

American life. Here, three-dimensional recreations of animal carcasses are installed in a butcher shop-like space and sound recordings made in New York butcher shops play throughout, drawing viewers into the macabre atmosphere. Quotes—referred to by the artists as “platitudes”—written on a wall within the installation stress the importance of observing Islamic dietary guidelines while living in the US. Though the work is visually shocking, its overall meaning is less intelligible. The emphasis appears to be on eliciting a visceral reaction from viewers rather than addressing the significance of these religious customs within a larger context.

Collaboration (2007), by Pakistan-born artist Shahzia Sikander (SEE AAP 16, 29, 43) and Indian dancer Sharmilia Desai, also references the meeting of cultures, presenting footage of Desai performing an original interpretation of classical Indian dance and yoga atop a mat painted by Sikander. As Desai moves across the mat, she serves as an extension of Sikander’s vivid yet delicate images of dark, abstract lines merging kinetically into each other.

While the works included in the exhibition span a diverse spectrum of perspectives, a more cohesive curatorial vision would have benefited both artists and viewers. But in terms of simply providing audiences with a rare opportunity to view the work of an underrepresented demographic in contemporary art, “Sultana’s Dream” is certainly a success.

• **Maymanah Farhat**

SARITA KHURANA AND CHITRA GANESH: *Dolley* (2006), Video, 4:18 min. Courtesy Exit Art, New York.

DALLAS

U-Ram Choe

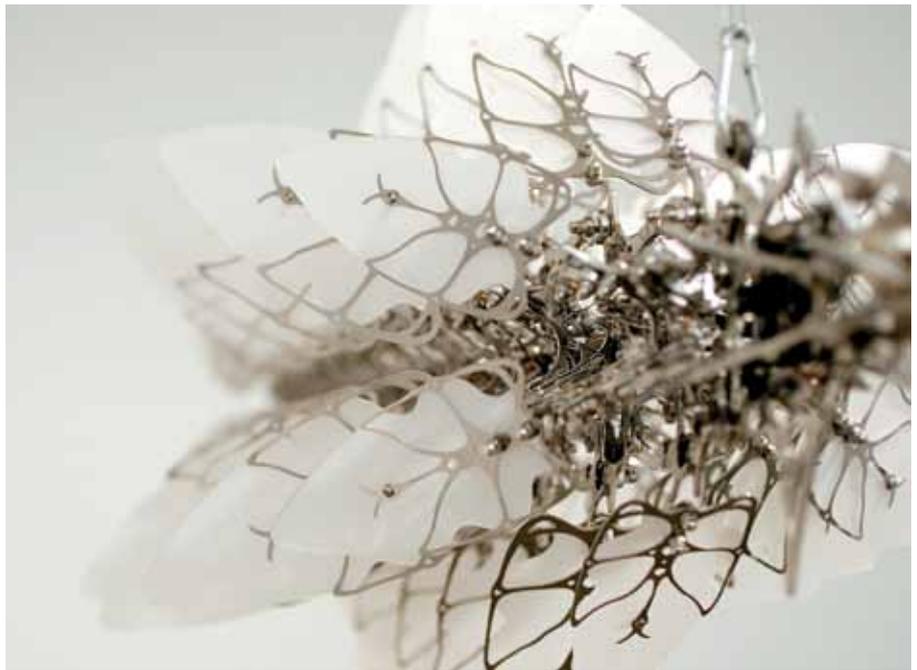
NEW MEDIA FROM SEOUL

THE CROW COLLECTION

Before Hollywood mangled Ishirô

Honda’s 1954 masterpiece *Gojira*, the film was a sobering consideration of the atomic age—an indictment of the reckless use of technology without consideration of its consequences. The sculptural creations of U-Ram Choe harbor an analogous sentiment. For his first solo outing in the US at the Crow Collection, Choe presented biomorphic “organisms” that, in their external beauty, belie sinister allusions.

Accompanying texts inform visitors that Choe’s amalgams of acrylic, resin and metal are, in fact, parasitic creatures, although one might never reach such a conclusion by simply looking at the work. The kinetic



U-RAM CHOE: Detail - *Urbanus (Male) Anmopista Volaticus Floris Uram* (2006)

sculptures’ polished, lustrous bodies quiver delicately in reaction to the viewer’s proximity, while Choe’s meticulous display, invoking natural history dioramas, adds to the seduction.

Suspended from the ceiling by wire just a few feet off the gallery floor, one such work, *Echo Navigo (Adult) Anmorome Istiophorus Platypterus Uram* (2004), resembles the skeletal remains of some exotic fish or prehistoric life form. Yet its size—over three feet in length—and devilish, knife-like horns and fins that run down a shimmering central column give it an aura of menace. This commingling of natural elements and artificial embellishment signals an evolution gone awry. It is a breathtaking piece, to be sure; however, Choe wants us to not only look but also to indulge in narrative exposition. *Echo Navigo* and all other creatures at hand are meant to be construed as live, sentient monsters of our own making.

In addition to mimicking scientific nomenclature in his titles, Choe describes in detail when and where each specimen was first “encountered,” its habitat and means of sustenance. In the case of *Echo Navigo*, the artist asserts that the species both feeds on and disrupts electronic currents, and can be found en masse near wireless telephone towers.

Each subsequent work displays signs of further evolutionary development, like the emergence of the potential for flight in the delicate, fluttering filigreed wings that cover the metallic body of *Urbanus (Male), Anmopista Volaticus Floris Uram* (2006). Perhaps the only thing not stated in Choe’s exhaustive text is that these organisms, *Urbanus* in particular, seem like theoretical

harbingers of destruction—couriers of an apocalypse that could be delivered ever-so-quietly on gossamer wings.

• **Anjali Gupta**

U-RAM CHOE: Detail - *Urbanus (Male) Anmopista Volaticus Floris Uram* (2006), Metallic material, machinery, acrylic, metal-halide lamp, electronic devices (CPU board, motor), 25 x 25 x 287 cm. Courtesy the artist and Bitforms Gallery, New York.

LOS ANGELES

Song Kun

UCLA HAMMER MUSEUM

Born in 1977 and a founding member of the N12 artists’ group from the Beijing Central Academy of Art, Song Kun devoted one canvas to each day of her life for a year in *It’s My Life*. The work forms a nebulous story of the desires, fears, pains and pleasures of her generation. For its presentation at the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles, 199 canvases out of the original 365 are installed. (Although it is a single work, *It’s My Life* was sold to four different collectors who each bought a group of consecutive canvases.) Arranged chronologically and date-stamped on their sides, the small canvases rise and fall in uneven rows, as though mirroring life’s highs and lows.

A varied cast of characters appear and disappear in this disjointed diary, which features everything from still-lives of stargazer lilies and anime figurines to storylines of love, marriage and death that unfold over several days. Working in oil, Song blends the realism of academic European oil painting with the loose brushwork of Chinese ink painting, creating some canvases that are highly detailed



SONG KUN: *It's My Life 06-04-09 (2006)*

studies while others seem to be quick, unfinished sketches.

Song's decisive cropping of her images evokes casual, out-of-focus snapshots. One such scene pictures a group of friends across a restaurant table, their mouths full of food and laughter. Another captures an outdoor music festival in a muddy field. A mysterious, dream-like fog suffuses most scenes, suggesting that Song is painting from memory. One canvas shows a stitched-up wrist, the apparent result of a suicide attempt; a few canvases later the same wrist, now encased in a wispy gauze bandage, flits awkwardly yet poignantly over piano keys. On days that Song did not feel like painting, such as the period following her grandmother's death, the canvases are left inscrutably blank. Also present is the mundane—Song includes two images of herself sitting on the toilet.

Song cites the husband-and-wife team of painters Liu Xiaodong and Yu Hong (SEE P. 168 & AAP 30, 52) as key influences, and, indeed, the former appears in a portrait dated 2005.12.23 that was not included in the exhibition. Although autobiographical, *It's My Life* is far from self-centered or narcissistic. Instead, Song's graceful handling of the human figure, sparse detail and evocative brushwork prompts viewers to consider the intricacies and mysteries of ordinary life. • **Jennifer S. Li**

SONG KUN: *It's My Life 06-04-09 (2006)*, Oil on canvas, 27 x 35 cm. Courtesy UniversalStudios-beijing.

SAN FRANCISCO

Shi Guorui

REPRODUCTION AND REFASHIONING

DE YOUNG MUSEUM

The de Young Museum wasted no time in displaying the results of Shi Guorui's fall 2006 residency, granting him his first solo exhibition in the US this past summer. The Beijing-based photographer came to San Francisco through the Collection Connections program, a series that aims to reinterpret traditional objects in the de Young's collection. Despite

the relative obscurity of the exhibition—inconspicuously nestled between another photography exhibition, an American art gallery and a Nan Kempner retrospective—Shi succeeds in bringing the museum's stolid relics and classic Californian vistas to the fore, presenting them as photograms or camera obscura photographs.

Shi creates large-scale camera obscuras by draping entire rooms in opaque fabric and setting out photographic paper for two-to-eight hour exposures. He began using camera obscura exclusively in 1998 after surviving a car crash in his native Shanxi province that killed one of his friends and severely injured the driver. In recognition of his unscathed emergence from the accident, he resolved to produce works that required long amounts of time to complete.

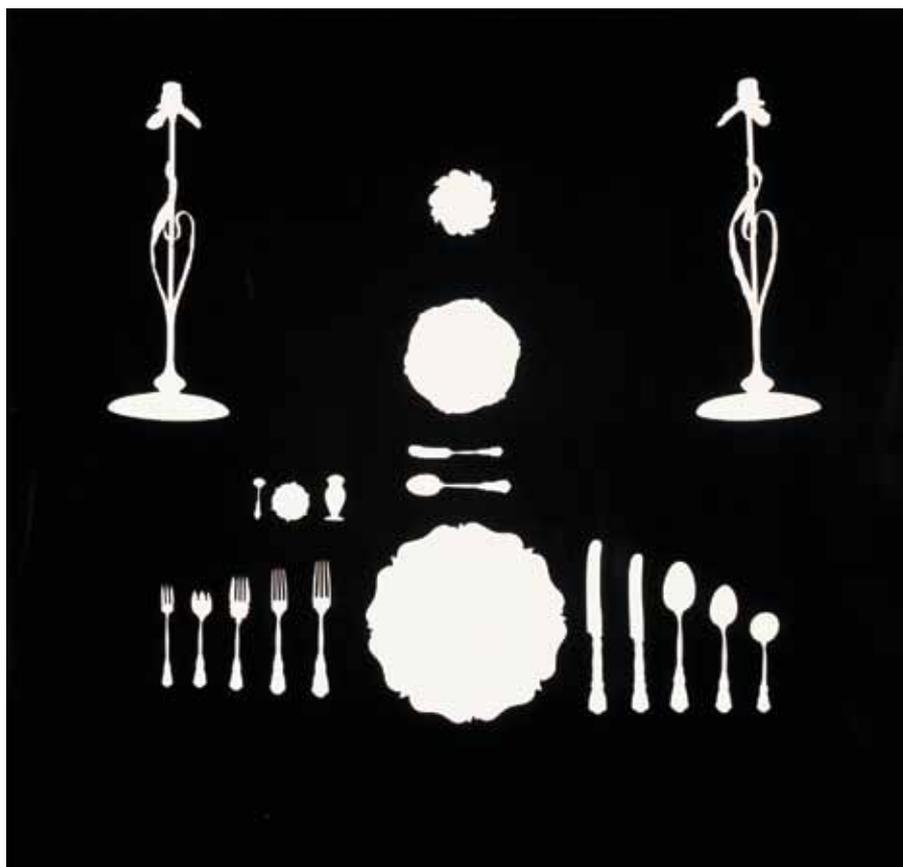
At the de Young, Shi offered four new photographs produced this way: *A View of San Francisco from Alcatraz Island*, 10/20/2006; *Hollywood Sign*, 10/3/2006; *Donner Pass*, 10/12/2006; and *de Young Tower*, 10/23/2006. Resembling gigantic negatives, these works create surreal two-dimensional landscapes where skies are pitch black and the earth ranges from charcoal gray to white. Familiar images such as the US flag, the Transamerica building and the Hollywood sign all receive this treatment; symbols of American prowess become shells of themselves as the stars and stripes and the H in Hollywood disappear into the murky sky, and the

Transamerica building is flattened among San Francisco's other skyscrapers, turning the skyline into something resembling an architect's Styrofoam model.

Shi continues his exploration of shape and form with 27 photograms of tools, household objects and sculptures. He was specifically drawn to Gold Rush era tools because of the participation of Chinese immigrant labor during that period. By arranging objects on light-sensitized photo paper and exposing them to light, Shi makes silhouettes that reveal the utilitarian yet crude qualities of 19th-century implements. *Tools*, 10/13/2006 and *Shreve and Company Silver Place Setting (1903-1917)*, 10/25/2006 bookend the epoch. Today, both the tools and place setting are relegated to obscurity even in a place that celebrates preservation, perhaps speaking to the ephemeral quality of all things. Shi revives them for a moment offering only their shadows, galvanizing viewers to find them in the museum.

The stark simplicity of Shi's methods and presentation prompts visitors to consider the subjects rather than the artist himself, thus countering the instinct to relate contemporary Chinese works to China's social and political situations. It is testament to Shi's artistry that his final impression on the viewer is not black and white but gray. • **Audrey Luk**

SHI GUORUI: *Shreve and Company Silver Place Setting (1903-1917)*, 10/25/2006 (2006), Unique silver gelatin print photograph, 127 x 127 cm. Collection of the artist.



SHI GUORUI: *Shreve and Company Silver Place Setting (1903-1917)*, 10/25/2006 (2006)