

BLOUINARTINFO:

12 Questions for Suzann Victor

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Suzann Victor during her residency at STPI
(STPI)

[Suzann Victor](#) represented Singapore at the Venice Biennale in 2001 and is better known for her large-scale installations, such as her seminal swinging chandeliers at the National Museum of Singapore, and performance art, but for her most recent show, at STPI now through Feb 21, the Sydney-based Singaporean artist turned to paper and printmaking during a residency in the print institute's atelier.

“Imprint: New Works by [Suzann Victor](#)” presents her “performative” or spontaneous approach to the medium. BLOUIN Artinfo talked to the artist about her latest project:

What did you set out to achieve?

I embarked upon the residency with an inherent “blindness,” not knowing much about printmaking, but chose to treat it as a kind of unencumbered innocence — a state that allows me to innovate rather than be limited by the conservativeness or rigidity of pre-knowledge. I set out to challenge myself as much as to challenge traditional printmaking processes. In this vein, the benchmark that I gave myself was threefold: firstly, to transform vulnerability and risk into the very impetus for creating new applications for conventional printmaking techniques; secondly, to design the presentation of resulting works in distinctive new forms not attempted before; and thirdly, to push the artwork’s potential even further by designing them to be re-configurable in fresh or new forms as a response to any future given space / spaces.

How did the residency develop?

It was a short intense period of six weeks spread out over three phases with two to six-month gaps in between. During the first phase, I focused on research and exploration while the second phase involved prototyping, followed by production. In the gaps between phases, I prepared documents and drawings, conveyed via email, to ensure that preparation for materials or other resources were in place for the actual and direct handmade processes that I had to carry out.

The residency has resulted in different series of works.

Yes, I've focused on various methods and that resulted in diverse outcomes. In the Cloud series, for example, I reassigned paper from its conventional role, as a 2D receiving surface for drawing, into a "liquid pigment" that I can use to paint with instead. Here, the finest paper pulp fibers are suspended in a liquid medium for me to paint with by the spoonful, poured onto more than 200 individual circular acrylic discs of various sizes. This formula is calibrated to ensure that the binding medium completely disappears, leaving only a physical record of delicate pulp fiber visible. Their organic forms, color, and shapes serve as both figure and ground in contrast to paper just being conventionally the backing or background for the artwork. These painted circular discs are in turn assembled into a basic visual "alphabet" of four or five modular units, each in predetermined quantities and from which the institutional-scale pieces and smaller ones are further "sculpted", or composed in mid-air, or wall mounted when I am on site. The Cloud can be seen as a work that I "sculpted" in situ as well as mutually "sculpted" by the dynamics of the given space.

I understand you also used a 'spit bite' technique.

Spit bite is a form of "extreme painting." The process involves dipping and loading the brushes with acid with which I paint gestural strokes and marks onto three individual copper plates. I wielded large customized brushes to create the largest spit bite copper plates ever attempted at STPI. The distinctive feature of this series is that unlike most prints, there is no fixed orientation, there is no wrong side during the acid painting process nor the final print; all sides of each painted copper plate from which individual prints are derived as well as in combination with the other copper plates to create unique prints are applicable.

There was a performative aspect to your work as well.

A third series revolves around a process of taking away rather than layering on to make a work. By de-collaging, I tear away or subtract from existing layers of wet paper pulp in order to compose, in contrast to the ritual of adding to a surface to make an artwork. Imprints made with parts of my body as I crawled, walked, and moved on the large-scale water-logged pulp layers also serve as content in this performative-process. When displayed on the wall, the paper pulp becomes both the subject, content, and medium thus assigning the wall as the ground to the paper as figure (in art theoretical lingo).

How do these paper works compare with what you have previously created?

It is completely different in methodology and instinct. However, I have set myself the benchmark to upturn tradition and create innovative applications to speak to printmaking as process, as technique, and of course, distinctively, the presentation.

What does 2015 look like for [Suzann Victor](#)?

I have two public commissions and the SG50 project with the Singapore Art Museum.

In general where do you find inspiration for your work?

In my head, reinventing the way things or ideas can be expressed or realized; so very much conceptual to start with, be it how a material, medium, or technique can be challenged and its potential to be pushed further from the existing limits.

What's one indispensable item in your studio?

Cable tie.

What was the last great show you saw?

Show? The show of strength and courage by the French public right after the 'Charlie Hebdo murders'.

Do you have an art-world pet-peeve?

Pretentiousness.

One Singapore artist you think is under-appreciated?

Great question. Lee Wee Yan.