

BXNU MFA

ARTIST Q&A

Art of Noticing Unnoticed



This is a selection of questions I received from tutors and art peers throughout the development of this project and compiled together with my response in a Q&A format.

Q: In this work, the Eucalyptus seedpods are central to the piece. Do the seedpods hold any significant meaning?

A: Initially, the seedpods did not have any significant meaning, nor did I feel compelled by them in any way. Quite the opposite, actually. The empty seedpods just lay strewn on the ground; rendered useless after fulfilling their purpose, with nobody to notice their existence. However, I became interested in this idea of unnoticed.

Q: What do you mean, you became interested in the idea of 'unnoticing'?

A: There is a fascinating video called 'Invisible Gorilla', an experiment, which demonstrates how 'selective attention' makes us unable to perceive what we do not notice, or in other words, the things, which we decide that are not worthy of paying attention to. In the video, a person dressed up in a gorilla suit casually walks across the screen from right to left and through a group of people passing a ball. As we are instructed to count the number of times the ball is passed, we do not see the gorilla. Thus, the gorilla is, on an unconscious level, deemed an object of irrelevance - unworthy of paying attention to.

When we apply this logic to reality, it means that we instinctively select what is attention worthy and what isn't in everyday life. The measure of attention is equal to the measure of value. If something is unconsciously decided to be without value, we would not notice such a thing. So, if we notice the unnoticeable, wouldn't we understand what we consider to be of no value?

Q: I see. But, how do we notice the unnoticed in the first place?

A: In the book *Aesthetic of Disappearance*, theorist Paul Virilio articulates that a car, slowed down at the moment of a speed bump, realises its speed for the first time. As one of the most valuable commodities, speed is a dominant force driving contemporary society. In "a society of unprecedented speed", as exhausted as that saying may be, I have sought to devise moments of slowed down time.

Q: So, as a result, you became aware of the Eucalyptus seedpod?

A: Yes - last year, I lived in Australia and there was a large Eucalyptus tree in the park I walked through every day. I didn't give it a thought but one windy night, the moon shone on to the Eucalyptus tree. It was very atmospheric. The next day, I walked around the area, this time giving it slow attention.

In that moment, I discovered for the first time, millions of Eucalyptus seedpods covering the ground like a carpet. The shock I experienced then was equal to when I noticed the gorilla in the video. I felt the value of this great, big Eucalyptus tree which tells a rich story of Australia, and yet, I did not notice the value of the seedpod, which lay barren and spent on the ground after running its course.

Q: In the work, you personify the seedpod by putting shoes on it. Could you explain why?

A: I consider the relationship of myself and the seedpod to be one that addresses the relationship between the human and non-human. To personify an object is not the same as say, giving human attributes from a position of superiority. It is rather an affectionate gesture and paying respect to its thingness. So, for example, I am not necessarily imposing my personal vision of the form onto the seedpod. The seedpod, just by nature of balancing on its own weight (at times falling) , appears to have a life of its own.

Q: Similar to the 1970s' Japanese movement *Mono-ha* (School of Things), rather than 'things' as mere materials for artistic expression, are you approaching 'things' in and of themselves as autonomous subjects - towards an expression beyond objects?

A: Yes. Mono-ha's 'Art of No Making' has been hugely influential. In particular, I very much relate Lee Ufan's approach to situating the subject beyond 'things', and his thinking around creating a moment of encounter within a work, as opposed to a representation of the encounter.

Q: Is there a difference in your approach?

A: Yes. The key artists of Mono-ha in the seventies were all male. For example, Ufan himself liked to use big rocks and steel bars, all of which existed far from the reaches of women in daily life. What is important for me - are the trifle things and the insignificant things. In that sense, I feel affinity towards Rie Nakajima's charming works, whose concerts are orchestrated by fragments of broken bowls and tools collected from her daily surroundings. It is like collaborating with humble things.

Q: So, you are concerned with making works through a collaboration with things unnoticed, the mundane objects found in everyday life, which are randomly noticed by chance. What are you anticipating out of this process?

A: When I noticed the barren and spent seedpods on the ground, the feeling was connected to witnessing my aging mother, who at an old age appeared to return to a child-like state. Even if I gave this toy-like seedpod a pair of porcelain shoes to wear, it will never be as valuable as a French doll. But despite that, such actions were an embodiment of my emotional response.

This work is a materialisation of my realisation and the thought process which followed that. But, making a work is not all that encompasses the thought process. I don't think that at all. What is important is that we think about why we didn't notice something in the first place and inadvertently, why we unconsciously placed it as something of no value. It is important to be honest with things and address how we relate to them. Or, to care for things. This, I believe, would move us toward emancipation from the current model of contemporary society.

Q. So, noticing the unnoticed and what follows after is important. Do you have any upcoming works or projects in mind following on from this theme?

A: An actor on TV was saying, "since lockdown, the passing of time has changed and I am noticing the passing of spring. Even if the current situation ends, I'm not sure if I want society to go back to how it was". This left an impression on me.

I am starting a project that asks: since things have slowed down, what have people noticed that they wouldn't have otherwise?