

## Cathy Hsiao: Movement 1, Bloom

Exhibition on view February 18 – March 24, 2018  
Gallery Hours: Fridays and Saturdays, 12-4pm, and by appt.



Cathy Hsiao, Impossible | 花密音, 2018, 6.5' x 2', concrete, plaster, zinc, brass, brazilwood, indigo, chamomile tea, plasticine

Goldfinch is pleased to present *Movement 1, Bloom*, Cathy Hsiao's first solo exhibition focusing exclusively on the Chicago-based artist's sculptural works.

In *Movement 1, Bloom*, Hsiao translates craft traditions of weaving and natural dyeing to the process of casting sculptures from concrete—a substance typically associated with the hard edges and surfaces of the built landscape. Using plant-based dyes like indigo, chamomile tea, and brazilwood, Hsiao brings organic compounds into a formal language influenced by the history of Western abstraction. However, the translation is not a precise one; it is deliberately skewed and the rigidity of minimalist forms playfully softened, as Hsiao embraces the humor and messiness of translation gone slightly awry.

Hsiao, who was born in New York, immigrated to Taiwan as a child, and returned to the United States as a teenager, embraces a hybrid practice that moves between material experimentation, interest in objecthood, and meditations on migration, memory, and (mis)translation in its many forms. As the artist navigates between cultures and languages, her sculptures are located in an elusive place where the past and present are woven together and apprehended simultaneously—much like the experience of listening to experimental music, in which temporal distortion, layers of sound, and unexpected structures prompt listeners to consider time not as linear, but as looped. Rather than root her practice in rituals of the past or in the immediacy of the present, Hsiao moves between them, revealing tradition as a means of holding the past and present together in time. As a result, Hsiao's sculptural language feels both ancient and new, playfully refusing to keep still.

Within each seemingly minimal shape are layers of color which pool and mottle the concrete in hues of pink, green, and blue—reminiscent of the microcosmic worlds of lichen and algae or of the multicolored fragments and mineral layers found in sedimented rocks. For this series of sculptures, each concrete work begins with the process of drawing, as Hsiao creates simple renderings from photographs of her environment and previous works, which undergo computer numerical control (CNC) milling to become single-part molds. The fluidity of movement continues as Hsiao freely applies lines of concrete in different pours within the molds: a motion that engages the artist's entire body, while her medium captures and condenses the energy of each human gesture. The outward surfaces of the sculptures

are, in fact, the exposed underbellies of the casts, revealed only after temperature and time have allowed the concrete to cure, when the forms may be freed from their molds. As she layers and unearths her sculptures in succession, Hsiao demonstrates both the personal and slippery nature of time, her own process in a syncopated rhythm with time's effects.

In the gallery, the arrangement of Hsiao's sculptures can be read as a spatial score, a composition that engages space and duration, unfolding like a piece of music. In musical compositions, movements exist as self-contained sections, structured from multiple parts (think of the instrument sections within an orchestra) and performed in succession. As her first solo exhibition, *Movement 1, Bloom* also presents the first gallery-wide arrangement of Hsiao's sculptures. This opening "movement" in Hsiao's layered practice will continue to evolve into new arrangements, new scores, and new spaces. The process of blooming, too, unfolds through time. Sometimes slowly, sometimes bursting open, things bloom when certain conditions—time, light, temperature—converge. Like the objects created through an evolving creative practice, a bloom is never the final point of growth, but rather one moment in a larger process—one that often circles back and renews itself.

In her essay "How Words Fail," poet Cathy Park Hong describes the difficult transaction that language can prove to be for those navigating cultural, political, and geographical displacement, when "the voice is not always a freeing form of self-expression." [1] Arguing that "voice" does not (and often cannot) fully mirror or capture one's inner life, Hong points to poets who— while witnessing language's limits and challenges—allow the words to be enough, creating a "distinctly haunting and astonishing music through solecisms and hesitations, through the broken sentence." [2] Words don't actually fail here; they become stretched, coaxed into new figurations, crafted by those who welcome a different kind of syntax. Words, like most materials, can be molded and recomposed as they attempt to translate one's inner landscape to the larger world. Hsiao, like the poets Hong describes, uses cultural and linguistic distances, not as limitations, but as prompts for casting a new material language. As Hsiao's making process acknowledges the complex dance between one's ties to home and one's attempt to navigate the wider world's new vocabularies and translations, the sculptural grammar in *Movement 1, Bloom* asks us to be both viewer and listener, while revealing the wild organism that language—both heard and seen—can be.

–Elizabeth Lalley

#### Artist Bio:

Cathy Hsiao is an artist working in Chicago. She comes from a background in craft, specifically weaving animal fibers dyed with plants, and was raised by a devout Falun Dafa Buddhist mother. "Plant and Animal Studio" keeps this name as acknowledgement to those histories. She holds a BA from the University of California Berkeley and a MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago (2017). She has been awarded the 2016 Emerging Illinois Artists Triennial Juror Prize, curator Kelly Shindler, the New Artist Society Fellowship, School of the Art Institute (2014 – 2017), a Peripheral Vision Arts Fellowship, and a Cornell School of Criticism and Theory Certificate among others. Upcoming exhibitions include Roots & Culture, Essex Flowers, and McLean County Arts Center.

[1] Hong, Cathy Park. "How Words Fail." Poetry Foundation. July 31, 2006.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/articles/68629/how-words-fail>.

2] Ibid.

Movement 1, Bloom Sound  
Program

Sunday Feb. 18, 5pm  
“Drone for Bloom, Drone for  
Blue”  
Akosuen, Rebecca Himelstein &  
Cathy Hsiao  
[billiejeanhoward.com](http://billiejeanhoward.com)

Saturday March 3, 3pm  
OKA Amnesia  
[okaamnesia.com](http://okaamnesia.com)

Saturday March 17, 3pm and  
4pm  
“The Space I Can’t Get In V.2”  
(3pm)  
Chin-Ting Huang  
[chintinghuang.com](http://chintinghuang.com)  
+ HSIAO + BOOTH + PATTON  
(4pm)  
[markbooth.net](http://markbooth.net),  
[kamaupatton.com](http://kamaupatton.com)

Saturday March 24, 3:30pm and  
5pm  
D. Denenge Duyst-Akpem  
(3:30pm)  
[denenge.net](http://denenge.net)  
GLIST! (5pm)  
Latham Zearfoss, Darling Squire,  
Claire Arctander, Whit Forrester,  
Cathy Hsiao, and more