

Danful Yang

In just a few years, and having only absorbed her craft by curating collections of designers, Danful Yang has carved out (literally, in fact) a career for herself as one of Shanghai's most promising artist-designers. Struggling to see the need for a distinction between art and design, Danful has made the most of the varying media available to artists today, and hopes that the positivity present in her work might lead us to question our use of everyday objects and appreciate them in alternative ways, and for the better. She says she can't stop, and she shouldn't.

by Andrew Spyrou



Packing Me Softly, 2012, foam and hand embroidery, 32 x 30 x 33.5 cm, edition of 50, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design

Background

I was born on Chongming Island, an alluvial island created by the build-up of silt along the Yangtze River. There is almost no industry there and it is very green. My grandfather practised as an accountant, but his real passion was making Chinese lanterns. He also helped me make all the furniture for my dolls. One's upbringing shapes one's perception of space and one's use of the objects around us.

I never had any formal training as a designer or artist. Not long ago I started working in Shanghai for the gallerist Pearl Lam, who was putting together a project on the French influence on Chinese art, and during our meetings for the show, Pearl asked the production team to put forward a design for a piece of jewellery. My Shanghai-Deco earrings got a 'not bad' from Pearl, which gave me a burst of inspiration.

Dichotomies

Differences are important. The interplay between old and new, traditional and modern, Eastern and Western is quite apparent in my work. We need to preserve our own cultures to retain the diversity of different nations, otherwise life gets boring. I'm not sure whether artistic boundaries are blurred by today's globalized world. For me, a globalized world means the sharing of technology, transportation, medicine, communication, etc., but not culture, not craft. The same applies to the dichotomy between the modern and the traditional: the past was great and we need to preserve it, but we need to develop the present so that in the future we can have a richer and



Installation of three Packing Me Softly boxes contrasted against real packaging boxes. 2012, foam and hand embroidery. Dimensions: 74.5 x 33.5 x 41.5 cm, 65 x 35.5 x 31 cm, 46 x 40 x 33 cm, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design



Packing Me Softly, 2012, foam, hand embroidery, 65 x 36 x 32 cm, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design

Sugar Town, porcelain, 24 x 24 x 30 cm, edition of 20, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design



Michelin (from the Fake series), 2010, ebony, 30 x 30 x 25 cm, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design



wider past than just Qing and Ming Dynasty porcelain and furniture. You may think it hypocritical to be creating more objects in an already cluttered world, but I feel it is essential to leave our mark here. How else will our children appreciate how we lived, what we liked and what we made? And what happens if there is a destruction of worldwide digital data!? Only through our designs and their accompanying traces can our histories really live on.

Playfulness, Sincerity, Boxes

While my works could be seen as being consciously playful, in fact I don't think about their sincerity while creating them. My *Meh Meh Yang* – cartoonish sheep carved into pieces of driftwood – remind busy urbanites to dream. My *Packing Me Softly* series is a comment on the disrespect we hold for packaging, something that surrounds us and that our life is contained within. When travelling or moving, what people care about most is the contents of their boxes. Can't we show some basic respect for these boxes protecting our treasured possessions? It is this question that inspired me to use the most delicate craft – silk hand embroidery – to create these 'boxes'. The same idea can be extrapolated to the city: we enjoy the cleanliness of the subway, but we don't always treat the cleaners with the respect they deserve. I raise the questions, and I hope that the nature of my work is positive enough to help people reconsider their surroundings and everyday actions.

Labelling

I don't see any distinction between the worlds of design and sculpture. I embrace all different forms as one. The most important element binding them all together is the creativity and narrative behind each piece. But at the same time, these inherent messages should be straightforward and accessible – I don't buy things that I don't understand, and I appreciate that others hold a similar view.

But one *can* encounter problems with traversing the worlds of art and design when selling pieces. Clients struggle to see why my pieces aren't as affordable as industrial design. The inherent distinction between art and design, and the labels we have adopted for these modes, are problematic. I appreciate that fine art can be very expensive, and personally I don't question that, but I want to know why design can't be more valued.

Art collectors need to become more confident. My *Fake* chairs, made from materials used for fake designer handbags, make direct comment on consumerist culture in China and further afield. People chase brands blindly and I am disheartened that a similar unfortunate situation has developed within the art world.



Fake Chair, 2007, replica bags upholstery with elm wood frame, 95 x 67 x 73 cm, edition of 20 + 2 AP + 2 prototypes, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design



Appropriation—Inspired by Jeff Koons, 2007, replica bags and fabric upholstery with elm wood frame, 118 x 226 x 67 cm, edition of 10, courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam Design