



Shin's *Chance City*, 2001/2004, consisted of \$21,496 worth of discarded lottery tickets.

When Jean Shin saw a broken umbrella on a New York sidewalk four years ago, she felt a sudden urge to “rescue the tragic object.” She took it to her Brooklyn studio and began scouring the streets for more, eventually transforming the forlorn discards into enormous, tactile shrines of stitched-together umbrella tops and “nests” of metal rods. “Worn objects project a sense of longing—an unrealized potential,” Shin says. Her studio is filled with lost gloves, shoes, eyeglasses, keyboards, and other objects, accrued through scavenging and donations from friends, family, and merchants. The installations become “portraits” of the people and communities from which the materials were gleaned.

Born in Seoul, Korea, and raised outside of Washington, D.C., Shin, 34, began experimenting with used objects after earning a B.F.A. in painting and an M.A. in art history and criticism from Pratt Institute. She started with clothing. “I loved figure drawing and wanted to continue to represent the body,” she says. “Clothing,” explains the petite, black-clad artist, “is the perfect surrogate—an abstracted translation of the body’s proportion, structure, movement.” One early project featured the “skeletons”—seams, collars, cuffs—of men’s shirts hung on a wall.

Other materials followed. Shin’s labor-intensive process involves, for example, thousands of rows of chopsticks arranged in tidy geometric patterns across a floor or millions of scratched lottery tickets assembled into towers. Although abstract, the works express subtle cultural critiques. For *Alterations* (2000–1), she collected tailors’ clippings from trouser legs, waxed the cylindrical cuffs, and stood them in clusters that evoked cities. “It was an abstract representation of those who don’t fit the fashion industry’s standard sizes,” explains Shin. In *Cut Outs* and *Suspended Seams* (both 2004) at New York’s Museum of Modern Art last summer, she made a mural and wall hanging out of garments collected from a cross section of MoMA employees, symbolically leveling hierarchies.

Shin’s *Chemical Balance 2*, at the University Art Museum in Albany through the 11th of this month, is composed of stacks of prescription pill bottles, alluding, Shin notes, to the “fragile chemical connections in our bodies,” and “how drugs can affect that balance.” Also this month, for Philadelphia’s “Chinatown In/Flux” show, with the support of the Asian Arts Initiative, Shin is presenting *Chinatown 20/20*—a version of a work she created for New York’s Frederieke Taylor gallery, where her installations sell for around \$6,000 to \$12,000. It features eyeglasses set into storefront windows, allowing passersby a voyeuristic glimpse—albeit a distorted one, unless the lenses match their own prescriptions—of scenes, Shin says, “not normally part of their Chinatown experience.” —Meredith Mendelsohn



Shin at work in her Brooklyn studio.

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TOP: MARGARET BUELL; COURTESY OF ARTISTS AND THEIR WORK; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THEIR WORK; JANE GALLERY, NEW YORK