

Spigot

26 September 2022
By Domenick Ammirati

Fear of Squares

Na Mira, Blade Runner OST, and orange wine from Greece.

My goal of getting Spigot out every Tuesday is unmet. Sorry! I hope this has not proven a vast disappointment to my readership. My week is ten days, I've come to realize, as I drift toward the bottom of September.

The most striking show I'm aware of in New York at the moment—my favorite show in a while—is Na Mira at Company. Mira's work, which was also featured in the Whitney Biennial, is an accumulation of intangibles: fire, ritual, spiritualism, chance, history, inheritance, and ghostly presences. There are disembodied voices, infrared scenes shot at night, holography, scented mists. At Company, her multichannel video *Tetraphobia* makes homage to an artist who's a clear predecessor and inspiration, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. The piece is so dense with reference to Cha's work it becomes difficult to say where she ends and Mira begins. Which is in part the point.



Tetraphobia's several projections are arranged in the six-surface form of a cube disassembled and laid flat, splayed across one corner of Company's ink-dark basement. In one channel, the artist Hanna Hur poses in a fixed black-and-white frame while reciting words and phrases; after each, she snaps open and shut the classic scene-setting "clacker" of movie sets. Meanwhile, another channel flashes the words Hur is speaking but out of sync and in reverse, while a mirror on the floor reflects them into proper orientation for the viewer to read: A GONE, TESSERACT, TRAIN, MELPOMENE, RED SMOKE, CELLO, MELPOMENE, TEXTURE, NELL, QUIXOTIC, and so on.

In the exhibition text, Mira describes *Tetraphobia* as involving recurring rendezvous with Cha; this event is dramatized in a pair of black-and-white video loops, which show a dark-haired, white-clad figure clambering over seats in an old deserted movie theater to meet her shadow cast on the pure white empty screen. Then she's back seated where she began, joined by a doppelgänger—a little J-horror, a

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little *Twin Peaks: The Return*, particularly given the screech-hum sequences of the soundtrack (and the intercut appearance of what resembles a painted-over electrical outlet on a wall). Scrambling the mood, Mira appears on two other channels with what appears to be a welding torch as she ignites an oversized teddy bear propped up against a chain-link fence. She's laughing happily.

The allusions to Cha's works are dense; I'm no expert, so I hope not to bungle them here. To cite just a few I could spot, the image of Hur recalls Cha's film *Permutations* (1976), which features ten minutes of the artist's sister interrupted by Cha's own visage for only a single flickering frame. The projection of words broaches Cha's myriad experiments with language and text; the font looks a lot like that of the original edition of 1982's *Dictee* (thank you QL), and MELPOMENE comes from the title of one of the book's chapters. *White Dust from Mongolia*, a project left unfinished at the time of Cha's murder, seems to be the cube that *Tetraphobia* is unfolding.

I've dwelled a lot on sheer description here, in part because the details are needed to grasp the work's density and ambition and in part because they combine to make it so mesmerizing. *Tetraphobia's* combination of formidable thinking, historical awareness, and sensory power is rare. (The potency extends to the haptic: Company's cellar is, as is often the case, so gorgeously dark that you can barely see the walls.) The work is absorbing in part because it offers too much to process all at once, not to render the idea of meaning absurd—which seems a default setting for much contemporary art—but rather to invite decoding over a hypnotic, ever-lengthening interval.



There's much more to say, of course. But to make one final note, take *Tetraphobia's* many references to cinema—the movie-theater darkness of the space, the movie theater we see in frame, the clacker, the crisp sound-sync disjunctions, the references to 16mm works from Cha's oeuvre. To me, they seem neither strictly about Cha and her work nor some kind of analog fascination. As the first mass-audience moving image (zoetrope stans, back off), cinema imposed a new way of perceiving time, one that includes a preservation and extension of the moment that can create an illusory immortality: death 24x a second, as Laura Mulvey might put it. The immersive attention to cinema is one facet of Mira's multidimensional reaching across distance, whether it be across time, across geography, or across dimension.

Above, I called *Tetraphobia* an homage to the late artist. I wonder if that could be a misnomer. The

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work is formed in the negative image of Cha's absence; does that add up to make her present? Can one could think of *Tetraphobia* more as a visitation? Melpomene, in case you wondered, is the Greek muse of tragedy. The muse's name comes from the verb for to be melodious, to make song.

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