

**ULRICH
PROJECTS**

JEAN SHIN HIDE

AUGUST 26 TO OCTOBER 3, 2004

OPENING RECEPTION

5 TO 7 PM THURSDAY AUGUST 26, WITH A GALLERY TALK BY THE ARTIST AT 6 PM

FREE AND OPEN TO THE PUBLIC



Hide (back), 2004, cut leather and suede (shoes), thread and shoelaces, dimensions variable



Jean Shin transforms the detritus of our lives into sculptural objects and monumental installations of breathtaking wonder and beauty. Cast-off items that we no longer want, need, use, or love are her prized materials. Shin is somewhat of a modern-day gleaner, scavenging the streets and sidewalks of New York in search of usable traces of humanity. Empty wine bottles, "loser" lotto tickets, broken umbrellas, worn out shoes, and out-of-fashion clothes are just some of the materials she has given new life to through her art. One might say that Shin has something of a Midas touch—she magically turns heaps of the mundane objects of everyday existence into conceptually profound and visually spectacular piles of gold.

One of Shin's latest reclamation projects is *Hide*, an installation comprised of hundreds of worn leather shoes that

Wandering through *Hide*, we begin to notice scale shifts between the various sizes of coupled shoes, how the pairs relate to our individual bodies, and how our bodies connect with the enveloping environment. This body/architecture dynamic is a hallmark of Shin's work and can be seen in such previous works as *20/20* (2003), *Umbrellas Stripped Bare* (2001), and *Alterations* (1999). And like all architecture, *Hide* embodies a human history: the accumulation of these shoes is like a chance gathering of strangers or the memories of an anonymous crowd. We cannot help but imagine the individuals who participated in the "building" of the work. What are the life stories that go untold in each pair of shoes?

While many associations reveal themselves in the structure of *Hide*, there are also many meanings latent in the



Alterations, 1999/2001, fabric (pant scraps) and wax, dimensions variable, approximately 12x22x12 feet

she has laboriously deconstructed, paired, and then stitched together to form hanging sheets of rich, undulating color. With their soles removed and flattened of their three dimensionality, the shoes no longer do what they were originally designed to do—cover and protect our feet. Divorced from their function and structure, the shoes have been reduced to their material essence. However, these unusual abstract forms serve an important aesthetic function and conceptual potential in Shin's installation: the perforated leather rings provide views through what would be an otherwise opaque curtain. Voids and openings are critical components of *Hide*, as the installation is as much about negative space as it is about positive space, as much about protection as about exposure.

work's title. Most obvious is Shin's reference to the material from which the work is made: leather; the tanned hides of animals. Shin further emphasizes the allusion to tanned hide by suspending her hanging leather constructions to the ceiling with shoe laces—

a technique similar to how animal skins are hung during the process of stretching and drying to make leather. Although *Hide* is primarily composed of cattle hide (the most common type of leather used to make shoes), it also poignantly speaks of human skin. Each of the hanging elements in the installation is organized predominantly by gender, type, and color (women's white and beige shoes, red pumps, blue, grey and black flats; men's brown loafers and black dress shoes). These fashionable colors of shoes, with their wide range of decoration and design, suggest our extremely diverse human population; there are multiple variations in hue and shade within these groups. *Hide* serves as a microcosm of humanity. It is significant to note that the "reverse" side of *Hide* (the "inside"

of our shoes—the layer closest to our feet) is, for the most part, the natural, non-dyed shade of leather—suggesting our human flesh, the untreated skin that unites us all.

The allusions Shin makes with *Hide* take on added dimension when understood in terms of the artist's own personal history. Born in Korea and raised in the United States, Shin has consistently but subtly referenced the immigrant experience throughout her body of work, from the materials she chooses, to her methods and techniques of creation, to the titles she applies. For example, in *Alterations* (1999), a colorful city-scape constructed from hundreds of cylindrical forms of excess fabric that result from shortening pants and blue jeans, she ingeniously commented on the predicament of failing to measure up to the American fashion industry's standard size (a dilemma for many, but particularly for those of Asian descent). At the same time, the cast-off cuffs may refer to a group of populations—predominantly Asian immigrants—who make up a large portion of the fashion industry's workforce, including sweat-shop seamstresses, tailors, and dry cleaners. They are among the hundreds of thousands of invisible laborers who come to American cities in search of a better life. What many encounter is not utopia but rather a metropolis of lost hope and broken dreams—an urban landscape to which Shin gave concrete form in her astonishing *Chance City* (2001), a precariously-balanced house of cards seemingly on the verge of collapse built with discarded scratch-and-win lotto tickets.

The all too invisible communities that are the foundation of *Alterations* and *Chance City* may also be the subject of *Hide*. The title, a word meaning "to conceal" or "to put out of sight," questions what is seen and unseen, thereby implicitly suggesting how immigrants labor within our society exist without much notice. But by referring to these less visible groups, Shin asks us to acknowledge their presence and contributions. This conceptual framework finds a physical counterpart in the architectural structure of *Hide* itself: the leather shoe constructions do not provide cover or protection

and instead reveal and expose their surroundings through their openings and voids. With her signature touch of humor, Shin involves us in a clever word play—we cannot hide within *Hide*.

In addition to its subtle social content, Shin's work reverberates with a palpable sense of optimism—that value can be found just about anywhere, that we only have to be willing to take time to notice and discover the



Chance City, 2001/2002, \$17,119 worth of discarded lottery tickets, dimensions variable, approximately 8x8x7 feet

unfathomable beauty that lies teeming beneath life's fragile surface. Indeed, *Hide* celebrates the diversity of our differences, revealing what lies literally on the other side of the fashions that distinguish and separate us from others. And perhaps even more importantly, Shin's *Hide* reminds us of the beauty that unites all of us.

Elizabeth Dunbar
Curator, Kemper Museum of Contemporary Art



JEAN SHIN

Born 1971, Seoul, South Korea; lives and works in Brooklyn, New York

Education

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

Solo Exhibitions

- 2004 *Projects 81: Jean Shin*, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- Jean Shin*, Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York
- 2003 *Penumbra*, Socrates Sculpture Park, Long Island City, New York
- 1999 *444*, Apex Art, New York

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OPEN 11 A.M. TO 5 P.M. TUESDAY-
FRIDAY AND 1-5 P.M. SATURDAY
AND SUNDAY; CLOSED MONDAYS
AND HOLIDAYS.



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Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2004 *Counter Culture*, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York
- Open House: Working in Brooklyn*, The Brooklyn Museum of Art, New York
- Up and Coming: Jean Shin & Julianne Swartz*, ARCO International, Madrid, Spain
- 2003 *Custom Fit*, Smack Mellon Gallery, New York
- Bits 'n Pieces*, DUMBO Arts Center, New York
- Supranatural*, Mixed Greens Gallery, New York
- Reconfiguring Space: Blueprints for Art in General*, Art in General, New York
- Tradeshow: Currents in New Asian American Art*, CR2 Gallery, Shanghai, China
- The Invented World*, Seoul Arts Center, Seoul, Korea
- 2002 *Nature of the Beast*, Caren Golden Fine Art, New York
- Multitude*, Artists Space, New York
- Mixed Description*, Barbara Davis Gallery, Houston
- Barometer*, Cynthia Broan Gallery, New York
- Real Interface*, space imA, Seoul, Korea
- 2001 *Material Whirled*, Art in General, New York
- Microwave, Three*, 123 Watts Gallery, New York
- 15 Asian American Artists*, University Art Gallery, State University of New York, Stony Brook, New York
- Six Sculptors*, Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus, New York