

Making Spheres - Undoing is to be doing
Words by Genie Lee, edited by Anna Walker

The concept of Oku echoes through my practice. The Japanese postulated in the existence of Oku as an innermost area found at the core of a high-density space around which multiple layers are organized like an onion. In my work the dense space at the center of each sphere is formed of stones or fragments, around which I wrap layers of recycled fabrics. This starting core becomes a catalyst to the finished object as it emanates its own specific vibration, which sometimes consists of a symbolic word, or the sound perhaps of a bell, or natural products like seeds, rice, or earth. Evocative objects that stimulate an ongoing and organic process where the inner core shifts to the outer space through winding, eventually becoming the skin, the peel, or the substance of protection wrapped around the inner feeling.

The process of making begins with the ripping and cutting of fabrics into strips. This is followed by the 'winding stage', which is about birthing and growing the sculpture step by step into its spherical shape. A tangible physical transformation, from the two-dimensional plane to a three-dimensional one, in which the making becomes an active performance moving through the cardinal points, north, south, east and west. The plasticity and softness of the textiles inspires the winding. It is an intoxicating action that feels like I am participating in a universal growth. I use plastic waste and a variety of other fabrications to enfold the core - unpicking bubble wrap from parcels, tearing used sheets into strips - bland and used materials that no longer have a defined function re-used to shape fresh intentions. The re-using of materials resembles the resurrecting of my memories.

As a small child I witnessed a process of recycling. During the Second World War, deep in rural France where my Jewish family was hiding, the local black-gowned grand mother having lost her mental bearings was kept busy knitting an ever-unfinished scarf from recycled bits of wool. Her work, like Penelope's, was unravelled at night to be picked up once more in the morning. Through the making of Spheres and Assemblages I rekindle this memory. The process seems to be about undoing and doing, the working and reworking of materials, whilst scavenging art history for subjective associations. It has become compulsive, a feminine impulse where the binding becomes an intensely satisfying ritual. During the physical shaping and holding of the materials between my hands I *sense* my way through the making of each sphere, developing each one into its own unique form.

The contemporary artist Christo tackles wrapping on an enormous scale. My work so far has been modest in size but ambitious in its intention and meaning. The sphere reveals itself as a feminine shape. It aspires to manifest as an ancestral icon through a variety of appearances. Some spheres have an organic and earthly presence, others a more conceptual aspect, and some have not yet divulged their purpose, being still in the embryonic stage. I refer to these as Orbs.

The making comes from a mysterious place deep inside. When working with Spheres I find myself questioning creation symbolism, Adam and Eve, the temptation of the apple and the eating of the forbidden fruit – though the work has little to do with the fruit itself but for its shape, is it perhaps “The re-mythologizing of consciousness through art... one way that our culture can regain a sense of enchantment”? (*Suzi Gablick, The Re-enchantment of Art, 1991*)

What is more beautiful than the shape of a sphere? It is an angle free object of possibility, a response to Nature's impulse towards wholeness, the shape of our planet. I feel as if I am tapping into a fundamental magical shape, that of the Earth and other planets, making it my own and reviving its potential. To 'bind' the sphere seems akin to a shamanic pilgrimage into a magical ancient past wherein the language of the ancestors helps locate our potential. For 'what is the modern conception of pure art? It is to create a suggestive magic which contains subject and object, the external world and the artist himself.' *Baudelaire*