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Lee Ming-wei (李明維)
The Shrine Project (壇城計畫)



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LEE MING-WEI

Lee Ming-wei

Lee Mingwei (李明維) is a friendly kind of guy. He's the boy next door with a great smile. If you happen to run into him, he might ask how you're doing and talk about anything in life except art. But, if you take a look at his resume, you'll realize he is one of Taiwan's most promising young artists. Pursuing his own creative vision, he has ranged far and wide, venturing way beyond the scope, form and medium of what most other local artists have covered. Now 36, he holds a Master of Fine Arts from Yale in New Genre Public Art, and in 1998 he became the first ever artist from Taiwan to hold a solo exhibition at New York City's Whitney Museum.

Born and raised in Taipei, Lee went to college in San Francisco where he earned an undergraduate degree in architecture. He now uses that training extensively in his projects, combing it with his explorations into the sacred and profane. The content in his works is extensive, including everything from the culinary arts to Ch'an Buddhism.

A promoter of conceptually oriented interactive art, Lee simply claims that art is about people and life itself. In his "Letter Writing Project" of 1998, visitors were invited to write letters about gratitude, insight, or forgiveness. In a second piece, "Way Stations," he invited strangers to dine with him. Both works centered around the theme of interaction with people, probing into their sentiments, feelings and thoughts.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF LEE MING-WEI

Letter-writing Project by Lee Ming-wei

For the Taipei Biennial, Lee is orchestrating the “Shrine Project.” It will include the participation of 147 people who will assist him in building seven shrines. Initially, seven of the participants will be responsible for creating their own individual shrines by amassing objects of personal significance and placing them in the shrines. Each week different people will be invited to do the same thing. Shrines, a common phenomenon in Asia, are used in religion to demarcate sacred territory. However, Lee said that for those who are not religious, there is still always something sacred. The objects that participants bring to the shrine installation are a way for them to “externalize” such sacredness.

Lee’s definition of “the sacred” is both spiritually and emotionally derived, referring to things or people that are valued or considered holy. The shrines Lee has installed offer a space for such specially cherished objects, elevating them “to the level of a public, albeit temporary, shrine.” The work invites viewers to observe their own private reactions to what others have chosen as sacred.

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