility [The Void]"

(La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état de matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée)," Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, 1958

Digital print

「第一物質の状態における感性を絵画的感性へと安定させる特殊化展」(通称「空虚展」) イリス・クレール画廊、パリ、1958年4月28日の招待状

1958
印刷物
7.2 × 17 cm
個人蔵

Invitation to the opening of Yves Klein's exhibition, The Specialization of Sensibility in the Raw Material State of Stabilized Pictorial Sensibility [The Void], Galerie Iris Clert, Paris, April 28, 1958

1958
Printed paper
7.2 × 17 cm
Private collection

マイケル・ブランクフォートに対する「非物質的絵画的感性領域の譲渡」(ダブル橋、パリ、1962年2月10日)を記録したプレスブック

1962
デジタル出力

Pressbook documenting the transfer of the Zone of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility to Michael Blankfort, Pont au Double, Paris, February 10, 1962

1962
Digital print

「非物質的絵画的感性領域の譲渡」のための譲渡書、No. 0

1959
印刷物
8.7 × 29.8 cm
個人蔵

Receipt book for the sale of the Zone of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility, Series No. 0

1959
Printed paper
8.7 × 29.8 cm
Private collection

モノトーン・サイレンス・シンフォニー

1949-1961
録音デジタル・ファイル
45分30秒
個人蔵

Monotone-Silence Symphony

1949-1961
Sound recording digital file
45 min. 30 sec.
Private collection

モノトーン・サイレンス・シンフォニー

1949-1961
楽譜
41.8 × 29.5 cm
個人蔵

Monotone-Silence Symphony

1949-1961
Printed score
41.8 × 29.5 cm
Private collection

指揮をするイヴ・クライン、ゲルゼンキルヒェン・オペラハウス（ドイツ）にて

1959
写真
16 × 22.5 cm
個人蔵

Yves Klein as orchestra conductor, Gelsenkirchen Opera House, Germany

1959
Black and white photograph
16 × 22.5 cm
Private collection

ジョン・ケージ

John Cage

4分33秒

1952
楽譜
27.5 × 21 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

4'33"

1952
Printed score
27.5 × 21 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

0分00秒（4分33秒第2番）

1962
楽譜
27.5 × 21 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

0'00" (4'33" No.2)

1962
Printed score
27.5 × 21 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

龍安寺

1983-1985
LPレコード
31.3 × 31.5 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Ryoanji

1983-1985
LP record
31.3 × 31.5 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

R³ (Where R=Ryoanji)

1983
ドライポイント
18 × 54 cm
TP, ED. 25
川村龍俊氏蔵

R³ (Where R=Ryoanji)

1983
Drypoint
18 × 54 cm
TP, ED. 25
Collection of Kawamura Tatsutoshi

R³ (Where R=Ryoanji)

1983
ドライポイント
18 × 54 cm
TPB, ED. 25
川村龍俊氏蔵

R³ (Where R=Ryoanji)

1983
Drypoint
18 × 54 cm
TPB, ED. 25
Collection of Kawamura Tatsutoshi

Ryoku, No.1

1985
ドライポイント
45.7 × 61 cm
AP5, ED. 10
川村龍俊氏蔵

Ryoku, No.1

1985
Drypoint
45.7 × 61 cm
AP5, ED. 10
Collection of Kawamura Tatsutoshi

易の音楽

1951
LPレコード
31.3 × 31.5 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Music of Changes

1951
LP record
31.3 × 31.5 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

ロベール・フィリウー（ハンド・ショー）より、

ジョン・ケージ
1967
オフセット写真
28.2 × 21.8 cm
Ed. 65/150
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

From Robert Filliou "Hand Show,"

John Cage
1967
Offset black and white photograph
28.2 × 21.8 cm

Ed. 65/150
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

ジョン・ケージのためのプリペアド・ボックス

1987
紙にオフセットリトグラフ、ゴムバンド、スライド
21.6 × 21.6 × 3.2 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Prepared Box for John Cage

1987
Offset lithograph on paper, rubber bands, slide
21.6 × 21.6 × 3.2 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

李禹煥

Lee Ufan

点より

1978
岩絵具、膠、キャンバス
72.7 × 90.5 cm
所蔵：東京オペラシティ アートギャラリー

From Point

1978
Mineral pigment and glue on canvas
72.7 × 90.5 cm
Collection of Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery

線より

1976
岩絵具、膠、キャンバス
100 × 80 cm
所蔵：東京オペラシティ アートギャラリー

From Line

1976
Mineral pigment and glue on canvas
100 × 80 cm
Collection of Tokyo Opera City Art Gallery

アラン・カプロー

Allan Kaprow

コンフォート・ゾーン

1975
16ミリフィルムをDVDへ変換、モノクロ、サウンド
17分49秒

Comfort Zones

1975
16mm film transferred to digital files (DVD), black and white, sound
17 min. 49 sec.

Activity at Galería Vandrés, Madrid
Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

コンフォート・ゾーン

1975

アクティビティ・ブックレット

32.5 × 22.1 cm

Comfort Zones

1975

Activity booklet

32.5 × 22.1 cm

Published by Galería Vandrés, S.A., Madrid Spain

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

セカンド・ルーティーン

1974

16ミリフィルムをDVDへ変換、モノクロ、サウンド

15分2秒

2nd Routine

1974

16mm film transferred to digital files (DVD), black and white, sound
15 min. 2 sec.

Activity at Stefanotti Gallery and Anna Canepa

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

セカンド・ルーティーン

1974

アクティビティ・ブックレット

35.3 × 27.3 cm

個人蔵

2nd Routine

1974

Activity booklet

35.3 × 27.3 cm

Private collection

Published by Stefanotti Gallery and Anna Canepa

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

7種類のシンパシー

1976

3/4 インチ U マチックをDVDへ変換、モノクロ、サウンド

7分26秒

7 Kinds of Sympathy

1976

3/4 in. videotape (U-matic) transferred to digital files (DVD), black and white, sound
7 min. 26 sec.

Activity at Museum des 20er Jahrhunderts, Vienna

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

7種類のシンパシー

1976

アクティビティ・ブックレット

27.9 × 21.5 cm

7 Kinds of Sympathy

1976

Activity booklet

27.9 × 21.5 cm

Published by Museum des 20er Jahrhunderts, Vienna

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

ハブニングのつくり方

1964

LPレコード

31.3 × 31.5 cm

所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

How to Make a Happening

1964

LP record

31.3 × 31.5 cm

Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

休日：ハブニングのカレンダー

1970

カレンダー

38.6 × 27.4 cm

所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Days Off: A Calendar of Happenings

1970

Calendar

38.6 × 27.4 cm

Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

ハブニング

1967

カタログ

25.6 × 22 cm

所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Happening

1967

Catalogue

25.6 × 22 cm

Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Published by Pasadena Art Museum

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

欧州へ旅行する前、友人に宛てた手紙

1981

手紙

サイズ不明

Letter to the friends before the European tour

1981

Typed letter

Dimensions unknown

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

往く／留まる

1981

欧州旅行中のアクティビティのための指示書

サイズ不明

Going / Staying

1981

Score for activity for European tour

Dimensions unknown

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

トゥー・メジャーズ

1974

アクティビティ・ブックレット

34 × 24.5 cm

所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

2 Measures

1974

Activity booklet

34 × 24.5 cm

Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Published by Martano Editore

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

スウィート・ウォール

1976

アクティビティ・ブックレット

22.7 × 15.1 cm

所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Sweet Wall

1976

Activity booklet

22.7 × 15.1 cm

Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

リー・ミンウェイとその関係展：参加するアート—見る、話す、贈る、書く、食べる、そして世界とつながる

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ルーティーン

1975
アクティビティ・ブックレット
28 × 21.5 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Routine

1975
Activity Booklet
28 × 21.5 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Published by Allan Kaprow
Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

エコ・ロジ

1975
アクティビティ・ブックレット
30.5 × 22.6 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Echo-Logy

1975
Activity booklet
30.5 × 22.6 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Published by D'Arc Press
Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

サティスファクション

1976
アクティビティ・ブックレット
28.3 × 21.9 cm
所蔵：清里現代美術館、山梨

Satisfaction

1976
Activity booklet
28.3 × 21.9 cm
Collection of Kiyosato Museum of Contemporary Art, Yamanashi, Japan

Published by M.L. D'Arc Gallery, New York
Courtesy of Allan Kaprow Estate, California and Hauser & Wirth, Zurich, London and New York

リクリット・ティラヴァニ

Rirkrit Tiravanija
無題 2007 (フリー/スタイル)
2007
16ミリフィルム、モノクロ
60分 36秒

Untitled 2007 (free/still)

2007
16mm film, silent, black and white
60 min. 36 sec.

Courtesy of GALLERY SIDE 2, Tokyo and Gavin Brown's Enterprise, New York

小沢 剛

Ozawa Tsuyoshi

ベジタブル・ウェポン——さんまのつみれ鍋

／東京
2001
ラムダプリント
113 × 156 cm

Vegetable Weapon: Saury fish ball hot pot / Tokyo

2001
Lambda print
113 × 156 cm

ベジタブル・ウェポン——芋煮／福島

2012
タイプCプリント
36.5 × 28.6 cm

Vegetable Weapon: Imoni (Taro potato soup with pork) / Fukushima

2012
Type C Print
36.5 × 28.6 cm
Courtesy of MISA SHIN GALLERY, Tokyo

田中功起

Tanaka Koki

どれもこれも

2003
DVD、カラー、サウンド
30分 (ループ)

Each and Every

2003
DVD, color, sound
30 min. (loop)

Section 2**リー・ミンウェイ**

Lee Mingwei

プロジェクト・ともに眠る

2000 / 2014
ベッド、ナイトスタンド
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

The Sleeping Project

2000 / 2014
Wooden beds, night stands
Interactive installation

ひろがる花園

2009 / 2014
花崗岩、生花
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション
1200 × 134 × 60 cm

エイミー&レオ・シー氏蔵

* (ひろがる花園) 出品に際しては青山フラワーマーケットにご協力をいただきました。

The Moving Garden

2009 / 2014
Granite, fresh flowers
Interactive Installation
1200 × 134 × 60 cm
Collection of Amy & Leo Shih
* Presentation of the work *The Moving Garden* is supported in part by a generous contribution from Aoyama Flower Market.

プロジェクト・ともに食す

1997 / 2014
台座、皿、豆、米、ビデオ
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション
所蔵：JUT 美術館準備室、台北

The Dining Project

1997 / 2014
Wooden platform, tatami mats, beans, rice, video
Interactive installation
Collection of JUT Museum Pre-Opening Office, Taipei

水仙との百日

1995
銀色素漂白方式印画
166.5 × 115 cm (× 5)

100 Days with Lily

1995
Silver dye bleach prints
166.5 × 115 cm (× 5)

ソニック・ブロッサム

2013 / 2014
ミクストメディア
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

Sonic Blossom

2013 / 2014
Mixed media
Interactive installation

Section 3**リー・ミンウェイ**

Lee Mingwei

布の追想

2006 / 2014
台座、箱、布製品
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

Fabric of Memory

2006 / 2014
Wooden platform, wooden boxes, fabric items
Interactive installation

プロジェクト・手紙をつづる

1998 / 2014

木製ブース、便箋、封筒

インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

290 × 170 × 231 cm (× 3)

* (プロジェクト・手紙をつづる) 出品に際しては森美術館ベストフレンズにご協力をいただきました。

The Letter Writing Project

1998 / 2014

Wooden booth, writing papers, envelopes

Interactive installation

290 × 170 × 231 cm (× 3)

* Presentation of the work *The Letter Writing Project* is supported in part by a generous contribution from the Mori Art Museum Best Friends.**砂のゲルニカ**

2006 / 2014

砂、木製模型、照明

インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

1300 × 643 cm

所蔵：JUT 美術館準備室、台北

Guernica in Sand

2006 / 2014

Sand, wooden island, lighting

Interactive installation

1300 × 643cm

Collection of JUT Museum Pre-Opening

Office, Taipei

プロジェクト・リビングルーム

2000 / 2014

ミクストメディア

インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

The Living Room

2000 / 2014

Mixed media

Interactive installation

水の星座

2014

椅子、サイドテーブル

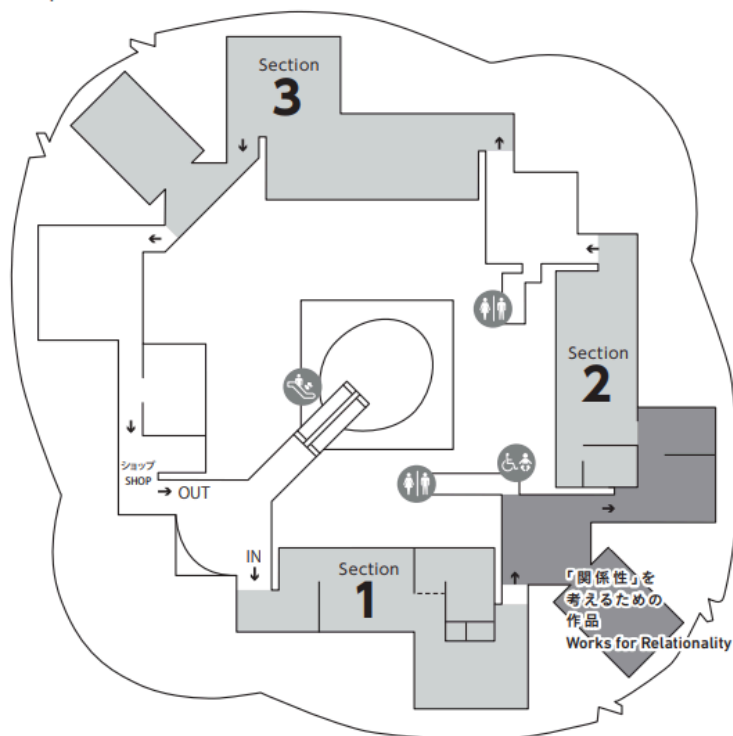
インタラクティブ・インスタレーション

Constellation of Water

2014

Chair, side table

会場マップ | Floor Map



List of Illustrations

Fig.1: *The Dining Project*, installation view at Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei, 2007.

URL: <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

Fig.2: Ballots from the lottery selection process of *The Dining Project*.

URL: <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

Fig.3: *The Sleeping Project*, from “Lee Mingwei and His Relations”, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2014.

URL: https://www.perrotin.com/artists/lee_mingwei/550/the-sleeping-project/48708

Fig.4: Additional example of nightstands covered with items from participants in *The Sleeping Project*.

URL: <http://www.leemingwei.com/projects.php#>

Fig.5: *The Tourist*, installation view at Rice Gallery, Houston (USA), 2002.

URL: <http://www.ricegallery.org/lee-mingwei>

Fig.6: *The Moving Garden*, installation view from “Lee Mingwei and His Relations”, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2014.

URL: https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/media_release/lee-mingwei-the-moving-garden/

Fig.7: *The Mending Project*, installation view at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017).

URL: https://www.perrotin.com/fr/artists/lee_mingwei/550/the-mending-project/48705

Fig.8: *When Beauty Visits*, installation view at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017).

URL: https://www.perrotin.com/fr/artists/lee_mingwei/550/when-beauty-visits/48712

Fig.9: *When Beauty Visits*, live event still at the 57th Venice Biennale (2017).

URL: https://www.perrotin.com/fr/artists/lee_mingwei/550/when-beauty-visits/48712

Fig.10: Visit to Saint-Julien-le-Pauvre, Paris, April 1921. (Collection Timothy Baum, New York).

URL: <https://www-jstor-org.proxy.library.carleton.ca/stable/pdf/3397687.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3Af6e6e11b04307b4d97b9e02d55dee9bb>

Fig.11: The Storming of the View from the Winter Palace, Mass spectacle, Petrograd, November 1920.

URL: https://www.hmkv.de/_pdf/Presse/2017/2017_SAW/2017_HMKV_Press_kit_The_Storming_of_the_Winter_Palace_EN.pdf

Fig.12: Artists from *Traffic* (curated by Nicolas Bourriaud at the CAPC Museum) Group photo taken by Carsten Holler, 1996.

URL: <http://cargocollective.com/manetas/filter/1996/LIFE-Traffic-Photo-1996>

Fig.13: *100 Days with Lily*, silver dye bleach print (ilfochrome).

URL: <http://www.leemingwei.com/mobile/projects.php?id=6>

Fig.14: *100 Days with Lily*, installation view at Honolulu Biennial Foundation, 2017.

URL: <http://theseenjournal.org/art-seen-national/honolulu-biennial-ngahiraka-mason/>

Fig.15: *The Letter Writing Project*, detailed view of the sitting and kneeling tents., Museum MACAN, 2018

URL: <https://www.museummacan.org/event-exhibition/lee-mingwei-seven-stories>

Fig.16: *The Letter Writing Project*, standing tent, installation view from “Lee Mingwei and His Relations”, Mori Art Museum, Tokyo, 2014

URL: <https://www.aucklandartgallery.com/whats-on/event/panel-talk-lee-mingwei-and-his-relations>

Fig.17: Shubun (active ca.1423- 1460). Ten round paintings mounted as a handscroll. Ink and light colours on paper. 32 x 181.5 cm. Shokokuji, Kybto.

Source: Helmut Brinker, Hiroshi Kanazawa, Andreas Leisinger, “ZEN Masters of Meditation in Images and Writings.” *Artibus Asiae. Supplementum* 40, (1996), 235.

Fig.18: *The Mending Project* label, 2017, taken from my camera.

Fig.19: Modelling the scarf, 2019, taken from my camera.

Fig.20: Detail of the stitch, *The Mending Project*, 2017, taken form my camera.

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<http://www.leemingwei.com/mobile/projects.php?id=15>
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