

Jacqueline Qiu: *Burying Flowers*

Artist Statement

Burying Flowers

葬花 zànghuā translates to bury flowers. 葬 zàng's components are organized from top to bottom, as grass 艹, death 死, and two hands 扌. I understand this character pictorially as the first person perspective of a burial. My hands at the bottom edge of sight, the dead material central, and grass coming from above covering it with soil.

The show title conflates a famous scene from the 18th-century novel 《红楼梦》*Hongloumeng*, where a character gathers fallen petals in a silk pouch to bury them in the ground, and the Shanidar IV "flower burial" in northern Iraq. In the 1960s, when archaeologist Ralph Solecki discovered clumps of pollen underneath a Neanderthal adult male skeleton, researchers surmised he had been buried atop a bed of flowers.

The Neanderthal flower burial has since been reevaluated. The modern hypothesis is that nesting solitary bees and other animals carried pollen from nearby flowers—perhaps new life feasted on the meat. In my mind, the initial theory, the misunderstanding, and the updated explanation all effuse their own beauty.

My weaving practice is a record of time, and if I prescribe to a linear sense of time, it is of passed time. The works are relics, they are altar cloths for the immaterial and material alike, and a form of burial rite in and of itself. The warp is (by the standards of industrial weaving or weaving for practical use) thoroughly disrespected. Its structure asks for repetition, pattern, and consistency, but I cinch edges, leave space while building surfaces, and let threads hang loose. I am wary of finishing the work, even though it is preordained by the length of cut thread and the size of the weaving loom. Each weaving is a tactiley encoded document over months time, a conversation between control and play. The watercolors follow a similar philosophy, but are embodied in a temporality where time without labor lets pigment settle and dry on paper fiber.

One day, about the middle of the third month, carrying a copy of The Western Chamber he strolled after breakfast across the bridge above Seeping Fragrance Lock. There he sat down on a rock to read under a blossoming peach-tree. He had just reached the line

Red petals fall in drifts

when a gust of wind blew down such a shower of petals that he and his book were covered with them and the ground nearby was carpeted with red. Afraid to trample on the flowers if he shook them off, Pao-yu gathered them into the skirt of his gown and carried them to the water's edge where he shook them into the brook. They floated and circled there for a while, then drifted down the River of Seeping Fragrance.

Going back, he found the ground still strewn with blossoms and was wondering how to dispose of these when a voice behind him asked:

"What are you doing here?"

He turned and saw Tai-yu, a hoe over one shoulder, a gauze bag hanging from the hoe, and a broom in her hand.

"You're just in time to sweep up these petals and throw them into the water," cried Pao-yu. "I've just thrown in a pile."

"Not into the water," objected Tai-yu. "It may be clean here, but once it flows out of these grounds people empty all sorts of dirt and filth into it. The flowers would still be spoiled. I've a grave for flowers in that corner over there. I'm sweeping them up and putting them in this silk bag to bury them there. In time they'll turn back into soil. Wouldn't that be cleaner?"

Pao-yu was delighted by this idea.

From the characters' interaction in this scene, I understand flowers as an analogue for transitory attachments. Tai-yu's ritual is a metaphor and a wish to give illusory, worldly experiences a sanitized and fair mourning. Fortunately or not, I have yet sometime to be enlightened... so I gather petals and see how they'll change.

Without the grass radical, 亾 *huà* is a verb meaning

1 change; turn; transform

2 convert; influence

3 melt; dissolve

4 digest

5 burn up

6 die

7 [as a verb suffix] -ize; -ify

All this is contained in a flower 花 *huā*.