



## Jean Shin: Playing with Space and Time



**FOR PROJECT 81**, her site-specific installation last summer at MoMA QNS (the Museum of Modern Art, Queens), Jean Shin took clothing that MoMA staff members had worn to work, cut it into component parts, then starched and pressed odd sleeves, pant legs, and dress fronts onto parallel white walls in the tightest configuration her computer could design. The patterns resembled cash-saving layouts devised by New York's garment industry or pieces of a jumbo abstract puzzle. One wall vibrated with red, pink, and pastel accents, while blacks and neutrals predominated on the other, suggesting how, even though they live in a world of art, nonuniformed employees still adhere to an implied office dress code.

Overhead, a linear sculpture of leftover seams, zippers, and pockets canopied the passageway that led to the main galleries in the converted Queens warehouse, which served as a temporary venue during reconstruction of the mid-

*ABOVE: Cut Outs and Suspended Seams, 2004; cut fabric (MoMA staff clothes), starch, thread. View of installation at Museum of Modern Art, New York. LEFT: Artist Jean Shin sewing in her Brooklyn studio. Photos courtesy of the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York.*

town Manhattan building. This suspended, three-dimensional drawing extended an idea the thirty-three-year-old Korean-American artist evolved in an earlier series in 1998–2003, in which seams stripped from men's long-sleeved shirts hung taut from the ceiling like schematic outlines or women's dress seams looped limply against walls.

The cultural implications of this urge to dematerialize, accrete, and give new life to castoffs can be seen in Shin's earlier floor installations of odd socks, reclaimed from Brooklyn laundromats and stuffed with dryer lint to form a jumbled, intertwining "community," or trouser cuffs





**TOP LEFT:** *Alterations*, 1999–2001; fabric (pant scraps), wax; 2' x 22' x 12'. **TOP RIGHT:** *Chance City*, 2001–2004; \$21,496 worth of discarded lottery tickets; 6' x 8' x 8'. View of installation at the Brooklyn Museum. **BOTTOM LEFT:** *Lost and Found (Single Socks)*, 2000; socks stuffed with dryer lint, zippers; dimensions variable. **BOTTOM RIGHT:** *Penumbra*, 2003; broken umbrellas, thread, 72" x 45". View of installation at the Socrates Sculpture Park, New York City.

left over after alterations, waxed stiff and assembled by color in a kind of urban sprawl. Shin favors items that suggest a lost personal history. Her tour de force, *Chance City* (2001/2004), consists of a housing complex built of losing lottery tickets, with units literally stacked up like a "house of cards" held intact by gravity. These miniature skyscrapers embody the irrepressible immigrant's hopefulness and aspirations for upward mobility.

Shin's work constantly plays with formal changes in space and time. For example, discarded umbrella tops, stitched into a colorful banner of flattened fabric hexagons and stretched across a clothesline at the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University, transformed a cement courtyard into a sort of flower garden. The title, *Umbrellas Stripped Bare* (2001), is both a direct reference to the fabrication process and an unmistakable pun on Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–1922), a translucent etched-glass piece that cracked accidentally. *Penumbra* (2003) was a variation on this theme for the Socrates Sculpture Park in Queens, New York. A patchwork of umbrella tops, mostly black, lashed between trees created a rectangular sunshade that cast a protective shadow on the exposed shore-front lawn. Similarly, Shin has sliced uppers from worn leather shoes, then paired and stitched them back into flat "hides."

Art from recycled materials has multiple roots in folk art and modernism. Jean Shin trained as a painter at Pratt Institute in New York, where she also earned a master's degree in theory, criticism, and art history. Clearly she feels strong affinities to textile materials and processes. Her early work explored her own hair as a medium for sculpture, an approach reminiscent of work by Anne Wilson and Ann Hamilton. In less than a decade Shin's installations have achieved national recognition for a distinctive, still-evolving iconography. ●

*Jean Shin has several shows this spring. For details, see Resources, page 78.*

Pamela Scheinman teaches textile design at Montclair State University in New Jersey and documents street art in photographs and video.