JENNIFER TEE: ETHER PLANE~MATERIAL PLANE
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Jennifer Tee: Ether Plane—Material Plane
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State Legislature.
Jennifer Tee first came to the attention of the International Studio & Curatorial Program when she was an artist-in-residence from January to December of 2012, a generous period of introduction to her multifaceted work. Six years later, she is developing her first solo presentation in the United States, working in close collaboration with curator Kari Conte and poet Jane Lewty. For Jennifer Tee: Ether Plane—Material Plane, the artist interweaves performativity, installation, ceramics, photography, and design into a mini-gesamtkunstwerk. She invites visitors to consider aspects of resistance—as a chemical process, as a form of political protest, as a way of asserting identity.

Though they seem to spring fully formed into existence, projects like this take in-depth preparation and support from many sides. We are grateful to the generous funders of this exhibition, starting with our longstanding cultural partners, the Mondriaan Fund, which has been sending residents to ISCP since 1999. Their dedication to transcultural exchange at ISCP continuously expands international awareness of Dutch contemporary art throughout each year, enriching New York arts communities while building professional networks for Dutch artists and curators through their interactions while in New York. Ether Plane—Material Plane was made possible by a Mondriaan Fund, Grant International Presentations, with further support from the Dutch Culture USA program of the Consulate General of the Netherlands in New York; New York City Council District 34; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council; and New York State Council on the Arts with the support of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo and the New York State Legislature. I offer special thanks to Robert Kloos, Deputy Head, Press & Cultural Affairs Department, Consulate General of the Netherlands in New York, for being a long-term advocate for ISCP and Dutch art.

Among the individuals who deserve our thanks are Jennifer Tee, for this wonderful presentation; Jane Lewty for suggesting such inspiring texts; Kari Conte for her adept development of Ether Plane—Material Plane; Karen Archey for her insightful essay, and Simone Couto, Luisa Kasalicky, Hera Haesoo Kim, Houda Lazrak and Tattfoo Tan for reading Lewty’s text in their native languages during the opening performance. ISCP is indebted to all of the collaborators and funders who have brought the exhibition and catalogue to fruition.
Jennifer Tee, *abstraction of a form, shape or presence* (3), 2016, glazed ceramic, $8 \frac{3}{16} \times 12 \frac{5}{8} \times 4 \frac{11}{16}$ in.

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam
Jennifer Tee most often orients her works horizontally, a lateral plane familiar to non-human animals, and less related to bipedal vertical humans, unless of course we are sleeping or dead. In Tee’s work, colorful knitted swathes often dot gallery floors, acting as ethereal planes. Terracotta swirls slither through them as if they were grassy knolls, while elsewhere glazed ceramic rings and oval spheres appear as outsized puka shells. This horizontal orientation says much about Tee’s interests and artistic strategy, suggesting a shift in both communication and perspective: the ineffable nature of exchange surrounding human subjectivity is seen in another light via the embodied communication of animals; the “worm’s eye” vantage afforded by lying on Tee’s floor-pieces offers a perspectival change, away from hegemonic vertical, wall-mounted, 60-inches-on-center artworks. Though subtle, these horizontal elements suggest a shift in viewership away from the traditional subject assumed by the museum: the white, vertical male. This research into new modes of communication, affectivity, and identity is termed by Tee “the soul in limbo.” She is particularly interested in liminality, whether in terms of race, gender, or even material states such as life and death.

Tee’s work *Ether Plane–Material Plane* further details this sense of liminality, specifically between the dead and the living. The piece was originally commissioned by Manifesta 11, which took place in Zurich, Switzerland in 2016 and was appropriately themed *What People Do for Money*. Manifesta 11 charged artists with collaborating with a local tradesperson to make a new work. Tee chose to work with undertaker Rolf Steinmann, head of the Zurich Funeral and Cemetery Office. Undertakers are among the few who professionalize the sad business of our transition from vertical to horizontal beings. The very term “undertaker” suggests that it is this person’s responsibility to take the body under the ground, into the earth. While working with the undertaker in Zurich, Tee bore witness to the enormous industry behind death. She saw Zurich’s six cremation ovens process approximately 35 bodies per morning as well as the uncannily banal nature of cadavers occupying the funeral home. The dead body, Tee thought, was accompanied by a sort of emptiness, freed from emotional baggage and other forms of damage. There was a peacefulness to it, but also brutality.
Ether Plane–Material Plane is an installation made up of various wall-mounted prints, with handmade ceramic elements, borrowed funerary artifacts, and floor fabric pieces nearby. To mirror the binary of life and death, Tee chose to work primarily in black and white, creating a monochromatic checkerboard pattern upon which she placed funerary artifacts. These artifacts were primarily sourced from Swiss collections originating in the Global South, such as ancient South American urns and African funeral masks. Through this pan-cultural panoply of ritual objects that relate to death, she suggests both death’s empirical uncertainty and the myriad ways in which every culture has attempted to come to terms with its mystery.

Along with Tee’s oval spheres split in black and white, there are other ambiguous spherical ceramic pieces, which appear as if they’ve been pinched in their portly middles. In actuality, these are imprints of human faces, which are then glazed and fired. Titled abstraction of a form, shape or presence, these spheres appear strangely akin to the funerary masks installed nearby, such as a nineteenth-century Tolai mask from Papua New Guinea. One can imagine the action that created the imprint, thereby filling the negative space suggested by the ceramic piece and conjuring a sort of ghostly presence. The title, abstraction of a form, shape or presence, is telling of Tee’s interest in the West’s deeply colonialist history of abstraction propagated by artists such as Hilma af Klint, Robert Rauschenberg, Paul Klee, and Wassily Kandinsky via trips to the Global South.

If we take Tee’s aesthetic usage of black and white throughout her work metaphorically, we can infer that she is conceptually interested in the grey areas—the difficult to define, the soul in limbo. If we think of social issues such as those related to race—particularly the white tendency to only understand people of color in terms of white or black, familiar or other—we come to the understanding that binary thinking may be a human defense mechanism. Stacked upon a Friso Kramer “Revolt” chair (its appearance quite benign, belying its name) is a collection of books that deal with the subject of liminality, whether in regards to the body or identity. The titles in the “Resist Stack of Books” range from the nineteenth century, such as Kate Chopin’s The Awakening (1899) and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter (1850), to twentieth-century classics such as Anthony Burgess’s A Clockwork Orange (1962) and Poems of the Black Object by Ronaldo Wilson (2009), to contemporary greats like Maggie Nelson’s Bluets (2009). A quick scan of the diverse collection of books reveals several threads: many references to color, such as black and blue, as evidenced by the titles above, as well as personal narratives on dealing with adversity, specifically how sociological phenomena like race are felt through lived experience. In Tee’s practice, color—be it skin color, or blue for depression, obsession, etc.—is a motif from which resistance is formed. Tee has diligently read through all of these books and marked them, and in many of her exhibitions invigilators or performers read through them. In some instances, Tee collaborates with poet Jane Lewty to write the Resist Text, a poem that appropriates passages from the Resist Stack of Books, which is then read aloud in the exhibition space. Viewers are invited to lie down on Tee’s knitted works and take in the text on a horizontal plane.

Experiencing Tee’s work, one is aware of the immense amount of detail found in her work, from the knots making up the knitted zones, to an hours-long choreography, to the hundreds of thousands of words in the Resist Stack of Books. The result of this labor-intensive practice is a sense of multivocality that conveys the ineffability of feeling unsettled or in between. Tee’s practice points to feminized and sometimes exoticized and racialized art forms, usually relegated to craft: weaving, pottery and ceramics, knitting, and large-scale flower harvesting and drying. It is through her very collaborative, historically informed practice of making that Tee’s work finds its voice to embody the ineffable.
“The soul in limbo is restless and alive, and caught in an unnamed place—a conceptual, mental, psychological, and physical space—on the border between the here and the possible.” — Jennifer Tee

In 2012, dancer Miri Lee edged her way around the lines of a loosely knitted wool floorpiece in ISCP’s gallery for artist Jennifer Tee’s performance work *A woman’s mind might resemble a room*. Octagonal in shape, the hand-dyed textile was produced by Tee in collaboration with craftswoman Sahara Briscoe, and acted as a stage for Lee’s choreography. Contained by the perimeter of the textile, Lee’s movements communicated directly with the floorpiece, with each step following its intricate lines and threads. Her smooth and continuous dance always remained within the borders of the floorpiece, seeming to exist in an enclosed psychological space. Tee and Lee intuitively connected object and performance, space and body, in a transcendent gesture for the audience.

Six years later, Tee once again activated ISCP’s gallery through performance. *Piece Resistance* took place during twenty minutes of the opening reception for her solo exhibition *Ether Plane—Material Plane*. A collaboration between Tee and poet Jane Lewty, a live reading in six languages was drawn from a library of books they compiled together that consider personal and social change from the position of resistance. The twenty books that form this library are stacked in the exhibition space on a wood and metal Revolt chair by Dutch designer Friso Kramer, with the resulting work titled *Revolt chair with stack of books*. Regarded as highly innovative when it was first produced in 1953, the chair was selected by Tee for both its form and reference to the forceful ideas articulated in the collection of books.

For *Piece Resistance*, Lewty and five performers read aloud the performance text, which was collaged from lines written by Lewty as well as lines excerpted from nine of the books in the library (plus a single line from Joan Didion’s 1979 *The White Album*). Parts of the text were translated into the native tongues of the performers—English, French, German, Korean, Malay and Portuguese. Beginning with the Didion quote “Ten watercolors were made from that star,” first read by Lewty, its translated equivalent was then recited by the five other performers.
Jennifer Tee, *A woman’s mind might resemble a room*, 2012, live performance at ISCP with dancer Miri Lee
The complete written text (which follows on the next pages), ruminates on finding the courage to make change in the world, in both a personal and universal way, and the quest for survival while doing so. Audience members could not decipher much of the text—maybe two or three of the languages—however, the reading allowed those present to access the texts in another way, through the sensibilities and interpretations of the performers, who made the unfamiliar perceptible.

Holding numerous books of fiction, memoirs and poetry—published between 1850 and 2017—many of the texts in the library evoke a particular color, either as motif or subject, implying the ways in which color can symbolize actions and emotions connected with resistance and struggle. Visitors are invited to read the books throughout the duration the exhibition. Mostly by American and British authors, they range from classic novels such as Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899) and James Baldwin’s *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), to more contemporary fiction including Rebecca Skloot’s *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks* (2010) and Han Kang’s *The Vegetarian* (2007), to poetry books by Mai Der Vang and Ronaldo Wilson. The ills of society are laid bare in the books, including the undeniable injustices of sexism, racism, classism, colonialism and homophobia, to name a few. There are also stories of extraordinary triumph over adversity: the fight of the disenfranchised against oppression, moral struggles against societal pressures, freedom and women’s rights, enduring traumatic childhoods, political opposition, and the plight of refugees.

Next to the *Revolt chair with stack of books*, Tee introduces a new floorpiece topped with four glazed ceramic rings to ISCP’s gallery. *Crystalline floorpiece / Deca* (2017), is also made of hand-dyed wool with the same colorful geometry as the one Lee danced on in 2012. Except in *Ether Plane–Material Plane*, the floorpiece is not included as a stage for dance, but as a crystal-shaped platform for viewers to read the resistance books on, and a space for meditation, contemplation and ritual. Abstraction and the sublime are joined together in the floorpiece, and Tee takes inspiration from a host of American art historical and vernacular references. These include Agnes Martin’s lifelong gridded works, Judy Chicago’s 1960’s *Pasadena Lifesavers* series which airbrushed octagonal shapes onto acrylic, Frank Stella’s irregularly-shaped canvases, as well as American quilts and Navajo textiles.

It’s the magic and spiritual in abstraction that links the floorpiece to the spatial center of the exhibition, *Ether Plane–Material Plane*, an elaborate installation that is also the namesake of the entire show (and discussed in depth in Karen Archey’s essay in this volume). The installation *Ether Plane–Material Plane* brings the legacy of Hilma af Klint into focus. A mystic and artist, af Klint was a European foremother of abstraction, her early twentieth-century paintings evoked her attendance of seances, and theosophical studies. Tee’s immersive and interdependent environment is equally influenced by spiritual practices and rituals. Two grid-like structures are designed to display a series of photographs alongside handmade ceramic sculptures, with each object placed at varied heights, like pins on a map. Uniting abstraction with the uncanny, the photographs show non-Western funerary objects alongside Tee’s own ceramics, punctuated by explosions of fire and smoke. The ceramics include spheres, wavy lines that resemble serpents and a single resist shape, which was created by pummeling the clay (one can also think of the title’s association with the resist wax technique used in ceramics). Here, Tee overlaps cultures, identities and objects without creating a hierarchy, giving equal weight to the spiritual dimensions of the found objects that she depicts, and her own ceramics, photographs, floorpieces, and display structures.

Exploring the relationship between spirit and matter, soul and body, the exhibition animates the inanimate. In this complex project, all nature and culture—and the objects within it—come alive. Tee gives the viewer a space for transformation, to reflect not only on what keeps womankind going, but also on what keeps us in a state of awe. *Ether Plane–Material Plane* is a world within itself, as much as a total art work, and spending time with it is like walking through a forest with a deluge of life-sustaining elements where things are never as they appear, and where numerous worlds exist side-by-side, some more visible than others.
Jennifer Tee (left) in her ISCP studio with Chennie Huang, 2012

Jennifer Tee, Revolt chair with stack of books, 2018, twenty books and Revolt chair, 33 1/2 × 20 1/2 × 20 in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam
PIECE RESISTANCE
A montage in English, German, Korean, French, Malay and Portuguese
Jane Lewty

1 Ten watercolors were made from that star
1 Dix aquarelles ont été faites par cette étoile
1 Warna air sepuluh buatan bintang
1 저 별로부터 수색(水彩)이 만들어졌다.
1 Zehn Wasserfarben wurden aus diesem Stern gemacht
1 Desta estrela foram feitas dez acuarelas.

2 There is movement around us.
2 The opening of space.
2 Tranquil light, shaken walls.
2 Here is a message: Resist the suggestion that you must be cautious in this world
2 Du darfst nicht zaghaft in dieser Welt sein
2 이곳에서
2 Neste mundo

3 Examine everything carefully; adhere to that which is good
3 if you are curious you might never come home.
3 Si tu es prudent, il est possible que tu ne pourras rentrer chez toi
3 Jikalau berwaspada, mungkin kau tidak akan pulang ke rumah
3 Jikalau selalunya ingin tahu, mungkin kau tidak akan pulang ke ruma

4 The curious are always in some danger.
4 If a color [can] deliver hope, does it follow that it [can] also bring despair?
4 When in limbo, what is a color?
4 A color is red, it is blue, it is mostly red.
4 It is blazing yellow
4 Peacock Butterfly

5 18
19
20
21
22
19
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21
22

Shiny Ochre
Mauritius Blue
Speckled Red
Cherry red, mostly red

공작나비
Glänzender Ocker
Bleu Maurice
Merah berbintik.
Vermelho cereja, principalmente vermelho

a body must be lifeproof, we assume,
as if life were bound
by laws of gravity,
Everywhere is everywhere, will we ever get used to
What has been undone
From making, digging, filing, burning, making, making capital
And more:
Countries use their weapons
Deportations were drawn up and now they happen
How can ceasefire be defined
Words like fugitive, defective, criminal, are flickering
They are like fire
Indiscriminate
Women are told they end life
I know they sit in despair, watching shadows edge across every day in advance
How does the center of us hold?
A thing becomes useless if it is bent out of shape.
I bear such weight, bear such desire.
Hear it in my head, eventually audible. I become a woman all set
In survival mode.
No estado de sobrevivência.
En mode de survie.

What is home
To where you return or are exiled from, and then call it so?
A place on a map has a border, and borders.
If a color [can] deliver hope, does it follow that it [can]
also bring despair?
When in limbo, what is a color?
A color is red, it is blue, it is mostly red.
It is blazing yellow
Peacock Butterfly

What is wet sand in a solid piece?
How does it really feel? Is it a limb thickening?
Jennifer Tee, *Ether Plane…Material Plane*, 2016, Epson Hot Press pigment print mounted on $\frac{3}{8}$ in. sintra, $23 \frac{3}{8} \times 23 \frac{3}{8}$ in. Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam
Look at my legs thickening, and ask me to show you the wind.

Resist the illusion that anything is complete.
Resist the need to draw tumor-like shapes, or a face.
Resist the joy of those who have won.

Paint yourself with ash from the last branch.
The world moves with you in gradients of orange and red.

Grip your own hand—if the waves are blue, then you
might retrieve your stroke and strike more

On good days, the resistance is plural.
The water propels us into the sweet calm borderless deep

We circle silently/about the wreck/we dive into the hold
I am she: I am he I am they

Wir kreisen leise/über das Wrack/wir tauchen in den Schiffsräum/Ich bin sie: Ich bin er

Diamnya kami mengelilingi/perihal kecelakaan/selamnya kami ke dalam ruang/saya dia

우리는 부서진 파편들 주변을 마다 없이 돈다. 우리는 그 중심으로 뛰어 듭니다.

Nous tournons en silence/autour de l’épave/nous plongeons dans le fort/je suis elle: je suis il

Nós circulamos silenciosamente/sobre a desgraça/ruína/nós mergulhamos até ao fundo/Eu sou ela: Eu sou ele

Said to ourselves in secret, and hoped for elsewhere
Think of the danger, think of the ruin
Not of sky but skin,

If one says ‘Calm down’ or ‘Relax’ to a crass black object, that object will operate much like a

flag at the end of a wind’s tether

Imagine a storm

Bayangkan ribut.
Imagine uma tempestade
Stell dir einen Sturm vor

Sound-waves of speech or intent leased out, spread and becoming your life.

So many targets
Bound, bordered, and worn out. Worn out.

Resist all, resist the. Resist the foregone, resist the urge to disappear.

Embrace those who have lost. Resist the innuendo that you must be cautious.

We resisted the warning

Resisted asking, what land have we taken? Who is no longer free?

Who even comes close?

Quelle terre avons-nous prise, à qui appartient cette terre que nous avons prise?

À qui appartient cette terre que nous avons prise, que nous avons prise?

Quelle terre avons-nous prise, la terre à qui?

What if there’s an end to everything?

The singleness of every minute counted down

And we die silent, eventually

Along with masses

Unfathomable

On peninsulas, in cities, rooms of yellow paper, blacked-out windows

Red cloth, blue paint

The singleness of every minute counted down

After heat a cold like nothing else felt

The cold like nothing else felt

The cold, the sand, the sea, the bombs

The colors, the sound

The cold like nothing else felt. Like limbo.

마치 림보처럼, 아무 것도 느껴지지 않았던 차가운 공기.

Die Kälte, wie nichts Anderes empfunden. Wie Schweben.

Suhu sejuk seolah tidak pernah dirasai. Seolah limbo.

Like limbo, what of limbo?

Hecate, the goddess of intermediate states

Of thresholds, of crossroads

Of travelers who have lost their way

The so-called restless

Those access two worlds

Who hover, who say

when the sea turns back

it will leave my shape behind

quando o mar retrocede

ele deixa a minha forma para trás

quand la mer retourne,

elle laissera ma forme

There is an arc of horizon

Between the meridian of a place

A circle passing through the object observed

Close, near, far. As if to say

I was there.

I was very much here.

As if to say, I never stay long in the place I arrive.

I resist that horizon

I prefer a star that makes colors:

Cadmium red hue

Bleu Céleste

타이타늄 백색

Avignon Orange

Burnt Ochre

Burgundy Violet

Celadon Green

Goldener See

The resistance is plural.

The bones unknitted, the flesh unweaving love.

A voice saying, my voice saying, our voice

I will wear out my own, I don’t mind if my voice stays here only here.

My body pulled from its skin and back again

Thinking I am old, this will hurt and leave, leave and return.
I don’t believe in still things but those that move
And spiral to earth together
Those that make a coherent storm. Show me the wind.
This is how I would like to live if I could choose.

I resist those who do not regard history.

Aku rintangkan mereka yang tidak mengiktiraf sejarah.
Je résiste à ceux qui ne regardent l’histoire
Resisto aqueles que não consideram a história
Ich widerstehe denen, die nicht die Geschichte sehen
나는 역사를 간직하는 그들에게 저항한다.

I resist those who do not regard history.
I resist the opinion that we cannot rise from the space
of ambivalence we made between
Rise like the oceans ahead in the years
of our dreams
that are not dreams.

Jane Lewty’s PIECE RESISTANCE borrows its structure, refrain, and certain lines (5, 46, 48, 67) from the architect Lebbeus Woods’s “Stop Obeying! Resistance Checklist” (1993), a manifesto that aimed to overturn preconceived notions of established order—material, political and personal. Phrases in quotation marks and italics are collaged from the following “Resist” books compiled by Jennifer Tee and Jane Lewty:

*The White Album* by Joan Didion (line 1)
*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* by Jeanette Winterson (line 10)
*Bluets* by Maggie Nelson (line 14)
*Blackacre* by Monica Youn (lines 23–25, 39)
*Afterland* by Mai Der Vang (lines 49–50)
*I Am Flying into Myself* by Bill Knott (lines 51–52, 115)
*Diving into the Wreck* by Adrienne Rich (lines 55–56, 123)
*Poems of the Black Object* by Ronaldo Wilson (lines 60–61)
*The Black Unicorn* by Audre Lorde (lines 94–95)
Jennifer Tee (born 1973) lives and works in Amsterdam. Tee was awarded the 2015 Cobra Art Prize. Recent solo exhibitions include *Let it Come Down*, Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, and Camden Arts Centre, London; *Tulip Palepai*, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; *The Soul in Limbo*, 6th Cobra Art Prize, Cobra Museum, Amstelveen; *Occult Geometry*, Signal, Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; *Heart Ferment*, Galerie Fons Welters, Amsterdam; *Practical Magic*, Project Art Centre Gallery, Dublin; *Local Myths*, Eastside Projects, Birmingham; and *Nameless Swirls, an Unfolding in Presence*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.