



## INTERVIEW WITH SHIAU-PENG CHEN

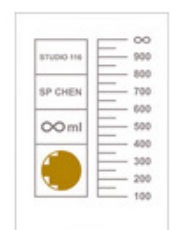
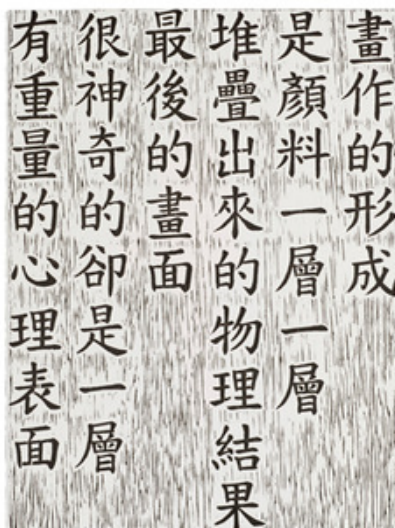
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BACK in my gallery days running *Immersion Therapy*, I had the good fortune of meeting a lot of artists who were living and working in Australia at the time. My memory isn't as precise as I would sometimes like it to be, but I think I met Shiao-Peng Chen at one of the shows that I had at the gallery through another remarkable artist that I know.

I recall heading down to the studios at RMIT in Melbourne which has played a part in a lot of artists' training there and I was immediately struck by how exact, precise and disciplined Shiao-Peng's work was. All the things that I'm not capable of, but that she nails time after time in her work. The other thing that impressed me is that in person, she's warm and funny, as if she gets all that exactness out in her artwork to free her up for day to day life.

Shiao-Peng's practice runs across different mediums: she paints, she constructs, she deconstructs and she uses print mediums in inventive ways. She is a prolific worker, teaches and is widely respected (and exhibited). She was kind enough to find some time to answer some of my inane questions. Let's meet Dr. Shiao-Peng Chen!



The Weight of Printmaking 2014 Woodcut, color print and silkscreen



**Is it sunny today?**

Yes, it's always sunny!

Looks like you are busy as always, three shows already this



LOOKS like you are busy as always...three shows already this year? Can you tell me about them and about any upcoming projects?

This year I have participated in three group shows so far. They are *Concrete Post 2* in Project Space/Spare Room at RMIT University in Melbourne (Australia), *Yi Jing: The Art Dialogue*

*Between Different Generations and Religions* in Da Xiang Art Space in Taichung (Taiwan) and *Concrete Post 3* in Raum2810 in Bonn, Germany. Currently, I'm working on my *Taipei Series*. Next March I have a solo show coming up at IT Park in Taipei (Taiwan).

**So what's taken up the most of your time this year?**

I would say that's teaching and art making. I'm trying to keep the two things well-balanced.

**When we first met, back in 2008, I remember that your work had a few major themes running through it. I would say that at that time you were interested in exploring spatial arrangements, socio-political geographies and art theory, and that you tended to express all those things in an abstract, but clear and symbolic way. Would you agree?**

Yes, good observation Dave! I think you have a very sharp eye.

**Why, thanks. Are those themes still important to your work? Are you still exploring them or has time taken you elsewhere?**

The themes are still important to my work. I have tried to push the ideas further and texts are used as a new format to support the images. Works from the *I Would Love to Become An Author Series* are good examples.

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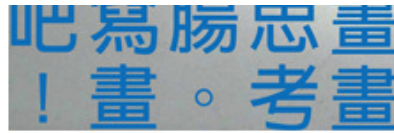
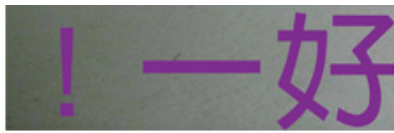
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I Would Love to Become an Author I : 2013, Color print and silkscreen 6 pieces 76 x 56 cm each

**One of the amazing motifs in your work is the way that you reduce everything down to its essential state and kind of rebirth it into something new. I recall that you even adapted your own visual alphabet into your work. Can you explain that a little to people who are not familiar with your work?**

Through reducing everything down to its essential state, most of my work tends to have a flat and simple appearance. The method of reduction and simplification I used is both subjective and objective. Originally it is derived from the physical facts I have observed. I then try to adjust the images through my understanding of these facts... and sometimes just by free associations which reveal what I've perceived and thought subconsciously.

**And the alphabet?**

Using my own visual alphabet in my work is another method I use to combine the outer world and my inner world in a playful and humorous way. It is way more subjective though.

**You are a prolific publisher and there's been a literary side to your work for some time. Will you extend your genius one day to showing the world that you are an actual writer?**

Last year I had a solo show entitled *Shiau-Peng Chen Publications* at the NHCUE Art Space in Hsinchu (Taiwan). It was a show presenting my text-works including drawings, silkscreens, text-photographs and artist's books. I was using text to support the ideas of my work. Most of the artists I admire are artists who create conceptual, geometric abstract works. And many of them are writers of writers. Somehow, I feel doing text-work is more like a way of saying that I want to be a good artist, just like them.

**Is Xu Bing still your friend?**

Of course! Xu Bing is always my friend, haha! (Though we don't know each other in person).

**People, that was a bit of an inside joke between me and SP. SP, what would you say to people who don't know about Xu Bing, and tell me about some of your other friends.**

If you don't know Xu Bing, check out his *Book from the Ground* first and then *Book from the Sky*. I'm sure by doing so you will be able to catch the basic/essential idea of Xu's work. Aside from Xu Bing, more recently I've become friends with the American artists Matt Mullican and Math Bass.

**And whose work have you been interested in lately? (and why)**

Allan McCollum, Matt Mullican and Math Bass' etc. They make paintings and installations. They also write. I am very interested in Post-Abstraction issues. I think abstraction is the last response an artist can have to the *end of painting* era. These artists more or less deal with similar issues.



**Melbourne, New York, Taipei, China... they've all left a mark on your work. Tell me about how they feed your motivation and inspiration.**

New York is a fantastic place where you can see the newest art and meet the most interesting art people. Melbourne is good for me to slow down and to



My China: To Be or Not to Be (detail) 2008  
Wood & wood lacquer

...meaning is good for me to slow down and to review/rethink my work. The physical landscapes of the two cities also affect the way I deal with the concept of *flatness* in my work.

As for China...don't forget my best friend Xu Bing is Chinese! Also, the movement of political power across greater China inspired me to create geometric abstract paintings that have a strong social and political sense.

Taipei is where I live and work. The inspirations are huge but I tend to express them in more subtle ways. Since 2012 I've been working on my *Taipei Series* which reveals my observations of the city. It's also a record of my life here.

**Is Meng Shu You Taiwan's greatest living treasure?**

Haha, she is not old enough to be called a living treasure. She might be the greatest *bullshitter* here in Taiwan though! (Just joking!)

**This another in-joke between us as we're all friends. Meng Shu is also another brilliant artist who I met during my *Immersion Therapy* days, and I had SP and Meng Shu exhibit together in the gallery. They've since become great friends.**

**SP, talk to me about how the two of you support each other.**

We hang out a lot. We go gallery hopping, make fun of people, laugh at others, complain about our jobs etc. together. We know each other's *language* well. We share the same background of studying abroad, both in the States and Australia, and are both teaching at universities. There are just so many topics we can talk about and share and have fun with. But, I feel so sad she is not my drinking buddy any more.

**I'm sad that I haven't been able to have a drink with either of you, for, like, forever! Boo!**

**What are your thoughts on the training that the new generation of artists is receiving?**

It's getting more and more challenging as the whole world is changing and the way we view art is shifting. I understand art is a kind of *knowledge*, but I'm just not sure if we can train for it as we do for other subjects. Sometimes, I feel it's just getting more and more *academic*...

**Yes, have to agree with you there. Okay, let's lighten the mood a little bit. When was the last time you were genuinely happy for someone else and why?**

At a dinner party. I was so happy to see a good friend who I hadn't seen for a while. So much fun to talk and so many stories to share with each other.

**What was the last give you gave someone and the most recent gift you've received?**

The last gift I gave was one of my artist's books to my doctoral study supervisor last week. I received a Momoko badge from a new friend yesterday.

**If I dragged you to karaoke, which I never would, what song would you sing?**

David Bowie's *China Girl*, haha!

**How do you access popular culture?**

Through friends, Facebook, newspapers, websites etc.

**Is there anything you'd like to do or try, but you're afraid that you'll really suck at it?**

Driving in Taipei!

**Where can people discover more about you and your work?**

At my [website](#).

Thanks Doctor! It was an absolute pleasure!

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