

## **ARTIST RESEARCH: Beili Liu**

4 October 2022

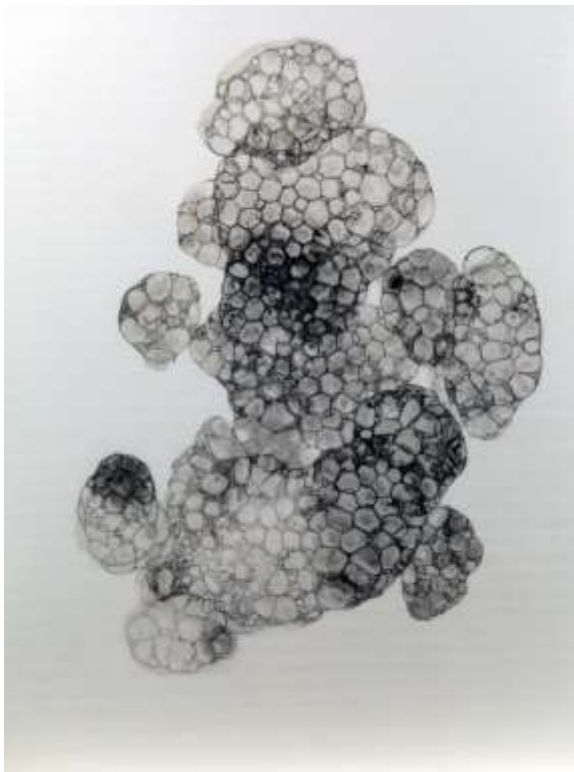
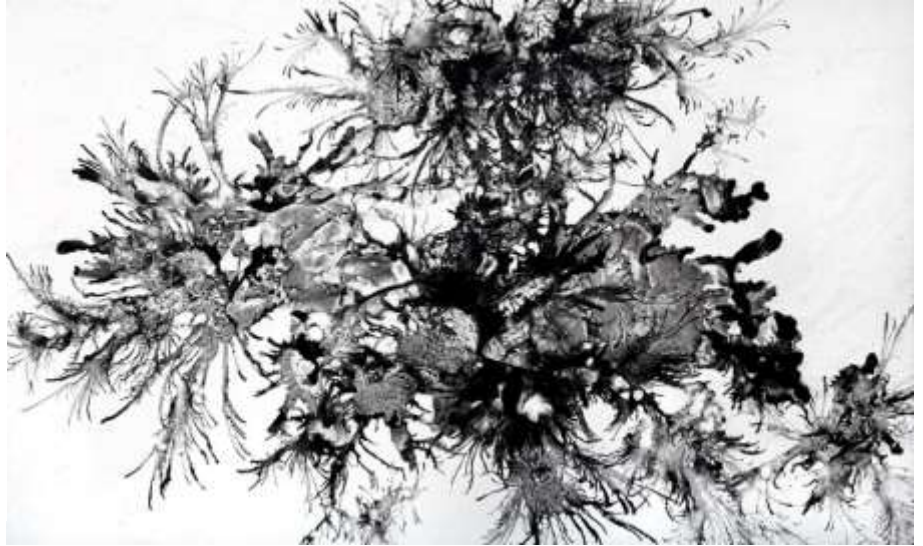
FIN110 Fall 2022

Dale Graham

### ***Wind Drawings Serie 1, Aerophyte #3,***

Sumi ink on birch panel,  
set of 4, 48"x48"x1

<https://www.beililiu.com/Wind-Drawing-Series-Aerophytes>



### ***Airseed Mono Series,***

Sumi ink on yupo paper set of 4, 11"x14"each

<https://www.beililiu.com/Airseed-Mono>



### ***Settle,***

Charred rice paper ,set of 9, 9.5"x12" each

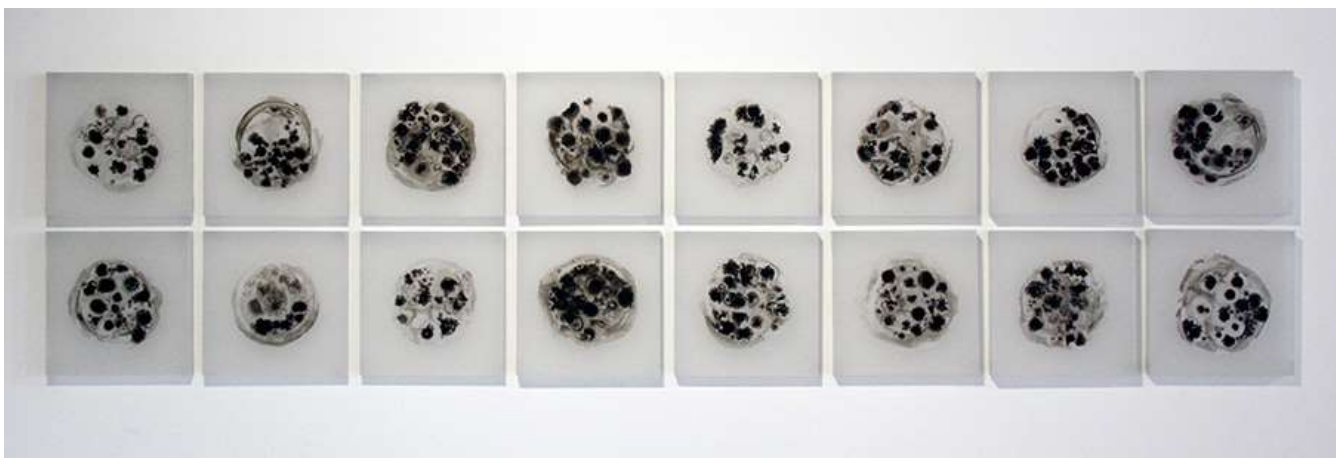
<https://www.beililiu.com/Settle>



***Ten Thousand Folds / Frost***

paper, acrylic,  
Sumi ink on panel  
40"x60",

<https://www.beililiu.com/Ten-Thousand-Folds-Fros>



***Mute***

Sumi Ink drawing on vellum,  
set of 16, 10"x10"x1" each

<https://www.beililiu.com/Mute>

## **ARTIST BIO: BEILI LIU**

(sources Artist Website <https://www.beililiu.com/BIO>); Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beili\\_Liu](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beili_Liu))

- Born in 1974 in a remote farming village in northeastern China, Jilin province.
- Parents were in exile there for 10 years for “re-education” during China’s Cultural Revolution
- As she grew up, the family moved to larger cities, ultimately to Shenzhen where she attended university to study Chinese Literature.
- Emigrated to US 1995. Earned BA at University of Tennessee in 2001, then Master of Fine Arts in 2003 from University of Michigan.
- Lives and works in Austin, Texas. Endowed Professor in the College of Fine Arts at the University of Texas. Multiple teaching awards / endorsements.
- EXHIBITIONS: Dozens of Exhibitions, solo and group, across the US, in China and Taiwan, and in at least ten European countries, 2002 to 2022. PUBLIC ARTWORK: Dallas, Austin, San Francisco, Germany, Taiwan, China.
- FELLOWSHIPS and AWARDS: numerous and extensive – in the past 2 years alone, awarded an Andrew Carnegie Fellowship, the Pollock Prize for Creativity, and several Fulbright grants and awards.

## **ARTIST’S STATEMENT** (source Artist Website <https://www.beililiu.com/BIO>)

*"I make environments that resonate with the experience of migration and cultural memory. My site-responsive installations and performances are rooted in the essence and history of a place and negotiate personal, cultural, and environmental concerns. I explore resilience, healing, and hope through humble materials and accumulated labor. Topics of diaspora, assimilation and the ultimate question of otherness versus belonging are at the core of my work."*

## **TYPE OF WORK / DESCRIBE THEIR PRACTICE:** (source: <https://www.beililiu.com/>)

- Mixed media – ink, paper, commonplace materials such as thread, needle, scissors, feather, salt, wax, cement, fabric, stone, coals, fabric, water.
- Works may be wall-mounted, suspended, float on water. Most are 3D.
- Her website categorizes her work into “installations” and “drawings”. Most drawings use atypical tools (draw with incense, spread ink with air compressor), I didn’t find any marks made by pen or pencil or brush.
- Installations are material-and-process-driven and site-responsive. Some are public art works that remain in place, others in galleries for short or longer-term
- In a 2012 program for a solo show at HUA Gallery in London, England she wrote: *“I consider most of my 2D works process drawings, process being the most important and determining factor of the visual outcomes.”* Beili Liu.

(source: <http://d23gysd6rkpiuk.cloudfront.net/pdf/catalogue/beiliLiu.pdf>)



## ANALYSIS OF BEILI LIU'S WORK:

### YUN YAN

#### How is the work made?

- each mark is drawn using a stick of burning incense lightly brushing onto the surface of the rice paper
- the paper is then mounted on to a birch panel
- this is one of a series of 8 panels
- she has explored burnt paper and/or burning sticks or coal as a drawing media in a number of her works



Drawing with an incense



**Yun Yan**, Incense drawing on paper, mounted on birch panel, series of 8  
26"x52" <https://www.beililiu.com/Yun-Yan>

### What are the formal elements of the artwork?

- Simple lines, short and tapering, that vary in value, width, density and direction
- Collectively they make a swirling pattern like a school of fish / flock of birds / cloud of insects
- Very limited colour palette – from the lightest brown char mark to the black of burnt paper
- Texture is given by variations in the colour and density of the marks, but also by the degree of damage to the rice paper – in areas it is burnt right through, with resultant curling edges
- Negative space is hugely important – where the burn marks *aren't* defines the swirling shapes, and the large amount of empty paper suggests the tiny insignificance of each mark
- Dominant principles of composition are movement (the eye seeks out and follows the swirling patterns) and rhythm (visual elements repeat in a marked pattern, creating flow).
- Secondary principles are proportion (tiny marks, large white spaces), harmony (recurring line, colour, shape), and unity (the feeling of the marks making a collective movement)

### What is the context of the work?

- No date on artist website. Program from 2012 HUA Gallery solo show describes the series as dating 2008 to 2012 -- the series of 8 panels were produced over 4 or more years.
- Liu is now 48, these were produced in her mid-thirties, at which point she had lived in the US for over a decade, with an established teaching and art career.
- Her continuing topics of “diaspora, assimilation, and otherness versus belonging” (see artist statement above) feel very connected to this work, given the use of traditional Chinese art media in novel ways, in the context of her now living and working in the US.
- DeWitt Cheng wrote in the magazine “Artillery” in 2012 that Liu’s work embodies “the idea of aggression and danger halted by gentle restraint”
- “Art in America” review 2009 describes her work as materially simple, metaphorically rich

### Describe the content/subject of the work (What the artist says about the work)

- “Yun Yan” stands for “cloud and smoke” in Chinese, and refers to things temporal and fleeting in life (caption for the drawing on the Beili Liu website).
- *“I consider most of my 2D works process drawings, process being the most important and determining factor of the visual outcomes.” Beili Liu.*  
(source: <http://d23gysd6rkpiuk.cloudfront.net/pdf/catalogue/beiliLiu.pdf>)
- *“Although my work appears abstract, it’s conceptually based, and my materials speak to the concept. I’m very focused on each individual segment – it’s my way of giving meaning to meaningless objects. It’s important that the labor I put into these pieces is obvious, that it’s clear how much time it took to make them.”* Here the author was describing (in 2021) a large installation sculpture, but I think the information pertains equally to this work.  
(source: <https://sculpturemagazine.art/soft-persuasion-a-conversation-with-beili-liu/> )

What is the mood of the work? (What do I feel about it?)

- I find gentleness and ease in the flowing stream of marks.
- The movement feels organic, the marks seem to be seeking a harmonious path together, as opposed to being frantic or agitated in their movement.
- The feeling of gentleness and harmony is an interesting and hopeful choice, given that these marks are made by a destructive force, flame, and that each mark is small and insignificant on its own.

How might the work inspire / influence my studio practice

- Inspiration to use non-traditional drawing implements.
- Permission to use empty space / negative space liberally
- The use of light touch with a destructive force like flame to produce something delicate
- Her commitment to making process evident enriches her work – I want to reflect on how I can import that idea into my own work.
- I've long been interested in Chinese brush painting and in manipulating paper (origami) – in what surprising ways can they be combined?
  - Consider destructive force, burning, crumpling.
  - Consider reconstitution after a destructive force
  - Consider making the processes of inking, folding, damage, repair more evident
  - Understand the feeling or commentary I hope to convey by showing the process