

biography and exhibitions

Born 1971 in Seoul, South Korea
Lives and works in New York

education

- 1999 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Maine
- 1996 M.S. in Theory, Criticism & History of Art, Design & Architecture, Pratt Institute, New York
- 1994 B.F.A. in Painting, Pratt Institute, New York

solo exhibitions

- 2004 Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York City
- 2003 *Penumbra*, Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens, New York
- 1999 *444*, Apex Art, New York City

selected group exhibitions

- 2004 *Counter Culture*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York City.
Open House: Working in Brooklyn, Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York.
Up and Coming: Jean Shin & Julianne Swartz, ARCO International Contemporary Art Fair, Madrid.
- 2003 *Custom Fit*, Smack Mellon Gallery, Brooklyn, New York.
Reconfiguring Space: Blueprints for Art in General, Art in General, New York City.
Bits 'n Pieces, dumbo Arts Center, Brooklyn, New York.
Open Studios: 03, Ssamzie Space, Seoul.
- 2002 *Nature of the Beast*, Caren Golden Fine Art, New York City.
Multitude, Artists Space, New York City.
Barometer, Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York City.
- 2001 *Material Whirled*, Art in General, New York City.
Lost and Found: Reclaimed Moments, The Rotunda Gallery, Brooklyn, New York.
Mixed Greens @ Space 101 Gallery, Brooklyn, New York.
- 2000 *Collector's Choice*, Exit Art/The First World, New York City.
Apartment #3F, Asian American Arts Centre, New York City.
Line, Artspace, New Haven.
- 1999 *Under Construction*, *GEN ART: New Visions '98*, West Chelsea Arts Building, New York City.

selected awards

- 2004 Artist-in-Residence, The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia
- 2003 New York Foundation for the Arts, Fellowship in Sculpture
- 2001 The Louise Comfort Tiffany Foundation Biennial Art Award

acknowledgments

I would like to thank Peter Norton for his generous support of *Projects 81*. Grateful acknowledgment is due to the artist, Jean Shin; to members of the MoMA staff who donated their clothes; and to Frederieke Taylor of Frederieke Taylor Gallery. I am deeply grateful to Laurence Kardish, Senior Curator, Film and Media, who organizes the **Projects** series and whose steadfast commitment and enthusiasm have made this exhibition possible. I also thank Ellen Conti, Claire Corey, David Frankel, Mary Hannah, Cassandra Heliczger, David Hollely, Kate Johnson, Peter Omlor, Jennifer Wolfe, and Carlos Yepes for their work on the exhibition and brochure. Special thanks to the artist's assistants—Dusty Lee, Michelle McCoy, Erin Treacy, Caroline Woolard—and her students at Pratt Institute.

The exhibition is made possible by the Peter Norton Family Foundation.

notes

1. Terence Riley, ed., *MoMA QNS: Looking Ahead* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2002), p. 9.
2. Peter Schjeldahl, "Judith Shea: Monument Statuary," *The Village Voice*, 16 April, 1991, p. 99.
3. *Chance City* is on view at the Brooklyn Museum of Art until August 15, 2004.

Jean Shin has a knack for transforming the mundane into the beautiful. Collecting discarded objects from daily life—old clothes, broken umbrellas, worn-out shoes, out-of-date eyeglasses—she uses a labor-intensive process of dismantling, alteration, and reconstruction to breath new life into them. This Korean-American artist makes sculptures and installations from items that once embodied a sense of comfort, hope, or at the very least practicality. Her materials often retain memories of the human body (worn leather shoes that have molded to someone's feet), the marks of particular events (an umbrella battered by a violent downpour), or note an absence (a lone sock left behind in the clothes dryer). Shin transforms the leftovers of our lives into a visually arresting explosion of form, texture, and color.

Just as Shin's installations give new life to old forms, architect Michael Maltzan's innovative design for the lobby of MoMA QNS reinvented the Swingline Staple factory in Long Island City, the location of the Museum's temporary home in Queens. Maltzan transformed this cavernous utilitarian structure into a series of ramps, passageways, and mezzanines that reflect the "seamless rising and falling of the subway lines above and below the city," a fluid design that encourages visitors to experience public spaces in motion.¹

For *Projects 81*, Shin has exploited the quality of this seamless architecture as a site that encourages a physical encounter with art. Taking advantage of the potential for a unique enclosure, she has created a site-specific installation in the passageway leading toward the galleries—the artery through which all visitors to MoMA QNS

must pass to enter and exit. In this enclosed hallway Shin has made a mural and a corresponding hanging sculpture out of donated work clothes she has gathered from MoMA staffers. She first deconstructed the garments by cutting out their seams, then flattened the resulting cutout shapes with starch and wallpapered them along the walls of the passageway. In counterpoint to this colorful, textured mural are the garments' missing seams, which hang above, extending the ceiling plane, so that visitors walking through the passageway are surrounded by the installation. The artist encourages visitors to pause within the fluidity of Maltzan's design, heightening their experience of it.

Shin renders the three-dimensional clothes utterly flat and abstract, so that we hardly recognize our own shirts, pants, and jackets. Her playful exploration of color and form recalls the formal investigations of color and shape in the work of the artist Sol LeWitt, whose wall drawings become rich visual fields that transform the space they occupy, and whom the artist sees as an influence on her work. Similarly, Shin makes Maltzan's QNS thoroughfare vivid with these same properties, transforming the architecture into an intimate environment that brings the art into close proximity with the viewer, weaving together architecture and sculpture.

With *Projects 81* the artist suggests that the reality of MoMA QNS is far from seamless. In fact the installation speaks to the impossibility of seamlessness, creating beauty through dislocation, highlighting a network of fragments and fractures and reworking them into an assemblage that only makes sense when seen as an aesthetic whole. Shin disassembles the staff's garments, then reassembles them differ-



ently yet still together in the same space, so that the viewers are invited to imagine the dismantling and reconstruction of a separated body. At the same time, given the collective nature of the process of donating these garments, they come to represent the variety and diversity of the Museum's staff. Guards' uniforms, a curator's pants, the director's oxford shirt—amid the codes of appropriate work wear in the institu-



tion's different departments, a sense of individualism emerges, with flashes of bright color and pattern. Yet the continuity of Shin's undulating arrangement of color and shape allows us to see the garments as one piece, a collective portrait of the MoMA workforce. *Projects 81* renders visible the Museum's large staff and hints at the diverse individuals who make up the institution, many of whom go relatively unseen by the public.

Shin's installations not only respond to the environment they occupy but take our bodies into account, since she often recycles clothes, shoes, and other items that have covered and protected our skin. A relationship between the organic and the inorganic appears in many of her sculptures. In the 1999 piece *Alterations*, waxed pant-cuffs, in a variety of colors and fabrics, are arranged on the floor. The cuffs are excess, cut off and discarded when pants are altered to fit someone who literally falls short of fashion's standard sizes. Shin uses clothes here for their formal sculptural effects—their inherent size, color, and form. Ordinarily soft and frayed, the pant cuffs are stiffened by wax and arranged to take on an architectural look, so that, looking down,

we might be getting a bird's-eye view of a dense urban skyline. The work contrasts the structural durability of architecture against the ephemerality of fabric. Stiffened in this way, the cylindrical shapes of the cuffs also take on the dimensionality of the human figure while simultaneously referring to its imperfections, since they have been amputated as unnecessary extensions of the body.

"Skin has no edges, clothes do," the critic Peter Schjeldahl once wrote,² and it is precisely these edges of clothes—their seams—that Shin makes allude to the body. Clothes are constructed out of parts, patterns that are necessarily designed flat, and that become three-dimensional objects that move with and conform to the body only when they are held together at the edges with stitches. Clothes mutate when they are worn, washed, and ironed, and are eventually discarded when they lose their use, whether because they become threadbare, they no longer fit, or they cease to be fashionable. Shin is interested in clothes not only as architecture for the body but also for the memory they hold of the human figure. In her 2003 piece *Clothesline (White Oxford Shirts)* she reduced seven white oxford shirts to their skeletons by cutting the fabric to preserve only the seams. Oxford shirts are the staple of the white-collar work uniform, one for each day of the week. Shin stitched their bones together as if on a clothesline and hung them limply and loosely, like deflated figures. In this work the body is absent—only traces of the figure remain.

The practice of turning everyday objects into art has a long tradition, ranging from Marcel Duchamp to Robert Rauschenberg and on; in itself a challenge to the authority of modernist ideals



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT
Proposal for Projects 81:
Cut Outs and Suspended Seams. 2004.
Digital rendering by Brian Ripel

Alterations. 1999/2001. Fabric (pants scraps) and wax, dimensions variable. Collection of Peter Norton. Photo: Steven Tucker

Penumbra. 2003. Installation at Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens. Fabric (broken umbrellas) and thread, 72 x 45' (21 m 94.6 cm x 13 m 71.6 cm). Courtesy the artist. Photo: Masahiro Noguchi

Clothesline (White Oxford Shirts). 2003. Cut fabric and thread, 4' x 12' 6" (91.4 x 3 m 81 cm). Courtesy the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York. Photo: Masahiro Noguchi

about materials, this history has been extended by a lineage of artists such as Hannah Höch, Dorothea Tanning, Rosemarie Trockel, and Ann Hamilton through the use of craft-based practices and traditionally feminine domestic labors such as knitting, weaving, and sewing. Shin continues this ongoing tradition with labor-intensive projects that involve many hours of cutting, ripping, stitching, and reconstructing. Her process of accumulation, alteration, and repetitive labor reveals her presence and hand. Her materials often have a history of obsolescence and abandonment, giving them an identity that she attempts to preserve while also bringing it into new contexts. For the site-specific piece *Penumbra* (2003), made for the outdoor Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, New York, Shin combed the city gathering umbrellas broken by wind and rain. After removing the umbrellas' handles, spokes, and spines, she stitched together the resulting circular skins into a large canopy that she strung between three trees. *Penumbra* provided a shady spot for visitors to picnic or nap on the grass on a hot summer's day. Using the castoffs of our lives to create a new environment for the community (Shin frequently involves local communities in the donation process for each project), it changed the landscape of the park, and the way people enjoyed it.

The 2004 installation *20/20*, at the Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York, similarly explored the relationship between body, architecture, and the perception of landscape. Here Shin gathered old prescription lenses and inserted them into a wall in front of a window overlooking 23rd Street. The viewer could look through the various lenses—as if peering through someone else's eyes—to the landscape outside. Depending on the prescription, each set of lenses magnified or diminished the buildings beyond, and viewers often had to step back or move closer to focus. *20/20* engaged both the

viewer and the outside world, playing with our perception and changing the environment of the gallery.

Many of Shin's pieces speak to the issues of labor, construction, and deconstruction. For a 2004 installation, *Chance City*, at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York, Shin has used \$21,496 worth of discarded scratch-and-win lottery tickets to build a precarious urban network of house-of-cards-like buildings.³ Embodying the failed hopes of ordinary people who had dreamed of becoming millionaires, the worthless lottery tickets have become the building blocks for monumental yet temporary structures. Shin used no glue to make these towering edifices, which are about six feet tall and up to five feet wide, but which, while delicate, are sturdier than they look. *Chance City* transforms thousands of discarded lottery tickets into an elaborate city perched delicately on the brink between dreams and reality.

Just as *Chance City* addresses the impermanence of architecture and space, *Projects 81* responds to a particular moment in the history of The Museum of Modern Art when the institution is in flux. Twenty years ago, the *Projects* series turned to publishing books when it temporarily lost its space due to the Museum's expansion of 1984, much in the same way that during our current expansion the series has turned to artists like Shin to make art outside the normal parameters of the galleries. As the Museum's newly constructed and renovated buildings are nearing completion in Manhattan, Shin's project speaks to a sense of optimism and regeneration. At a time when the Museum lies on the threshold of a new phase in its history, it is only fitting that her project for MoMA reworks the old into the new.

—Eva Respini
Assistant Curator, Department of Photography



Chance City. 2001/2004. \$21,496 worth of discarded lottery tickets, 6 x 8 x 8' (1 m 82.9 cm x 2 m 43.8 cm x 2 m 43.8 cm). Courtesy the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York. Photo: Masahiro Noguchi

ON THE COVER
Cut Outs (detail). 2003. Cut fabric (clothes) and starch on wall, dimensions variable. Courtesy the artist. Photo: Bill Orcutt