Identity and Beyond

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree Master of Fine Arts in the
Graduate School of The Ohio State University

by
Betty J. Sarti Rivas, BFA

The Ohio State University
1995

Master's Examination Committee:
Massey, Charles Jr.
West, Pheoris
Harned, Richard

Approved by
Massey, Charles Jr.
Adviser
Department of Art
Dedication

To the members of my family who passed away, and who always are my inspiration.
My uncle Oscar Rivas Dasilva, 1991
My brother Alejandro Sarti Rivas, 1991
My grandmother Rafaela Dasilva de Rivas, 1994

To my love Uwe who makes a difference in my life
Acknowledgments

I express sincere appreciation to the members of my committee: Professor Charles Massey, Jr. for his guidance and encouragement, Professor Pheoris West for listening and accepting my cultural background with open arms, and to Professor Richard Harned whose ideas and challenges made me work harder.
Vita

Born, in San Felix, Bolivar State, Venezuela

Colegio Nazareth, Elementary School
Instituto Gonzalo Mendez, High School
Bachelors of Fine Arts, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio 1992

Field of Study

Major field: Art
Studies in Printmaking
## Table of contents

- DEDICATION .................................................................................. ii
- ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ................................................................. iii
- VITA ........................................................................................... iv
- LIST OF PLATES ........................................................................ vi
- INTRODUCTION ........................................................................... 1
- BACKGROUND ............................................................................ 2
  - UNDERGRADUATE WORK ......................................................... 3
  - GRADUATE WORK .................................................................. 4
- WHY IDENTITY? ........................................................................... 6
- INFLUENCE OF OTHER ARTISTS ............................................... 9
- WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE ............................................... 12
- CONCLUSION ............................................................................. 36
- BIBLIOGRAPHY .......................................................................... 38
List of Plates

PLATE I, SMILING FACES AT MOON'S SPINNERS CAFE ........................................ 15
PLATE II, SELF PORTRAITS ................................................................................. 18
PLATE III, UNTITLED ......................................................................................... 22
PLATE IV, MEDICINE CABINET .......................................................................... 25
PLATE V, CULTURE EATING CULTURE ............................................................ 28
PLATE VI, HOW TO CAN CHICKEN .................................................................... 31
PLATE VII, MEDITATION ..................................................................................... 33
Introduction

"Once a man held a huge banquet with a thousand guests. When someone presented a gift of fish and fowl, the host said appreciatively, "Heaven is generous to the people indeed, planting cereals and creating fish and fowl for our use." The huge crowd of guests echoed this sentiment. A youth about twelve years old, however, who had been sitting in the most remote corner of the banquet hall, now came forward and said to the host, "It is not as you say sir. All beings in the universe are living creatures on par with us. No species is higher or lower in rank than another, it's just that they control each other by differences in their intelligence and power; they eat each other, but that does not mean they were produced for each other. People take what they can eat and eat it, but does that mean that heaven produce that for people? If so, then since mosquitoes bite skin and tigers and wolves eat flesh, does that not mean that heaven made humans for mosquitoes and created flesh for tigers and wolves?." (Cleary, 1993)

This is a tale from the book “The Spirit of Tao”. When I read this book, it changed my whole perspective about life itself. My work as an artist, through symbols and connections to the ideas in this tale, helps explore this new perspective.
Background

I was born in San Felix, Bolivar State, Venezuela. I am the youngest of four children and the only female. My mother is a Pharmacist; my father is a Teacher. In my family education was taken seriously. All my brothers are engineers. I am the only artist in the family.

My childhood is important since my memories contribute as symbols to my art now. I planned to become a pharmacist to follow in my mother's footsteps, but I found that this was not the right field for me. My artistic side was stronger, and I decided to become an artist. At first, my family was not happy with this decision, but after some discussions, they accepted and supported my idea thoroughly.

My work is related to my experiences in times of despair and isolation. I came to the United States to study English, then Art as an undergraduate and a graduate student. To be in another culture is a challenge. For a long time I thought "who am I?". I have had problems adapting to a new culture, with relationships, and with my family. I think I have now found who I am through my works as an artist. I deal with subjects related not only to me in particular but also to things around most people. These are things which most of us do not consciously recognize because they are part of our everyday life, but they do have an effect on all of us. I have explored by looking closely at myself to find my “identity” in the middle of a world culture.
In my research during the past one and a half years, I have found that I have a strong sensitivity for the values of other cultures. I realize that people walk through life without paying attention to the things they do every day. I am trying to show, with my work, that life or to live is more than being alive; we can make choices to live better. One example is the way we eat. We eat anything that looks good and tastes good. We eat without thinking. My experimentation with this subject is influenced by my personal view of how we are seduced by a culture of mass consuming.

Undergraduate Work

I came from Venezuela in 1987, hardly knowing any English. It took me about one year to get used to the language and the American culture. I was accepted at The Ohio State University to study Art. During the years that followed, I grew tremendously as an independent person, and I had a wonderful experience with printmaking.

At the beginning of my undergraduate studies, my works were "political" in the sense that they were socially oriented. My work was based on experiences, childhood memories and the problem of cultural differences. I felt, and I still feel, that the world around me is making decisions for me.

My work was conceptually very rich, and the experimentation with printmaking techniques was encouraging. I chose to go to graduate school in order to further develop my artwork conceptually through research into imagery and processes best suited to what I found in my ideas.
Graduate Work

The experience of working with lithography was followed by the development from two-dimensional work to three-dimensional work with ceramics. In further development, I started to experiment with mixed media, including ceramics, wax, and found objects in combination with photographs and drawings.

My experiments with ceramics and other different materials has led to valuable contributions to my work in general. I feel that multiple mediums is my way to express what I want to say as an artist. Also, I have looked closely at the work of contemporary artists to allow me to learn about how they deal with techniques and issues similar to ones I am dealing with in my work.

During my research, I have found that an image needs essential elements to be art, including motion to activated the physical work and emotion to activate the feeling about the work. The piece needs to be physical, emotional, and spiritual. Physical: so it has an impact in our brain; it really exists. Emotional: after the experience with the physical object, one realizes a reaction toward the object. Spiritual: after seeing the work and reacting to it, we realize that there is something that goes beyond the physical and the emotional part of the work. I have been inspired in particular by Joseph Beuys and his philosophy of his drawings being physical and cosmological or metaphysical. (Moffit, 1988)

My interest in the integration of images and processes in single pieces is still growing, and I am adding different layers of materials to make the work complete. Through my
exploration, I have found that there are many different directions that remain for me. Through finding my own identity in a world culture, I have found what is good for me. With my work I want to transmit these experiences to other people who do not know themselves and depend on external things for them to be loved and accepted.
Why Identity?

The major part of my work is about finding my identity. The reasons why I lost my identity date back to my youth but can also be found in experiences from recent years. There are cultural, religious, as well as family reasons.

Hispanic culture is very restrictive towards women. The rules of that society force women to please others instead of respecting themselves. It is not accepted for a women to be independent. If a women is not under the protection of her family, she has to be married. A single woman is not respected, and divorce is seen as a shame. Society and religion influence women by making them feel guilty. The restrictive code of this society is also reflected in the family. My family always told me what to do. They expected me to study Pharmacy and follow my mother’s footsteps. I finally felt that it was not the right field of studies for me.

My feelings towards religion have become negative, too. When I was young, I started my education in a catholic school for women, and I learned to be religious and obedient. But slowly I saw that there was a difference in what they taught and how they acted. Finally, I totally lost my belief in the Catholic Church.

By the time I started college, I felt very restricted by society. There was a lot of pressure. I quit my studies of Pharmacy after one year.
After this I had time for myself. I started to read and learn about Buddhism. I like Buddhism because inner values are important, and one learns about oneself from meditation and observing nature. How one looks is not important in Buddhism. I became vegetarian for a while. I felt like I started to make my own decisions for my life.

Later, I had the opportunity to come to the United States to study while under the protection of my brother. It was not easy to get accustomed to the new culture. I had culture shock. In the United States it is important how things look. Race can be a problem because Hispanics have a bad reputation. I was in a new environment and had to make new friends. This was even more pressure to accept American habits. Again, I felt society was imposing its rules on me. I also still had pressure from my family because they still did not accept that I was on my own. In addition, I got into a difficult, personal relationship in which I was not accepted for the way I am. I tried to change here, too.

All of these experiences accumulated until I could not take it any more. Finally I broke up with my boyfriend and started a new life. I started to cut my ties to everyone: my brother, my ex-boyfriend's friends, even my family. I made school my highest priority. I became a vegetarian again. I practiced Tai Chi Chuan which is a walking meditation that improves the physical, mental and spiritual self, and I tried to find a new way of living. I went to counseling and I started to validate myself. I learned to say "no" to my family, my ex-boyfriend and everyone who tried to control me. The improvement was slow, but I was learning how to look for issues and say "no" to abuse.

Now, I know that I love my family, but I need my independence. I lost my three best friends: my brother Alejandro, my Uncle Oscar, and my grandmother. They were my greatest memories in my childhood. I have found that sometimes life is not so glamorous;
it is not fun. I have opened my eyes to reality now. I need to touch base with myself. I am trying to understand myself, my own limits. I am on my own. My driving motivation is myself, and I want to make my own decisions about politics, social issues, economics and the culture in which I live.

With my work I want to show my struggle to find my identity and a place in society. It also reflects difficult times and pain from the past. I have used my art work as therapeutic and to renew myself. With this I have recovered my self esteem and validated myself in this society.
Influence of Other Artists

Other artists influenced me with their view of life, courage, and techniques. During the time of looking for my identity the works of artists like Barbara Kruger, Jenney Holzer, and Joseph Beuys became very important for me.

Barbara Kruger's work deals with identity, women's issues and the place of the human in society by using images from movies, television and stereotypical situations in everyday life. The implications of her work are political, social, and feminist. (Linker, 1990). I believe Barbara Kruger has courage to depict these images and break with the stereotype of males and females roles in society. I can relate to her work because of my experiences with the rules imposed by religion on Hispanic society, which are oppressive to women. “Untitled (Perfect)”, 1980, for example, depicts the "perfect" women, obedient in a pose with folded hands in front of her chest. In another work, Kruger's assault on sexist mythologies is clear in a billboard proclaiming "We don't need another hero", 1989. The billboard shows a little girl admiring a boy which is posing as a hero.

Another topic of Kruger's works is mass consumerism in our society, “Untitled (I Shop therefore I am)”, 1987, is an example of how we identify ourselves with the things we buy. The same issue is reflected in my pieces “How to Can Chicken” (plate VI) and especially in “Medicine Cabinet” (plate IV).
Another important influence to my work is the American artist Jenney Holzer. Holzer shows the impact of words on our daily life, while Barbara Kruger demonstrates the influence of images. They both showed me how to use images and text in my art.

As Diane Walman writes, Jenney Holzer "employs art and aspects of culture to comment on the nature of society and on the way in which art is perceived and received in a consumer society... Her pieces range from simple one-liners to highly complex elegies and meditation on the human condition" (Walman, 1989). Holzer criticizes the structures of society with an electronic display sign board saying "Class structure is as artificial as plastic" (Part of "Truisms", 1985).

As Barbara Kruger does, Holzer also depicts the topic of mass consumerism in some of her "Protect me from what I want". (Truisms, Caesar's Palace, Las Vegas 1985).

The German artist, Joseph Beuys is important for me because he uses art to teach people about art and life. Beuys has created what he calls a "Social Sculpture", a political concept which is for many people singularly confusing. Beuys' social sculpture has primarily to do with creative productivity. He believes that the spiritual and creative faces of humankind have been neglected in our technocratic society. He wants to make us aware of the paralyzing effect on human creativity if technology is regarded as the only means of progress. He believes that art and the artist are best equipped to point out the way to a spiritual fulfillment which does not necessarily have to do with religion. Beuys believes in art as liberating force. Art emancipates man from suffering because intuition reveals knowledge of the world. For him, art is seen as therapeutic. He is leading people toward spirituality, showing them by his action that they can be free. His drawings exist in two levels:-a purely physical one in which the elements of his activity are mapped or "scored" (as in music), and a cosmological level in which all the elements of his pieces become
incorporated into the sculpture because they exist in the world. (Moffit, 1988). This is similar to my view of art existing in different levels: Physical, emotional spiritual and (c.f. page 8).
What the work looks like

My thesis exhibition, "Identity and Beyond", presents my work from the last two years. It features lithographs, screen prints, drawings, and mixed-media pieces along with found objects combined in an installation format. Twenty-two self portrait prints and drawing are displayed in the hallway and in the entrance lobby outside of the gallery. Viewers can walk through the hallway looking at my work, and the experience of seeing my deformed self-portraits through the Plexiglas is like the effect of reflection. They see themselves through me. A similar group of self portraits is shown at the entrance of the gallery, here with bold flat colors. This group features screen prints with photographic effects. Entering into the gallery, the viewer becomes a part of the exhibition because interaction occurs with large and small works, all mostly three dimensional.

The large piece in the center of the gallery, "Meditation", is an installation which was assembled with many pieces of Joss paper, Chinese funerary paper to be burned in memory of dead family relatives. I glued them together to form eight large pieces, eleven by twelve feet each, to make walls. The little square papers were screen printed with images, such as my self portrait, fingerprints, a map, Chinese characters and words in other languages. The piece contains many simple elements made to exist as a whole. The central piece requires most of the attention from the viewer. Other pieces inside the gallery, cabinets and photographic collages, are located on opposite walls so they connect and support but do not distract from the central piece. Their relationship to the central
piece is their format appears as containers which hold objects and images that are part of identity. The other walls remain empty to focus the attention on the central piece.

The spaces outside the gallery, with the drawings and prints, indicate the facade. Inside of the gallery, the work becomes more intimate. The four walls of “Meditation” create an enclosed space. Some of the walls have a double layer of paper; others are single sheets of paper. One can walk inside or outside the space from each corner of the piece and become part of it because the paper walls are not attached to each other. They are suspended from the ceiling and allow one’s movement to create movement of the paper. The cabinets occupied space too. One can open, touch, and see that the objects inside are real; they exist.

Lighting is used to focus the viewer’s attention on one piece at a time, and to create a meditation or observation attitude. I use spots of light instead of even lighting for the pieces outside of the gallery. The lighting on the cabinets is like on a stage; it is solid and clear. The illumination of the central piece in the gallery is from the inside out. The double and single layering of the paper creates the effect of the light both coming through and staying inside the space. The piece, being translucent and opaque, appears to be fragile and solid at the same time. At the backside of the piece, the solid effect of the gold leaf on the paper and the lighting from the outside gives this structure strength, like a solid wall of metal.

Almost all the pieces are related to each other through consistent repetition of symbols and the use of the very broad photographic concept of reality and truth. For example, something that one can see, touch, feel, experience or understand because of the way it
looks is normally believed to be real or true. The interaction of the pieces is clear because they carry ideas through a constant use of the same or similar “real” symbols.

I use printmaking mediums for much of my work because of the fact that printmaking, as part of the mechanical reproduction of images, emphasizes that multiple images have a unique existence. Commercial lithography helps everyone get easy access to art and writing, to facts and assumed truth. Artistic lithography uses but breaks with this purpose. Traditionally, there were only original works of art; every thing else made after it was a copy or a reproduction. In the “art” of printmaking, every print is original and has the same value or importance.

I used the reproduction aspect to represent the multiplicity of me. I exist as fact and as personality.
Plate I, Smiling Faces at Moon's Spinners Cafe
Smiling Faces

Men's and Women's Bathroom 12' 1 x 12' w x 16'h.
Painted walls, latex paint, and paper collage.

Three computer printed photographs document an installation at Moon Spinners Cafe. The topic of the installation is not identity itself. It rather documents my work during a significant time of finding my identity. Leading to the work which is concerned with identity itself, they are placed at the entrance of the hallway lobby.

At the time when I did this installation, the difficulties in my life affected me tremendously. I said to myself constantly: maybe if I draw smiling faces for long enough I could be happy. The smiling faces were a metaphor for my mood and, in a broader sense, my face. I started to do some of them in small prints, with colored pencils and graphite. The size started to increase and increase. The biggest one was fifty inches by seventy two inches, but for me the size still was limiting. I wanted to go beyond this size to project an overwhelming feeling of happiness. Later, during the summer, I had the opportunity to do an installation in Moon Spinners Cafe in Columbus, Ohio. I wanted this piece to be big and real. The piece has public interaction by working in an unusual space, the bathrooms. It helped me to get strength and to believe in my work as an artist. I was reaffirmed by an art review in a newspaper, which described me as an artist with courage leading ahead for new forms of art: The Other Paper, August 11-17, 1994.

This piece was in both bathrooms at Moon Spinners Cafe. There were smiling faces in yellow, blue and pink. The decorative 60’s colors influenced the work. I also painted big flowers collaged colored paper, and added diagrammed meat cows on the wall. The only difference between the rooms was that the women's had more blue; it is more dreamy, in
comparison to the men's. The men's room is more yellow, and one sees three very happy cows jumping over the urinal.

People's responses have been positive because the smiling faces are amusing. However, if one looks at it closely, it has another side, too. The feeling is overwhelming happiness, but there are references of happy cows ready to be eaten by us. I realized that sometimes the happiness is just like make up, a mask; there is an underlay of unsatisfactory life conditions.

My intention with this work was for people to start thinking about how they feel toward some issues: Vegetarianism, animal abuse, what we eat, what mood we are in. It was good for me as therapy; it gave me strength to work and to believe in me.

The topic of happiness is further explored in the piece "Untitled" (plate III), which is shown inside the gallery.
Plate II, Self portraits
Self portraits
Mix media, 22 "x 30" each,
twenty one pieces.
Lithograph, screen print and negative film,
china ink, pencil, color pencil and graphite.

I created these pieces during the time when I went to counseling and all my energy started to concentrate on me. Who am I; what is important for me? I tried to look at myself and tell myself that people will always have a different perception of me. However, I needed to find out for myself who I am. With this work I am expressing my personality and the way I feel, my moods. I validated myself. It is normal to feel the way I feel. I am not ashamed anymore. It is me; those feelings are part of me, no matter what.

There are twenty-two pieces; all are self-portraits. The pieces started from a computerized photograph from the result of the Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). I copied it, enlarged it, deformed it, photographed the image again and converted it through screen print and lithography and as a projected drawing.

By deforming the photographs, the portraits go further than the photography itself. The movement and deformation of my faces are suggestions of a crisis. It is an internal crisis; it is reflected by the colors I had chosen for each piece and by its form in elongation, rotation and shortening of the face. In general, they are portraits of emotions and moods. Therefore the number of pieces was consciously left open. I made as many as necessary to show my feelings.
Fingerprints started to be a significant part. I used them in a number of variations such as veering from light to dark and positive and negative photographic forms in space.

The combination of different techniques goes along with my changing moods. I have combined lithography with watercolors, screen prints and positive and negative photographic transparencies, colored pencils and graphite. Next to the prints I had a short explanation of how I felt during that time. By this way I could prepare the viewer to understand some of the emotions I was depicting with my pieces:

Time of isolation makes me feel
that I am going into regression.
Isolated from the world, because
it hurts so much.
Why am I here?
I live in a place of fantasy.
Somehow this is not reality.
What is reality? Inside or outside.
My reality is distorted
from all angles.
My past comes back
in time of pain.
I am hurt, and it hurts more
when others want more from me.
It seems that it is not important
to live this life without my own opinion
about myself.
The demands of others over me hurt so much.
My image gets distorted by their
desire of changing something about me.
Why do I have to change?

The self portraits build the connection between the outside and the inside of the gallery. The connection is emphasized by repetition of my face and fingerprint in the central piece, "Meditation", as well as common content throughout the exhibition. From here, as the visitor goes inside the gallery, one sees that the pieces are more personal. The pieces
inside the gallery all are similar in their format as containers, which holds two aspects: There is the exterior appearance and the interior that reflect identity, personality, and desires.
Plate III, Untitled
Untitled
Bathroom Cabinet
Mix media, 16"x 24.5"x 5.5
Found objects, toys, acrylics, color pencils.

“No species is higher or lower in rank than another, it’s just that they control each other by differences in their intelligence and power; they eat each other, but that does not mean they were produced for each other.” (Cleary, 1993)

This cabinet had a mirror at front and an elaborated frame, one can see their own reflection, representing ones facade. When one opens the cabinet, it has the effect of looking behind the facade of the individual. One can see two toy fishes trapped in a small cage and hanging from the top inside the cabinet. The background color inside of the cabinet is painted black. It is covered with smiling faces which are painted in yellow, pink and neon green. Also, there are some smiles made with color pencil and graphite.

With this piece I am coming back to the smiling faces and the theme of being happy. The fishes are symbols for people. They are trapped in a metal cage. What would one usually think? These two fishes are out of their ordinary habitat; in this case they are plastic toys, but they are a metaphor for and about people. It relates to my feelings of being trapped by the rules of society and family and the showing of a happiness in society or family which is not true.

The format: The three-dimensional quality of a cabinet is good to express reality. My prints, in general, are two dimensional, and I thought I needed to go beyond the limits of their meaning. I wanted to have something that one could actually touch and experience
and incorporate the element of surprise. I wanted people to wonder about the "smiling" and the context. The cabinet acts as a container where one puts things that are part of life, of culture, of who we are became of the world around us.
Plate IV, Medicine Cabinet
Page 26 does not exist.
Many of these icons are displayed in this cabinet. A photograph of expensive perfume represents people who try to escape their lives by buying expensive products. Others use drugs, which is represented by medicine bottles. Condoms preserved in a jar stand for people who use sex as a substitute for love. The wax Buddha figures and a "Last Supper" candle are representation of ritualistic religion. Superstition is symbolized by a horse shoe. People use horse shoes for the protection from other people's invidious desires.

From the cabinets, the way leads to the opposite side of the gallery where one could find a third cabinet, "How to Can Chicken". Two black and white photographic collages, "Culture Eating Culture", are placed next to the wooden cabinet on the left and right side of it. The two pieces have a close relationship to each other and to the cabinet and are placed together. They are all likely seen as one piece.
Plate V, Culture Eating Culture.
In the two-part photographic collage, "Culture Eating Culture", I focused on the subject of how culture dictates what we eat. One thinks that we are free in our decisions of what to eat and in general what to do. But culture and society imposes rules and restrictions on us which can hardly be overcome. These restrictions are better recognizable when entering another country and another culture. In the United States, for example, it is difficult to avoid eating fast food because of its easy access, economical reasons and strong publicity.

This piece is composed of two large photographs. There are four different kinds of meat products: Chicken, sausages, pork, and human; and the title "Edible Culture". The other photograph has four pieces of meat: Chicken, pigeon, pork, and bacon. This piece is an exploration of the same topic as plate VI, "How To Can Chicken", in its cultural context. However, the format is different; instead of being three dimensional like the cabinets, it is two dimensional. This is a photograph, and its format acts as a poster for advertisement of food and products. The effect of a black and white photograph is powerful because it lets one's imagination put in the color they want or assume is there. By using the photographic effect, the meat looks frozen in a time frame, but one knows it will discompose. The presentation of food is important in most cultures. Especially in western culture, one does not want to see the head and feet of the animal. The food cannot be individual or have a personality. We care about how it looks and how it tastes.
The association of a female human body without a head adds another layer to the subject. Meat is meat; one eats or consumes it when it is presented in a nice package. Models are used for mass consumption in the same way as other products. “All beings in the universe are living creatures on par with us. No species is higher or lower in rank than another, it’s just that they control each other by differences in their intelligence and power; they eat each other, but that does not mean they were produced for each other.” (Cleary, 1993)
Plate VI, How to Can Chicken
Title: "How to Can Chicken"
Mix media, wood cabinet 24"x 30"x 12"
Doll, chicken feet's, fish, photographs,
clay figures, containers.
Winter 1994

The influence of society on the individual, the politics involved, animal abuse, humans' abuse and the relationship and comparison of animals and human beings is the main theme in the combination of these pieces. There is often no respect for human life and human rights because of politics and economics. Instead of individuality there are masses of people or masses of animals, and sometimes they are treated the same. Culture dictates what we should eat. What is approved to eat, what to consume. Sometimes we eat whatever is available in our environment.

I have wondered about how culture controls us. By putting these things together, I express my questioning of the choices. Are they the right ones? Are they the best ones? Are individuals sacrificed?

This cabinet is bigger than the others ones. It is made of wood with two compartments and six small sub compartments. Inside one sees the compartments filled up with small jars. Some of the jar are containers for food; others are laboratory containers for laboratory specimens. All of them contain things such as photographs of crowded people and masses of chicken. One finds real animals body parts, such as chicken legs, and there are fried pork ears, and artificial human body parts, such as plastic ears, clay arms and legs and a Barbie doll's head. One finds a constant comparison of people and animals. The viewer will likely explore the cabinet and pay attention to all the details inside.
Plate VII, Meditation
Title: "Meditation"
Mix media, 11.6 high x 12.8 long (Feet).
Joss paper (Chinese funerary paper),
with Silver and Gold leaf, screen print,
Chinese ink, Gesso. 1994-1995

The central piece, "Meditation", is made of paper used for ceremonies in Chinese culture. The little rectangular pieces of paper are glued together to build large paper walls. Hanging from the ceiling, the walls build a room in the center of the gallery. One can walk around it or inside of it. In the center, inside the room, is a rectangular box with a ceramic bowl inside of it from where bright red fish are going out and spreading around. The box is full of and surrounded by sand. The sand is a representation of a land or a place. The rectangle of the box together with circle of the bowl are a symbol the union of the female and male energy of the universe, a symbol with can frequently be found in Buddhism. The fish are out of their natural environment; they are a metaphor of people swimming in an ocean of struggle. Two banners inside the room, which are placed at the north and south sides of the box, complete the piece. They are symbols of my struggle to take off the rules and external restrictions off my self. The rules are symbolically represented as heavy layer of paper and paint. I have scratched the surface until my face, the self-portraits, appear from underneath.

This piece is self contained; there is repetition of shapes and form. It is a combination of self-portraits, finger prints and the idea of being contained in a grid system, contained in a society. This is a summary of many things I have done so far, in terms of concept and images. I continue searching for answers to questions about the system we live in, our world of beliefs, politics and religion.
As a whole this piece has sense of a system structure. The structure is built by multiples of images and symbols which, seen all together, have the sense of unity and self containment. I use materials that look fragile and solid: paper with gold leaf and Chinese ink. The elements as a whole are meaningful, while the parts represent the support for the structure, each having individual identity or meaning. The work is a relationship between the inside and the outside, the parts and the whole. The images in each part hold together, almost protect the object inside. The small elements are important in that system: They could be a system of beliefs, or cells in the human body, or a government, maybe religion, family, factories, universe. The relationships of the parts represent the whole. The symbols printed on the paper show different things which are part of me. There are maps of my home town, collection of words, finger prints, and most frequently my self portrait. Also, a combination of my self-portraits with finger prints can be seen. They all show different aspects of me. The repetition of the self-portraits shows that the piece is about my self as an individual.

The colors used in all the elements are warm, alive. The expressiveness of the elements is pure, simple, imaginary, very strong. The statement has the purpose of meditating on the repetition of the shapes and the structure. It has meaning, of strength because it is large, of fragility because of material and vulnerability, possible to overwhelm but also to disappear and change.

Equality and diversity expands our cultural values and notions of right and wrong. Their qualities can supersede (overcome) the differences in political viewpoints. Then we all have the power, it will enable our world culture to last forever.
Conclusion

The show was a way to find myself. The hard moments in my life have made me be stronger as a person and more persistent with the things I want as an artist. Art demands great effort and dedication because it seeks the unknown. I had to gain all that through my work and add the experience of living in a different culture which challenges me even more to think and work broadly. “Making a piece of art may feel a lot like telling a family secret. Secret telling, by its very nature involves shame and fear. It asks the question “what will they think of me once they know this?” This is a frightening question, particularly if we have ever been made to feel ashamed for our curiosities and exploration—social, sexual, spiritual.” (Cameron, 1992).

My work was made in time of isolation and despair, and I wanted to explore ideas that have an effect on me. I wanted to transmit my experience to other people who do not know themselves and depend on external approval.

What helps me to understand my situation is that I recognized my problems and did something about them. Cultural diversity made me think and compare my cultural background, and it helped me to see opportunities that I did not have before. As an artist I look for inspiration in other artists that helped me to follow my convictions; I felt that I am not the only one. There are other people who are searching for the same ideal, equality, respect.
I am aware of mass consume and that I used to depend in external things to be loved and accepted. This is not important for me anymore. I depend on myself, I am the only one who knows my limits. I know who I am.

“No species is higher or lower in rank than another, it’s just that they control each other by differences in their intelligence and power; they eat each other, but that does not mean they were produced for each other. People take what they can eat and eat it, but does that mean that heaven produce that for people? If so, then since mosquitoes bite skin and tigers and wolves eat flesh, does that not mean that heaven made humans for mosquitoes and created flesh for tigers and wolves?” (Cleary, 1993)
Bibliography


Liang Huang, Chung: La Esencia del Tai Chi (Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain: The Essence of Thai Chi), Quatro Vientos, Editorial N° 47.333, Santiago de Chile 1980.


Waldman, Diane: Jenny Holzer, New York 1989