

Painting with Needles—'Fu Xiaotong: Proliferation'

June 05, 2018 by Carol Wang

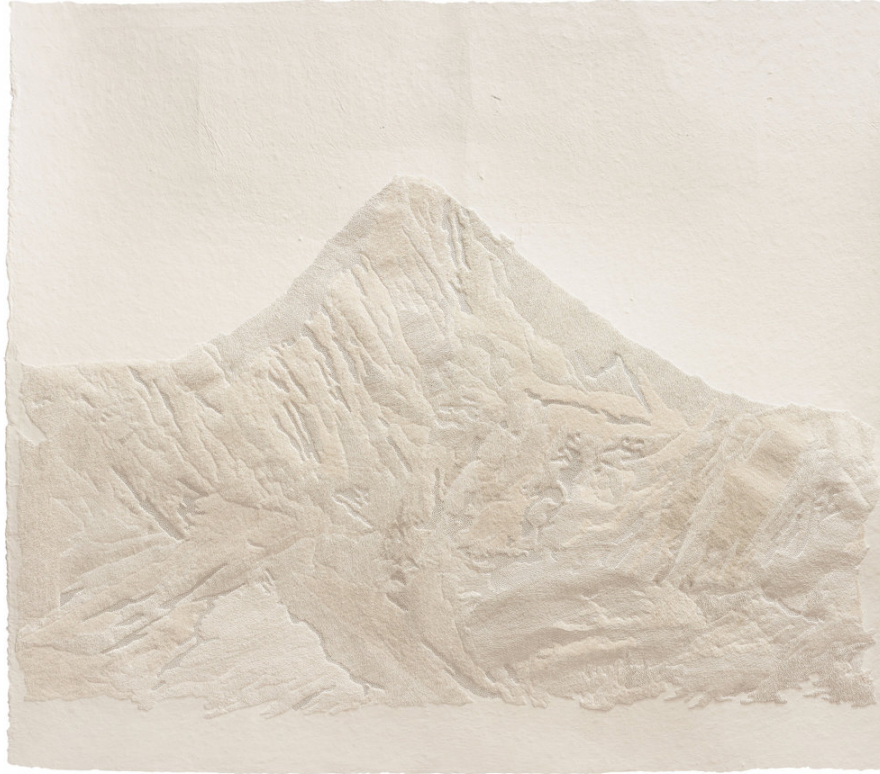


Figure 1. Fu Xiaotong, "21,000 Pinpricks", 2018. Handmade paper. 116 x 133 cm. Image courtesy of Chambers Fine Art.

Chambers Fine Art will be opening 'Fu Xiaotong: Proliferation' on 7 June 2018. Viewing the works from afar, you will be curious how the artist achieved the three-dimensional visual effect; as you step closer, you will be astonished to realize that the works are nothing but a piece of paper with holes.



Figure 2. Fu Xiaotong, "1,400,940 Pinpricks", 2018. Handmade paper. 486 x 160 cm.

While studying under Wu Jian'an in the Experimental Art Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), well-known for his exploration of the paper cut technique, Fu Xiaotong developed a strong affinity for handmade Xuan paper that has been used within China since the Tang Dynasty (618-907) and is still the preferred support for traditional brush and ink painters and calligraphers. "In the end," she has written, "I chose handmade Xuan paper to be my primary medium and decided to use needles to pierce holes in the paper to form images." Elsewhere, she has written that "in the course of study on the language of materials, I learned to focus on the material itself. In general, in Chinese painting, ink covers the beauty of the paper but it is my aim to reveal it without any interference. I do not paint or write on it, but rather create images through the accumulation of thousands of holes that I create with my needle."

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The images she creates resemble the lofty mountains and rushing streams, characteristic of traditional Chinese landscape painting (*Shan Shui*), and stand as a testament to her cultural association. These convincing representations of rock and water require years of practice and a high familiarity with the use of materials. Fu Xiaotong's "language of the needle" now consists of five different ways of approaching the surface of the paper. Over the course of the years, she has learned to perforate the surface of the paper from

directly above, from reverse and at diagonal angles. By now she has such control over the use of the needle that she is able to visualize the effects of different combinations of directional strokes. The importance of process is evident in the titles she chooses, as the works are titled according to the number of pinpricks required. In the current exhibition there are works that range from 427,000 pinpricks to 1,400,940 for the largest. Seen from close-up, the texture of her paper works resembles textiles or tapestries in the intricate interlocking of the multiple units of directional needle holes.



Figure 3. Fu Xiaotong, "243,000 Pinpricks", 2017. Handmade paper. 116 x 150 cm.

Although the use of Xuan paper and her technique originate in the Chinese tradition, Fu Xiaotong's works also have associations with modern art movements, such as abstraction and Post-Minimalism. Her recent works saw an evolution in her technique and a transition in her imagery from the landscape motifs to a more abstract language of forms. Instead of using a limited repertoire of directional pinpricks according to predetermined plans, she now starts from the center and works in a circular rhythm, softening the sturdy paper until it results in a pronounced three-dimensional surface. These undulating surfaces evoke a multitude of associations, organic, cellular, human or animal skin, breaking waves or breast-like forms that recall an important aspect of the work of Louise Bourgeois. Although the relationship of her work to traditional Chinese motifs is self-evident, it is also instructive to consider it in relation to artists such as Roman Opalka (1931 – 2011) who began painting numbers from one to infinity in 1965 or a work such as *One Million Years* (1999) by On Kawara (1932 – 2014).



Figure 4. Fu Xiaotong, "456,870 Pinpricks", 2018. Handmade paper. 200 x 160 cm.

Through Fu Xiaotong's obsessive daily practice, she injects new significance and meaning to a tradition dearest to Chinese art. She positions herself in the forefront of Chinese contemporary art while fostering connections to both Chinese and Western art.

Images and information courtesy of Chambers Fine Art.

Location:

522 West 19th Street
New York, NY 10011

Exhibition Period:

7 June – 19 August 2018

Hours:

Tuesday - Saturday: 10:00-18:00