



Tea is more than a beverage. Serving and receiving tea is an artform deeply rooted in the customs and traditions of many world cultures.

Since 1997, I have been collecting hundreds of used teabags to construct sculptural forms and create large-scale room installations. The use of tea stain as a medium and the use of teabags as raw material provide endless possibilities for me as I explore my identity, memory and the notion of time. I am a Japanese-born artist living and working in south Texas since 1992.

Drinking tea is a centuries-old daily ritual that plays many roles in daily life: to start a day, to greet guests, and in my culture its purpose is also to cleanse one's soul and body. Tea has been given as a gift to celebrate and bestow a healthy long life. My interest surrounding tea is the time-shared, mutual respect between host and guest, and memories of the moment as an event. I am interested in how these moments are prepared; how each person comes together to connect with one another. I have begun recording these events that have taken place at my home, at restaurants, artist studios, or at airports--wherever and whenever I have been a witness to tea-centered events.

Although I am from Japan, I have lived in America long enough that my identity and my notion of home have been obscured. Since 'home' is something of an imaginary place for me, it has become a significant force in my work as I explore its shape with manipulation of materials. I work here with hundreds of brewed and then dried teabags. Each opened teabag, devoid of tea, has a distinguishing stain, an imprint that evokes multiple images; at times it appears to be a distant forest, and another time it resembles the shroud of Turin. As my hands quilt the bags, my mind moves in a journey through time and space. Gradually, a shape silently emerges from the thousands of layered and stitched teabags--an image, perhaps, of a house existing neither in real time nor space, or of a ship leaving one place to return to another.

Lately, I have been intrigued by the process, which involves not only collecting tea bags but also cleaning, pressing, developing patterns, and quilting them, and repeating the entire cycle over and over and over again. These constructions often provoke an exchange of questions and answers within my mind. "Where does the shape come from? Is this a shape of my Japan? If so, it must have been born within me."

Hundreds of used tea bags are required for large projects, and in the past, these have engaged a wide community-based effort. The greater the numbers of tea bags, the more hands are needed. I have found such collaborative projects empowering. As bees build their nest and ant colonies construct a complex large community, so the idea of constructing a form from the singular tea bag contribution to the multiple end result is fascinating. The core of the collaboration is an idea so fundamental yet profound: one teabag at a time. One teabag transforms into hundreds, and ultimately grows to become thousands--as the number increases the scope and nature of the collaboration expands. Each participant experiences being a part of something incredibly large--so large and powerful that its entire nature is almost impossible to comprehend. In other words, the whole "Tea Culture" is within us. Each one of us creates our culture. We are the seed for the "Tea Culture".