

Lured by the flicker of *LoFoSto* spilling into the main room, we turn the corner and enter a different kind of space. Where Claus is expansive and stately, Chan is intimate and unassuming. With its smaller scale, subdued lighting, and elements arranged on the walls, this grotto-like space is made communal, like the hearth around which stories are shared.

Chan and Claus' works both bear the "handprint" of their personal narratives: the first through her history of immigration, the latter through the exploration of her Mohawk roots and world-view. In striving to relate these narratives to the spectator, Lucie Chan and Hannah Claus derive intricate systems from elemental components, and then elegantly consolidate these to create a holistic experience with multiple points of entry for the viewer. Each work poses a simple, but profound question: in the face of displacement, how does one find a meaningful place and a sense of belonging?

1) Jönsson, Love, "Letting Slow Go" (lecture, 6th Think Tank Symposium, Gmunden, Austria, 8-11 October, 2009). Also published in *Think Tank*, "Papers Edition 06", 2009, <http://www.thinktank04.eu/page.php?4>, 182.

2) Benjamin, Walter, "The Storyteller", in *Illuminations*, Fontanot, 1992, p.91, cited in Leslie, Esther, "Walter Benjamin: Traces of Craft", *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 11, no. 1, Craft, Modernism and Modernity (1998), pp. 5-13.

3) Exhibited at Montreal, arts interculturels, February 10 – March 12, 2011.

4) Hannah Claus' artist statement: hannahclaus.blogspot.ca, accessed October 28, 2012.

Elementary Particles

Works by Lucie Chan and Hannah Claus
Curated by Peter Flemming and Claudine Hubert

November 10 to December 16, 2012

Elementary particles are considered the fundamental building blocks of the material universe. Smaller than atoms, they can be neither reduced to nor constituted from smaller particles. In their work, Lucie Chan and Hannah Claus each employ a process of dismantling broad narratives into their component parts, then examining and recreating them as composite structures. Where Claus is interested in the human experience and its position in the cosmos, Chan focuses on the way in which personal stories—deconstructed, collected, and recomposed—create interrelated statements.

Both artists adopt a materially-informed, process-based approach rooted in handcraft and a history of sculpture and drawing. Claus methodically assembles thousands of paper ovals by hand, suspending them in cloud-like structures. Chan draws a multitude of small portraits, interspersed along the walls of the gallery with animated videos depicting the stories of her subjects.

Chan and Claus' work requires skill, meticulous attention, and is highly time-consuming. In this way, their practices are rooted in handcrafting, a tradition in which

it is theorized that “craft [...] helps us connect with our origins and rediscover our basic needs.”¹ Craft theorist Esther Leslie points to the parallels that philosopher Walter Benjamin traces between *making* and *telling*, declaring the act of storytelling itself to be a craft. To Benjamin, true experience is conceived as the close and practiced knowledge of what is at hand, and storytelling “sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the hand-print of the potter clings to the clay vessel.”²

Working with themes of community and memory, Lucie Chan explores the aggregate narratives of individual stories that tie to her personal experience of loss and a broader sense of togetherness. In her 2009 work *On the Surface*³, Chan traced the profiles of myriad faces, gathering them into the shapes of leaves—an organic genealogical tree more akin to shared experience than blood relations. At OBORO, Chan presents *LoFoSto*, short for “Longing for Stories”; the abridged title evokes an intangible language bridging the voices of three Asian women, interviewed extensively by Chan in Montreal in 2009. Building from this material, she drew over 100 images in red ink (a signifier of luck) depicting these immigrant stories, gradually amassing a collection of silent, animated portraits—singular elements quilted to convey a sense of comfort to the visitor, who may recognize her own narrative through that of a stranger.

In her installation practice, Hannah Claus strives to “[...] create sensorial landscapes that are meant to provoke a subtle re-thinking of boundaries and borders of cultural, historical and personal associations [and] a tension that highlights fragile and tenuous qualities inherent to the relationships between self and other. Repetition, accumulation and pattern suggest codes or languages that are meant to be deciphered. These provide a basis for expression, interpretation and express a desire for communication.”⁴ Claus draws on her personal history, notably her Mohawk roots, integrating references to natural elements as basic components of our physical world.

For *Elementary Particles* Claus proposes a collection of four clouds dispersed in space: sculptural volumes in 3-dimensions, but methodically executed in 2-dimensional planes, thereby referencing the techniques of drawing. Furthermore, her detailed schematics for each cloud are reminiscent of knitting patterns or musical scores, positioning her work on the edges of various creative disciplines.

Clouds are comprised of innumerable water molecules, invisible to the naked eye. From our earthbound vantage, they become unified forms, perfect examples of *pareidolias*: the tendency for the human eye to interpret vague forms as familiar shapes. Claus' materials of choice, ovals of semi-transparent film paper hanging like droplets on delicate filaments, are directly evocative of this phenomenon. As the artist articulates in writings about this work, translucent materials play with light and shadow, the tangible and the intangible.

Claus' clouds play on the tension between spatial and perceptual limits. On close inspection, we see individual ovals connected to strings; pulling back, the strings disappear and the ovals become masses. Looking around, these forms are deconstructed again in the shadows they throw on the walls and floor. This perceptual and formal shifting suggests the fragility, complexity and mutability of what we hold to be true.

Entering the gallery space of *Elementary Particles*, one must first navigate the delicacy of Claus' cloud installation. The smallest movement makes the ovals flutter, dispelling any illusions of solidity. Their surface sheen evokes light playing in the leaves of a tree, alluding to the “leaves” of Chan's earlier work, *On the Surface*. With these clouds, Claus manifests her belief that our actions impact people and events invisible to our eyes: a localized expression of chaos theory, the sky as one large communal space. Her inspiration for this work derives from the Iroquois creation teachings in which Sky Woman falls from the clouds, yielding a particular attention to the moment of suspension.