



## Main Space

Xpace Cultural Centre  
2-303 Lansdowne Ave  
Toronto ON M6K 2W5  
416 849 2864  
Tuesday-Saturday 12-6  
[www.xpace.info](http://www.xpace.info)

Jessica Jang

### ***Cloud Hands***

April 6 – May 5 , 2018

Jessica Jang, current MFA candidate at the University of Guelph, makes a departure from her usual drawing and painting practice to explore sculpture in the form of *Cloud Hands*. Loosely borrowing from feng shui (also called Chinese geomancy) principles and rock scholarship, Jang explores her identity and Chinese heritage through traditions reinterpreted within a gallery setting. Marrying different Taoist practices, Jang creates a space that encourages mindful reflection and meditation.

The title *Cloud Hands* is taken from a grappling or defensive Tai Chi movement of the same name.<sup>1</sup> Tai Chi promotes the understanding of the body as separate from the self – an inanimate object that is capable of being transformed by directing and channelling the life force or qi (pronounced *ch'i*).<sup>2</sup> The pairing of words "Cloud" and "Hands" conveys the poetics of transformation in this instance, as the relationship between the hands being simultaneously of

---

<sup>1</sup> Tai Chi, a meditative martial arts practice with slow flowing positions, called movements

<sup>2</sup> Finlayson, Caitlin C. "Performativity and the Art of Tai Chi: Understanding the Body as Transformative." *Southeastern Geographer*, vol. 55, no. 3, 2015, pp. 362–376.

the body and yet also inanimate objects.<sup>3</sup> The theme of transformation is recurrent throughout *Cloud Hands*, from the paintings on the wall, to the presence of floor seating; Jang is encouraging active engagement or an experience rather than passive viewership.

While recognizing that her understanding of feng shui is far from complete, Jang is intrigued by both the idea of energy moving between animate and inanimate objects as well as the poetic nature of Chinese philosophy. Employing papier-mâché and a muted colour palette, Jang has created a series of objects that represent Chinese scholar's rocks, which are often used in feng shui as a way of manifesting auspicious energies into a space. Complete with small guardians to prevent the blockage of energy associated with corners, Jang's installation attempts to mimic the harmony with natural forms typically found in Chinese geomancy. The paintings on the walls serve to illustrate energetic dynamism, shape shifting and highlight the importance of geology and clouds.<sup>4</sup>

In the complex practice of feng shui, qi is cyclical and the balance of Yin-Yang maintains vital energy. Qi provides life and supports prosperity. It is preserved underground, rises up in the form of wind, descends in the form of rain, flows in the form of rivers and is present in all natural forms.<sup>5</sup> Caves and crevasses present in mountains act as the channels through which qi flows and these in turn offer a view into the source of nature's life force. Areas that have a complex combination of these elements nearby are considered favourable and are sought after for various purposes, including the building of homes, important buildings and burial sites. However, these conditions can be replicated to invite

---

<sup>3</sup> Jessica Jang, in conversation with the author, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Jessica Jang, in conversation with the author, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

<sup>5</sup> Yoon, Hong-Key. "The Image of Nature in Geomancy." *GeoJournal*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1980, pp. 341–348. The author acknowledges that this is an over-simplified explanation of a highly sophisticated and well-established cultural practice.

or maintain fortune in contemporary dwellings and workspaces by bringing in elements, such as scholar's stones, which traditionally represent mountains. These stones are typically smooth with holes, signifying caves, which invite contemplation on the power of nature and flow of energies.<sup>6</sup> Collected by those of high status and privilege, they are often small and displayed indoors on wooden bases specifically carved for each unique rock. Larger stones are found lying directly on the ground in harmoniously arranged gardens.

The "rocks" of *Cloud Hands* have been created with pocks and recesses and are much lighter and less precious than their traditional counterparts. By creating these objects out of common craft materials, the artist deconstructs the traditional value structures associated with them. Nonetheless, Jang has stayed true to tradition insofar as the stones are presented with fabric-covered bases. Additionally, the artist's placement of meditative cushions also invites visitors to view the installation from the ground. A lower vantage point provides the optimal view of the background paintings, scholar's rocks and guardians, encircling the viewer in a harmonious environment with "quiet" colours.<sup>7</sup> This change in perspective is an intentional offer of both a literal change in perspective and an exercise in grounded meditation. When sitting, the viewer becomes more closely connected with the source of qi, opening up the possibility of channelling positive and calming vital energy. Similarly, by viewing the work from below, the western idea of the gallery as a liminal space, designed for detached and passive experience, is challenged by the active recognition of the flow of energies between animate and inanimate objects.

---

<sup>6</sup> Stomberg, John. "Zhan Wang: Urban Landscape." *Gastronomica*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2007, pp. 9–11.

<sup>7</sup> Jessica Jang, in conversation with the author, April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018.

Jang invites the viewer to join her in an exploration of challenging western notions of viewership and methods of reading artworks by introducing a setting for a philosophical experience. By combining her understanding of both western and eastern practices, Jang helps to bridge a gap between typical western art subjectivities and Chinese philosophical practices. When viewed from the ground and taking the opportunity to mindfully slow down, the artist anticipates that visitors might experience time differently. Additionally, experiencing the installation may stimulate philosophical and personal questions, leading to a potentially transformative experience.

-Vicki Clough