

Jason Yi fashions pieces of a world in 'Terraform'



"Collision Courses" is made of sumi ink, colored pencil and Mylar tape. Credit: Jason Yi

By Rafael Francisco Salas, *Special to the Journal Sentinel*

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"Terraforming" is a science fiction trope that involves transforming planets into more habitable worlds. It is an apt metaphor for artist Jason Yi, who builds visions of skies, oceans and earth with found objects and trips to the hardware store. He calls his work and process "Terraform," which is also the title of his elegant exhibit at the Dean Jensen Gallery.

Yi's landscape-inspired works are austere but approachable, romantic even. They follow the precepts of Minimalism but contain the drama and sublime grandeur of the natural elements they reference.

His sculptures are often created on site and require a formalist rigor and a dogged, workmanlike persistence. The titular work in this show is a monumental sculpture that wends its way from floor to ceiling. It is composed of discarded folding chairs wrapped in three miles of red plastic. The plastic works as a sheath, covering and obscuring the armature of the piled chairs. The result is a transformative, organic form that rises to the rafters. It echoes a column of smoke or a slowly emerging stalagmite, stable and sound at the base, rising into a slender wisp in its upper reaches.

Another large-scale work is a wall-sized drawing called "Collision Courses." Here Yi riffs on the tradition of East Asian landscapes, using black sumi ink on paper to create a mountainish event at the bottom. Overlapping these forms is a series of jagged interruptions slicing down like lightning from the sky. These angular, jutting abstractions are composed of reflective Mylar tape, another industrial material. In between these conflicting forms are delicate lines traced in red colored pencil. They evoke a topographical map and are drawn with minute and sensitive precision, as if Yi were carefully charting the contours of a series of islands.

The works in “Terraform” are not elegies. At times they are humorous, even cartoonish. But they also contain an irony and darkness that linger.

He is describing something of the human condition, the ways we often interact with the world through the materials we have created. We live as if we are gardening with rubber gloves on. It’s a conceit that gives Yi’s artwork a tension and poignancy.

“Jason S. Yi: Terraform” is on view through June 18 at Dean Jensen Gallery, 759 N. Water St. For more information visit deanjensengallery.com.

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