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CHARWEI TSAI *Water Moon*

JUNE 2ND - AUGUST 13TH 2017

**INSTITUT
D'ART CONTEMPORAIN**
Villeurbanne/Rhône-Alpes

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After her participation in Station 1(0) of the Laboratoire Espace Cerveau in 2016, Charwei Tsai was invited to hold her first solo exhibition in France at the IAC. Charwei Tsai's multimedia practice is motivated by concerns that are at once supremely personal and universal. Geographic, social, and spiritual elements constitute a body of work that encourages the participation of the viewer beyond the limits of passive contemplation.

Fascinated by the relationship between humanity and nature, Tsai meditates upon the complexity of cultural beliefs, spirituality, and transience. Borne by the unstable and transitory nature of life, Charwei Tsai's oeuvre makes itself part of the continual flux that irrigates each presence in the world. Artistic research and philosophical quest mingle at the heart of her work. This Taiwanese artist, a practitioner of Buddhism for ten years, invites us to take an inner journey to the heart of this spirituality.

Drawing upon interiorised thought, Charwei Tsai continues a quest toward the perceptible connections between end and beginning, visible and invisible, simplicity and perfection. Far from dogmatism or an ambition to translate the ineffable, her work is based on the organic continuity of a singular, personal

path, its guiding principle sharing and the perpetual search for meaning through experience. In harmony with Buddhist thought, Charwei Tsai's oeuvre is conceived in coexistence with the environment and aims to reveal its essence, experience the movement animating it, and seek out its creative vibrations. Based on canonical writings, Charwei Tsai's practice uses performance to rematerialise these texts in time and space. *The Heart Sutra*, whose main theme is emptiness as perfection and wisdom, is thus recopied from memory with Indian ink and brush. Retranscribed as drawings, then performances, using materials like paper, incense, or trees, the verses of the *Sutra* are the vectors of a fusion, at once concrete and spiritual, with the stuff of life itself.

Extended to experimentation in different media, such as film, photography, drawing, and installation, Charwei Tsai's work aims to capture the moments when apparently polarised phenomena become interdependent. The intertwining of death and rebirth constitutes a privileged field of research, pursued under the prism of ritual practices or in the contemplation of a landscape. Based on the *Bardo Thodol*, a Tibetan text describing the successive states of consciousness and perceptions experienced during the period from death to rebirth, the work develops a deepened meditation upon the inextricability of beginning and end.

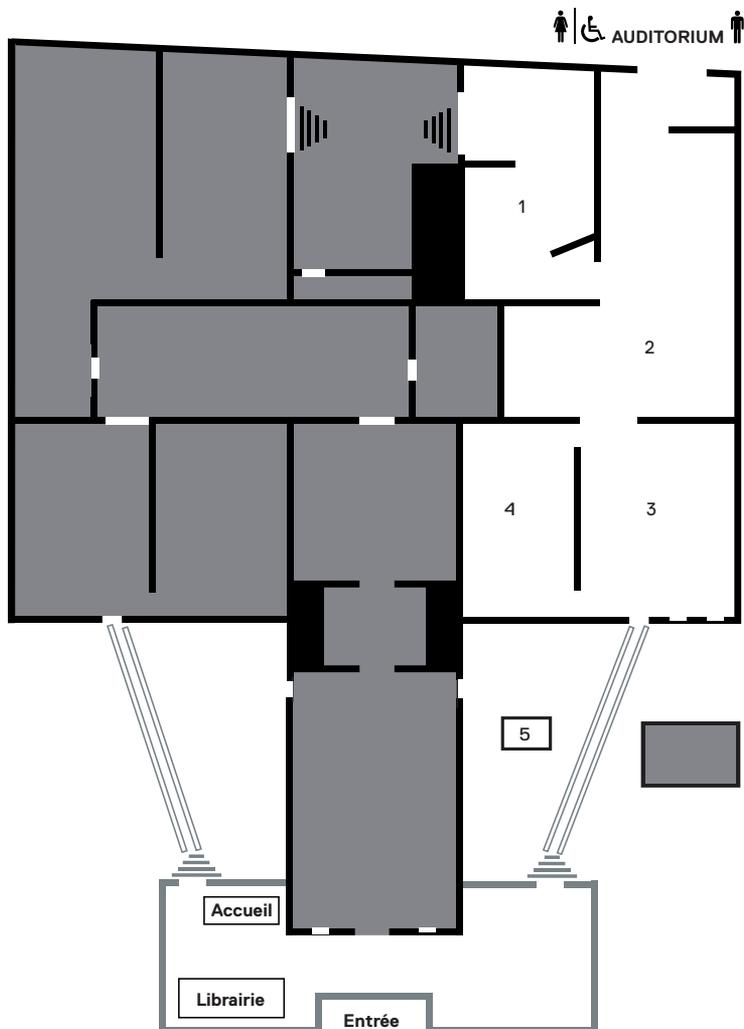
Charwei Tsai is editor in chief of *Lovely Daze*, a biannual art publication she founded in 2005.

CURATORS

Nathalie Ergino assisted by Magalie Meunier

Charwei Tsai was born in Taipei (Taiwan) in 1980, she lives and works in Taipei and Paris (Taiwan and France).

Exhibition rooms



ROOM 1 :
Water Moon

ROOM 3 :
We Came Whirling Out of Nothingness

ROOM 2 :
Spiral Incense - Five Buddha Principles

ROOM 4 :
Bardo

Room 1

Water Moon, 2017

Vidéo
Nouvelle production

The title of the exhibition, *Water Moon*, derives, the artist says, 'from an expression often used in Buddhist literature to evoke the fact that what we perceive as reality is like the reflection of the moon in water; it seems real but is in fact empty. Emptiness, here, does not mean nothingness, but rather the fact that all phenomena are interdependent and impermanent in themselves [...]. Physically, all the works in this exhibition are circular, like the moon, or are presented so as to emphasise the cyclical nature of life. This is the opposite of a linear view of life, with birth as beginning and death as end [...].' This eponymous piece reworks the principle of impermanence, using a representation of the full moon (itself a symbol of illusion in Buddhist culture¹). By means of a tiny intervention that generates ripples on the smooth, placid surface of the water, the video progressively reveals the true nature of the image presented to us, interrogating our ability to distinguish the real planet and its reflection.

1 The moon reflected in the water is also used, in the *Sutra of Wisdom and the Infinite*, to illustrate the spirit of the meditator.

Room 2

Spiral Incense - Five Buddha Principles, 2017

Installation
12 pièces d'encens

As a child, Charwei Tsai memorised the *Heart Sutra*. Although non-practising, she was fond of this text and its transcription, without giving it any spiritual importance. She writes the *Heart Sutra* in spirals of incense², used in Buddhist temples in Asia to purify them. These evolving sculptures bearing the vibrations of the *Sutra* are consumed over the course of the exhibition and transform gradually to smoke and then ashes, making manifest the Buddhist concept of 'Emptiness'. The application of five colours on the incense spirals is inspired by the Tantric Buddhist concept of the 'Five Buddha Families'. In this cosmology, each colour symbolises both a negative emotion and one of the five corresponding virtues, transforming that negative energy into positive energy. One of the six syllables of the mantra³ *Om Mani Padme Hum* is written on each colour, representing the vibration of sound in the world. The colours and the gradual dispersion of this installation refer to the mandala. Conceived as a ceremonial approach, this installation offers visitors the

2 The Incense used for this installation is created by the workers of a family-owned factory (currently managed by the third generation) in Tainan, one of the oldest cities in southern Taiwan.

3 *Om Mani Padme Hum* is one of the most famous Buddhist mantras. It is the six-syllabled mantra of the bodhisattva of compassion. It is therefore also known as the *Mantra of Great Compassion*. It is the Tibetan national mantra.

opportunity to transcend their own emotions through the vibration of the colours and the fragrance of the incense as it is consumed.

Room 3

We Came Whirling Out of Nothingness, 2014

Aquarelle
Encre
Papier de riz

We Came Whirling Out of Nothingness is a series of watercolour drawings on rice paper, representing different types of spirals on which the *Heart Sutra* appears. The Chinese calligraphy the artist uses for this work allows her to write both vertically and horizontally. The very transcription of the text is designed to create a dynamic movement, gradually dispersing the texts, through repetition, towards the edge of the paper until they reach the void.

Visitors are invited to lose themselves in the contemplation of the essence of 'Emptiness', whose symbol par excellence is the circle, embodying the cyclical nature of life.

Room 4

Bardo, 2016

Vidéo en couleur avec du son
5 min 30 sec

Bardo is a video installation made in collaboration with the Tibetan director Tsering Tashi Gyalthang. This work was initially presented in the waiting room of a fake funeral home created by the artist for the Biennale of Sydney. Intrigued by the philosophical scope of Buddhist teachings, Charwei Tsai considers spirituality and art to be inseparable. *Bardo* refers to the *Bardo Thodol*, a Tibetan text describing the successive states of consciousness and perceptions experienced during the period from death to rebirth.

(The full subtitles are transcribed below and next pages)

Bardo – subtitles

The Transitional Stage of Dying
O son of noble family that which is called death has now arrived.
You are not alone in this world.
Everyone who has come before you has died.
You can no longer stay here.
Now you should think like this:
'Now I will abandon clinging to this body and to this world.
I will go forward.
I will abandon fear and terror.
I will recognize whatever imagery that appears as a projection of my own mind.'
Listen carefully,
now is the time for you to pay close attention.

*Do not be afraid. You are dying.
The four great elements of your body
are collapsing one after the other.
It feels as if you are being crushed by
mountains,
tossed by waves,
scorched and carried off by strong
wind.
This is the bardo of dying.
It is important to recognize your
nature.
Do not resist this, do not be afraid.
O son of noble family, the time has
arrived.
Now let your compassion be limitless
as space.
Let your mind be at peace.
Rest in this, the vast and empty
luminosity of mind itself.
O son of noble family
that which is called death has now
arrived.
Now for the benefit of all beings,
recognize this luminosity, which has
dawned before you.
This great blazing mass of light is
liberation in itself.
It is the natural mind,
it is the essence of your own mind.
Recognition and liberation are
simultaneous.
Listen carefully,
you have died,
the light of this world is fading
completely.
The light of the next world has not yet
appeared.
Your body has lost all feelings.
This is what death is.
Let yourself go.
Recognize any image that may occur
as your own projection.
If the deities or saints arise,
you still don't recognize that they are
creations of your own nature,
the wrathful ones will appear.*

*The Transitional Stage of Becoming
Listen carefully,
though you can still see your family,
they no longer know you are with
them.
Though still you can go anywhere you
wish,
you cannot slow down.
You are simply driven by the winds of
hope and fear
just as a dead leaf is carried on a gale.
Now all your desperate thoughts
pursue you as shadows,
beasts, and armies of demons.
You will move about backward and
forward towards anything that
appears.
Image of your former body is becoming
faint
and your future body is becoming
clear.
Any birth seems better than your
current pain.
This will be your last chance,
let your grasping mind dissolve
completely.
You are now on the path to rebirth,
choose carefully where you are to be
reborn.
In all the possibilities that are present
for you,
choose a good human birth
and a good place so you can continue
to recognize
the nature of your own mind.
Even though you are desperate for a
home,
A dark cave or a forest may well lead to
the animal realm.
Even if you are consumed by yearnings
put your mind at ease.
Avoid extreme pleasures and pain
and take birth where you may still
recognize
the luminous essence of your mind.*

Garden

Plane Tree Mantra, 2014

Performance : dessin à l'encre sur tronc
d'arbre
Collection 49 NORD 6 EST - Frac Lorraine

In November 2016, when she participated in Station 1(0) of the Laboratoire Espace Cerveau, Charwei Tsai inscribed the Heart Sutra on the trunk of one of the plane trees in the IAC garden. This ancestral text, which the artist learned in Taiwan, constitutes one of the pillars of Buddhist wisdom, evoking the evanescence of all things. The public was invited to observe the writing process and the long, painstaking exercise of calligraphy, symbolising the coming together of the memories of three entities: an individual, an ancient philosophy, and a tree several decades old.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION

CHARWEI TSAI

Water Moon

Exhibition from June 2nd to August, 13th 2017

OPENING HOURS

Exhibition from Wednesday to Friday, from 2p.m. to 6p.m.

Weekends from 1p.m. to 7p.m.

T. + 33 (0)4 78 03 47 00

The Institut d'art contemporain is open on public holidays during exhibitions, except on 1st May, 25th December and 1st January.

GETTING HERE

The Institut d'art contemporain is 10 minutes from Lyon Part-Dieu railway station. To reach the Institut d'art contemporain, you can use Lyon public transport:

Métro ligne A (arrêt République)

Bus C3 (arrêt Institut d'art contemporain), C9 (arrêt Ferrandière) et C16 (arrêt Alsace)

Station Vélo'v

ADMISSION

Tickets : 6€/ 4€, Pass IAC 2017 : 15€

BOOKSHOP

Specialised in contemporary art, the bookshop at the Institute is open during exhibition opening hours.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Friday, 23th of June 2017 at 12,30 AM and 1PM : *Visite sur le pouce*

Saturday 24th of June 2017 at 3,30 PM visite de l'exposition en L.S.F 

Saturday 1st of July 2017 at 3,30 PM : visite experience *Postures à l'oeuvre*

Sunday 18th of June 2017 at 3,30 PM : *Family Sunday*

L'institut d'art contemporain is supported by the French Ministry of Culture and Communication (DRAC Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes), the Regional Council Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes and the City of Villeurbanne
Avec le soutien de :



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