

FORSYTHIA In March, I went to see the forsythia bushes several times in Central Park to check if their buds have begun to swell. One of the first shrubs to bloom in the spring, if left alone, it may colonize nearby area as its weeping branches touch the ground and develop roots.

As I was gazing at the germinating buds on dormant branches in the bright sun light, it felt as if I stare long enough, I could see the eternal life force morphing. But after an initial look, there wasn't any more to see but the ephemeral movement of my own thoughts.

After a few days I went there again and saw the pointy yellow buds swollen ripping off its skin and opening, as if finally letting out a sigh after a long oppressive winter. Forsythias were just standing there in exquisite silence on a different realm.

In a Confucian world where I grew up, ink-brush paintings with personal notes were hung in the main rooms of houses and public halls. Seeing the picture and hearing the whispers of written words happened simultaneously.

Those ink-brush works of old Asia still speak to me so palpably in a museum showcase on moth-eaten old scrolls. Reading handwritten words is an intimate transaction through the wet brush lines displaying the author's breaths and nerve-endings so nakedly. I always marvel at such a magical sense of connection with another mortal who took a breath thousands of years ago as if I am standing next to him sharing his tender emotions.

The reason why such works still touch us, I believe, is not because they are, or were, new or profound, but because they convey author's sensory experiences and his arising emotions as a mortal in the Nature. They still stir deeper emotions of a common man within us living the 21st Century spending much of our waking hours in cyber space.

Such palpable sense of connection, however brief it may be, bring me a joy and it carries me through the day. It cuts through the opacity that surrounds me especially in our digital time of hyper-connections with little embodied awareness.

About two dozen photographs in this series are mounted on gessoed wood boards and I erased the forsythia branches' background with gray paint. I saw a perpetual tug of war between the erasing, forgetful winter gray and the germinating yellow buds. My passing thoughts seemed like a veil over my eyes that want to see.

ASIA

This group of works came from my walks on Canal Street in downtown New York City, through the cacophonous streets of shops with the 18 karat gold trinkets of Confucius, Jesus, and Mercedes logos, industrial junks, mounds of fruits and fishes, and Pearl Paint art supply store near Broadway.

This part of lower Manhattan must have been idyllic farmlands when Europeans first arrived in their costumes centuries ago. Now this multi-ethnic area is a place brimming with refreshingly uninhibited life force devoid of self-consciousness or social protocol where people's frenzied lives are precariously hanging in the balance. A tantalizing mirage of our ever becoming ephemeral world.

At the Buddhist Temple of America Inc., there is a sign in the shrine under the smiling Kwan Yin (the Bodhisattva of compassion) with Gladiolus, incense, and Mazola Corn Oil bottles, which announces in Chinese idiograph "Watch for pick-pockets," and a donation slot with a big arrow under, the point of procreation in our body. **The literal translation of the word Kwan Yin () or Kwan Se Eum () is "Observe the sounds of the world."*

In our uprooted time of rapidly disappearing regional colors, and the homogenizing force of globalization, these are my personal notes on changing times and places. I, as a strand in infinite Indra's Net, a hyphen between two disparate worlds.

I took photographs of things I saw on Canal Street which runs through Chinatown and Little Italy and down

into the Holland tunnel, with cheap factory-made classical Asian iconographies such as mythological fruit trees, fishes & amphibians, and white bearded mountain sages from the old tales I heard in my childhood. I worked with those photographs obliterating their background with gray paint exposing only the image I wanted to use. Straightforward snapshots with their digital grains made more sense to me, documenting our time without a personal paint brush. And I paired those disparate images as they made sense in my memory chamber.

Painting as an act of muting, or painting the space between two thoughts like the way music happens in silent space between the musical notes.

*I added some footnotes on my works here, since images resonate different things in us according to each cultural traditions.

ROOFTOPS

These photographs were taken over a span of fifteen years, 1985 - 2000, from my one time home on a high-rise in the old Yorkville section in Manhattan. It was often mesmerizing to watch the sunlight on empty rooftops of aging low buildings far away down from me.

Sometimes they evoked tender affection in me, and sometimes keen melancholy, depending on the angle of sunlight and the dramas of the sky, and of my life.

Weatherworn air vent pipes and chimneys cast shadows like sundials on these empty open field in the middle of a bustling mega city. Occasionally, a faint smoke rose from a chimney like an SOS from the underground to the visible world. There was never really anyone there but a forgotten ladder or a lone rusting beach lounger. The sun oscillated from dark grim December to Summer Solstice, as we had our birthdays, Christmas, summer trips, over and over.

Those nameless trees pushing through urban asphalt cracks, also stood in the back alleys of these aging brownstones, flowering and shedding their leaves under the pivoting sun high beyond the concrete canyons.

I wonder sometimes, if those trees were all from one mother rhizome running underground, pushing up new shoots wherever it finds unpaved opening. They stood with arms spread like bronchial tubes of our lungs, breathing, spreading finer and finer branches up toward the sky.

Irrepressible and timeless tree of life.
