

ArtAsiaPacific

TODAY'S ART FROM TOMORROW'S WORLD

PHILADELPHIA

Jean Shin: TEXTILE

THE FABRIC WORKSHOP AND MUSEUM

Over the last few years, Korean-American artist Jean Shin has thoughtfully and laboriously deconstructed and reassembled the detritus of everyday life—used clothes and shoes, old eyeglasses, broken umbrellas and prescription bottles—into formally and conceptually sophisticated sculptures and installations that meditate on the materiality, functionality and past lives of disposable objects. Shin is particularly attracted to objects that have an intimate relation to the body, registering and retaining its traces, almost serving as its surrogates.

For her latest exhibition, the result of a three-year residency at Philadelphia's Fabric Workshop and Museum, Shin uses the computer keyboard to explore the complex relationship between acts of communication and the human body, and how this is profoundly transformed through technological advances.

The exhibition is sparse yet cogent, the gallery's grey floor and white walls mimicking the dour, monochrome palette of the keyboards. One of Shin's many talents is the wit and humor with which she reuses materials, cleverly manipulating them to draw attention to the surrounding architecture. In *Key Promises* (2006), recycled function/command keys trace a single line around the perimeter of the gallery, directing and following the viewer through the space: Home establishes the start of the route, Pause/Break sets off a closed doorway, Shift coincides with a corner turn.

TEXTile (2006), the exhibition's centerpiece, is a 25-foot long interactive tapestry made from over 20,000 computer keycaps, transcribing e-mail correspondence between the artist and Fabric Workshop and Museum staff. An aluminum armature supports the fabric, rising at both ends. Resting on a desk-like extension at one end, the first three rows, corresponding to the first e-mail exchanged, serve

as a makeshift keyboard. At the other end, a custom-designed interactive program reproduces the typed text as a projection that recreates the fabric's grid structure. The physical and virtual fabrics literally spell out the project's gestation and exhibition, doubling as a visitors log. The makeshift keyboard, organized according to the initial correspondence, is missing uncommon letters, prompting users to re-learn the normally automatic act of typing and focusing their awareness on this particular mode of communicating and the physical experiences that accompany it.

If *TEXTile* is about the physicality of the act of typing, the video installation *Duet* (2006) captures its aural dimension. Two facing projections each feature a keyboard typing—without hands—apparently in dialogue with the other. A cacophony of clattering computer keys accompanies the piece, replacing the spoken word as the prevalent sound of communication in contemporary society. ■ MURTAZA VALI

Jean Shin in collaboration with The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia ■ Detail of *TEXTile* ■ 2006 ■ 22,528 recycled computer keycaps and 192 custom keycaps, high performance laminate fabric with Spectra fibers, customized active keyboard and interactive software, video projection, and painted aluminum armatures ■ 36 x 48 x 276 in. ■ Photo by Aaron Iglar ■ Courtesy the artist and Frederieke Taylor Gallery, New York

