

Summoning

Yen-Chao Lin

January 25 - March 22, 2025

Alchemized, Strewn: Tracing Yen-Chao Lin's Summoning

An artist walks to the train tracks. She folds over and places a handful of pennies on the rails. She departs through the tall grass. An act of abrupt violence occurs when the train passes—or, we have to imagine this part. The pennies flattening and flying in an instant, their value stripped, alchemized, strewn. The artist returns to gather the coins, which requires finding them. Bent over, fingers traveling along wooden slats. The copper ovals slide into overall pockets and skirt folds. She travels them to her studio, where they will be further transformed, an annihilated currency restored as symbol. Every day, the artist repeats this act of consequence.

What glints in the sun such that we miss its shadow?

Yeo-Chao Lin's pendulum is zeroing-in on minerals in this, the final instalment of her triptych devoted to dowsing ("water witching"). Taking Canadian pennies—thousands of them—Lin flattens and hand-rivets them to form an organic line that traces the OBORO gallery in mid-air. The trail raises a shadow beneath it, made of enameled steel: a foot beneath, slightly offset. Viewed head on, the two thin lines appear like water snakes suspended in the water mid-swim. Serene, briefly in parallel, soon to cross.

As Above So Below. In an artist statement, Lin evokes "the jewel like copper and [its] underbelly," resource extraction. The Canadian penny, which was put out of currency in 2013 when it began costing 1.6 per coin, is not dissimilar to the Canadian railway system in terms of what it took from the earth, and from disenfranchised populations, to make. The tracks exploited Chinese labor workers (many of whom died due to inhuman work conditions) as they arterialized the shuttling of extracted resources such as wood, fuel oil, and metals. In 1876, the Indian Act provided the government with "the legal framework to privatize and appropriate Indigenous lands crossed by the rails, bringing violence, famine, and territory loss to the First Nations," as Lin writes. A long shadow heaves beneath the rails.

Magic surrounds these things, too. Pennies are for wishing on, a practice dating back to when we lived in fear of mercurial gods. There is a trail of pennies to feed the shadow in them. Then there is the practice of throwing coins in wells, believed to prevent them from running dry. If you find a bent penny, it's thought to be especially auspicious. Turning a penny over in your pocket at the sight of a new

moon brings financial success. Finding a penny from your birth year is extra fortunate—or, better yet, a penny after a rainstorm, thought to have fallen from the heavens.

It's this coaction of magic and shadow that envelops *The Spirit Keepers of Makuta'ay*, shot on location in the traditional Amis territory in Taiwan. In the super-8 film, Lin travels through villages that dot Taiwan's east coast. The talismans and environments of the Amis, the largest tribe of Indigenous inhabitants on the island of Taiwan, particularly captivate her lens, often framed through what's been lost. In a brief speaking part, a local tribeswoman describes how a site of incantation, Moon Cave, lost its power to overtourism. Lin has us listening to this as the camera flits around apertures to the sea, like the window of a ruin. The camera begins to rotate so quickly within the ruin that the window spins like a magic lantern, creating a reel. At its center is an always-moving and never-changing subject, a roiling sea.

Stillness, elsewhere, and wafting colour. Joss papers burn and a prayer flag flickers in the wind. So do feet, jittering in a ritual trance. Everything close-up, made sonorous with attention.

Lin was raised in a multifaith family in Taipei, with gatherings at Buddhist temples, the occasional energy healer and New Age conference, and a weekly punctuation of Sunday mass. In this quilted context, her penchant for working with materials and crafts like gilding, textile, copper enameling, glass, and metalsmithing, tells us something of the artist's attention to the aura of her media and

the histories that bond us to them. Certainly she tells us of the tactile interplay between that which cannot be seen, touched, or named, but is felt.

In *The Spirit Keepers*, Lin pictures fishnets likely belonging to the Amis fishermen of Makuta'ay (Haulian). The netting threshes in the wind. In another context this could be quipu, cords knotted to record events in the Inca period. As Lin scans up the distended trunks of betel nut trees, we have a similar sense of time being meted out in landscape.

In *A Tender Act*, Lin, inspired by the practice of identifying symbols in tea leaves, divined her fallen hair for two years. The work is light as it treads and shimmers in the mind as a provocation.

There is what happens, and what it costs. Action, reaction. A need, a taking, and what follows. A line to the train with one thing in hand, departing with another. Lin traces these interdependent lines, accentuating the hair's breadth that lies between them—that missed but assumed act that creates a deficit, a groove, a violence, a pattern.

What glints in the sun such that we miss its shadow?

— Sky Goodden

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