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Carbon 碳

Mengyuan Li

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251 East 10th Street
Peggy Phelps Gallery
Claremont, CA, 91711
Gallery Hours: M-F 10am-5pm

Carbon 碳

Mengyuan Li
MFA Thesis Exhibition

April 1st-5th
Reception:
Tuesday, April 2nd, 6-9pm

www.mengyuan-li.com
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CARBON 碳

Carbon 碳
Mengyuan Li

I was about four years old when I first realized that everyone will die, and it scared me. At the time I was mostly afraid that if I died, I wouldn't be able to eat my favorite yogurt anymore. Now, I'm still afraid of death, but not for the simple reasons that I used to be. This seemingly universal fear of death—is it the fear of losing what we have, or the fear of the unknown world after death? No one can describe it clearly. The only thing that seems clear is that when it comes to death, everyone is afraid.

Death is the one certainty in life. This fascinates me and I cannot stop thinking about it. When it comes to life and death, the cemetery is a more realistic place than heaven and hell, and it is also a place to feel life and death more directly. A simple gravestone separates life from death. Cemeteries let people come face to face with life, death, and even love.

In a cemetery, there is a tranquility that is different from the city or nature. In a cemetery, people take off their masks and face their emotions. I believe that when we talk about cemeteries, there should be more than just fear. It seems to me that cemeteries are a place that could connect life and death. They are full of memories from the living and the dead. They are filled with both life and death.

My original reason for choosing to make a cemetery is that I wanted to invite the people that I have lost to see this important moment in my life. I hope that they are proud of me. Each gravestone represents a person or a pet that I once knew but has died. They were in my life once. They taught me the price of growth, which is loss, but they also taught me to cherish and respect what I have now.

Each piece of plastic in the gravestones represents about 30 days. If you count, you can calculate the age of the deceased, like the growth rings on a fallen tree. Other than that, there is no information on the gravestones, because these gravestones could represent anyone. Every viewer has their own people who they are mourning, so this cemetery and these gravestones can also be a bridge for them to communicate with the people that they have lost.

The lines on the ground are just like the traces and impacts that people leave behind in our lives.

This piece is called carbon, because life on earth is essentially made up of carbon. Most molecules in living organisms contain carbon. And because humans produce so much plastic waste, microplastics have been seeping into living things without even us realizing it.

I choose to make art from materials that have been discarded. In my opinion, every piece of garbage and every kind of material has its own story and life. Garbage is a misplaced resource. As long as we have artistic creativity and practical hands, garbage can have a purpose outside of the trash can. It can turn into art and light up our lives.

In the eastern Pacific Ocean between California and Hawaii floats the Great Pacific garbage patch. It was discovered in the 1990's. Since then, it has expanded at an alarming rate. Now, the vast dump which obscures the sun to the sea life below it weighs 88,000 tons, or about the weight of 500 jets. I want to make people aware of it and take it seriously. The things that people leave behind don't actually disappear.

Many people try hard to break down plastic, make it decompose more easily. However, we must admit that it is difficult for human beings to transition to plastic-free lives. Rather than constantly making plastic waste at a high rate, recycling is used to extend the life of plastic products and thus reduce the rate of creating plastic waste. For plastic bottles, the ordinary usage is to throw them away after drinking, so the functional life of this plastic bottle is less than one day, and then it turns into garbage. But if we use it over and over again, or if we collect plastic bottles, and use industrial technology to convert them into something else that gives them new value and function, then the rate at which we

make plastic waste will be greatly reduced.

I use recycled plastics and other materials to build new worlds. I am inspired by the Japanese aesthetic wabi-sabi, which finds beauty in imperfections. My work often has the asymmetry, roughness, and simplicity that is characteristic of this idea. To quote Richard Powell, "wabi-sabi nurtures all that is authentic by acknowledging three simple realities: nothing lasts, nothing is finished, and nothing is perfect."



Mengyuan Li

Carbon 碳, 2019

Concrete, chicken wire, plastic bottles, plaster, wood, fishing lines, vinyl, rocks























