

In early September I visited the Song Dong exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art on a free Friday. The crowd level was high but it was worth it to see the reactions of many to this very interesting exhibit by Song Dong. Dong was born in 1966 in Beijing, China. He has been working with conceptually based art and does many interesting installations with common objects, and much of his work alludes to the passing of time.

The exhibit at MOMA was titled Project 90: Song Dong, and featured the entire contents of his mother's home. The collection of objects spans fifty years and is truly every object that one could find in a common home, minus some of the more perishable items. The installation was based and similar to others held around the world entitled "Waste Not." The concept that has come about in Chinese culture of "wu jin qi yong" that creates a feeling of security in personal possessions. The comparable feeling to this is frequent in our lives as well, having a band-aid on hand if needed or having the perfect pair of shoes to wear in the rain. It seems perhaps to go a little farther than this in Chinese culture where that you keep material possessions for as long as you can, mending them thus ensure that you can always have these objects as needed.

The installation itself was displayed in which that the center was a hut or a home and the objects spiraled out of this area. So as an observer to this exhibition you had to wind your way through a very detailed display of these possessions. The objects were grouped together by use, generally within small squares laid out on the floor. However, it did not seem as if the objects next to one another were interrelated in any way. Some of the methods for display ranged from a typical stack to an intricate fold of some cloth to make various shapes. Many of the visitors on the day that I visited, were exclaiming that it was

very similar to a yard sale, which it is very easy to see that comparison. There are no labels though on any of the objects and mostly they are not displayed in a way that makes them easy to see. Also beyond the soda bottles, it would be difficult to claim that most anything here was aesthetically beautiful.

As you leave the center of the house you are directed into the next gallery through more of the objects, they do grow in size as you are heading out as well. For example, some of the large items include couches, desks, large cardboard boxes, stuffed animals, and much more. At the very top of the ceiling as you leave the exhibit in Chinese characters the phrase; “Don’t worry Mum and we are fine” is displayed in blue neon. Song Dong worked with his Mom in creating this exhibit and the collection of these possessions seems built on this sense of worry. The unstable nature of life and also the government in China really comes through with this message that is for the most part lost on the non-Chinese fluent visitors. There were no brochures, flyers, activity sheets, or handouts for this installation; I was informed by security that there was a book for sale in the gift shop though.

The ephemera in the exhibit were surprisingly less apparent than I expected. The first ephemera objects that I found were pharmaceuticals including toothpaste tubes, pill boxes, pill bottles, shampoo, etc... These seemed to be pretty dirty and dusty for the most part and perhaps spoke to the level of how much was kept even when not necessary. Following that there was a collection of gift and packaging boxes, which was interesting, I saw these more as representing the popular culture changes and overall span of time. Similarly inside the hut/home there were two groups of objects, one being shopping bags, which were layered on top of one another and the other a collection of soda bottles and cans. The shopping bags were perhaps the most ephemeral concept object in the entire installation; the bags were a great selection of colors and different stores. The bags in

conjunction with the soda bottles seemed to directly symbolize consumption and capitalism, maybe the influence of America on China.

Ultimately, the exhibit was a great use of common every day to create a very thought provoking art display. The ephemera use was a bit sparing, but it did add to the ability to date the objects and also displays the amount of common fleeting objects that were kept by Song's mother. Also, the overall organization of the exhibit was quite inspirational because of the intricate nature of the placement of so many objects and also the juxtaposition of many of these unrelated possessions. Song Dong's exhibit perhaps did not immediately garner many fans the evening I went to MOMA, but it definitely did create a stir.