

The creation depends on the intuition, the subversion is the rule - interview British artist Susan Stockwell

In the opening evening (9/29-11/28) of "B-side Ecology", the lady in black mix & match style with the skull patch on the back of her jacket, British artist Susan Stockwell from Manchester is reminiscent of a rock-n-roll girl who gave us a talk patiently about the process and the experience of using recycling materials of her practice while a bulldog kept sniffing and making noise in the room. Susan who has been in residence in Taipei Artist Village before, was invited by Hong's Foundation for Education & Culture for the exhibition "B-side Ecology" this time. The scrap computer components (sponsored by E&E recycling inc.) were piled up and formed into large-scale installations as if a miniature of cityscape. According to the curator, Grace Cheung, the term "B-side" came from vinyl record, due to B-side tracks are not considered to meet the major market requests, the existence of B-side tracks is able to be more experimental and original. The concept of this exhibition brought up the discussion of the possibility of how the environment could survive after being through mass destruction as the way B-side tracks do.

Next morning after the opening night, I went to interview Susan in the site again. Arriving before the interview, I saw Bin-Yuan who was already taking pictures in front of those monstrous metal creatures silently. I let him know I was there after a moment's hesitation because I was under an illusion being in outer space. I decided to take a good look of the exhibition before Susan's arrival. It was a very different look than last night, sunlight was spreading through windows while the music was playing in the background, I was looking at those computer components sweeping round the wall and floor. They are reminiscent of

urban apartment blocks like the reflection of the buildings on the Roosevelt Road. I became sentimental when I thought about our environment and what we have been through during the industrialization.

Soon Susan had arrived, with her beautiful smile and dressing in spring style, the lady in front of me looked totally different than the cool rock-n-roll girl I met last night. It's her third time visit in Taiwan. Susan praised Taiwanese food to me when we were talking about her image of Taiwan. She told me she had been to a Taiwanese restaurant in London, but she doubt that it might be run by Cantonese or other Asian. I think Taiwanese food represents Taiwan as a brand to her. I asked about her first impression of Taiwan, she told me that she thought it was ugly when she first saw those messy grim cold buildings everywhere. The developments of cities had not been well thought out, and still keep growing up, additionally the exportation and mess productions of high-tech products reminded her of Ridley Scott's film, Blade Runner(1982). This film also made me recall the article "Remapping Taipei" by Fredric Jameson who has been to Taiwan and analyzed the postmodernity of Taiwan.

The first impression is very important for Susan, because her creations depend on the intuition. She has used a lot of cardboards stacking up into an installation "Paper, Glue, Paper" in China which came from her first impression of the city that she had observed when she arrived exhaustively. Besides, Susan is also skill in using local materials. During her residence in China 2006, she cut out the map of China in "cock" shape from rice papers but was questioned why it did not include Taiwan by the authorities, even she had

explained that it was an art work not a real map, but wasn't accepted. Therefore, it got her interested in Taiwan.

In the end of 2007, Susan came to Taiwan and discovered the characteristic of calligraphy rice paper then began using it for various creations during her residence. Being fascinated by materials and maps, Susan also has turned some used tea bags into a shape of Taiwan, tea leaves rose up in the tea bags which looked like the Central Mountain Range. It created the relationship between material and the region and was evocative of the thoughts of history and culture. The exhibition "B-side Ecology" in Hong's Foundation is also the intuition of Susan's impression of Taiwan. The director of Taipei Artist Village, Yaohua Su, told us: "I have no inclination to 'sanctify' the artist's sensibility of environments, however, the angle Susan was looking at from did revolutionize our thoughts on where we 'belong to', and the lights and shadows reflected the possibility of regenerating our culture."

On the subject of using recycling materials, Susan expressed that she is no stranger to recycling waste into her works since collage, and moreover, because she's always on a tight budget she pays more attention into searching the daily waste for her arts. Susan said that she didn't want to be consider as a "recycling freak" or an "environmentalist", using recycling materials simply because of the budget and she wasn't earning a lot of money as an artist. She appreciated that E&E recycling inc. sponsored those computer components for the exhibition for free.

Susan also stressed that she wanted to subvert the traditional view of materials by making use of them. For example, she has built a huge square column installation with tissues

provided by Kimberly-Clark which subverted the soft and disposable image of them.

Furthermore, she considered that the traditional image of maps were very masculine. So, she started to make dresses by using maps and her instinct led her to place different countries on location of significant organs. She analysed her works after finished a series of dress installations and had some amazing conclusions of political meaning. Susan said she would keep making arts from dresses. After seeing those wedding gown look white rise paper dresses and Victorian style map dresses, I asked Susan if she made her own dresses too. She told me she had not been making any cloth for more than ten years, but she learnt the skills from her mother and grandmother.

About her residence experiences, Susan told us that the residence between NainJin China and Taipei Taiwan are very different. In China, there are less foreign artists than local artists and the quality of Chinese artists' works are much poorer. In comparison, artists in Taipei Artist Village come from worldwide and they have more opportunities to confer to the others which is very exciting. She also thinks the art in Taiwan are more exquisite than China, and the community is more supporting in art too.

Susan only stays in Taiwan for shortly 10 days and she is going back to Britain this weekend when WeiMe typhoon is attacking us. Art for Susan is not just a work, it is her life and a part of her which is unable to separated. Susan said perceptively as a female artist: 'Each work of mine just like my children, all have their own characters and they mean a lot to me.'