

PROLOGUE: LOCAL MYTHS

Gavin Wade, 2010

In: *Local Myths / Love Spells*, Eastside projects

Local myths are being shaped. They are emerging, taking root and receding as localised wishes, ideas, propositions, tweets, business deals, partnerships, consortia, master plans, city parks, cultural quarters, media villages, studio buildings, high speed rail links, education campuses, academies and marketing campaigns, taxi repair centres, limo hire firms, car parks, coach stations, cash machines, cafes, nightclubs, museums and autumn festivals. Local myths are forming as I write this and we are part of them. Jennifer Tee is part of them. Her artwork is one of them.

Jennifer Tee's exhibition *Local Myths* at Eastside Projects acts as the gravitational heart of this book, *Local Myths / Love Spells*. The shift between the enigmatic phrases "Local Myths" and "Love Spells" also reflects the dramatic shifts between the forms of exhibition and book. Tee's symbolic, synthetic, even fantastic works take on many diverse forms and ideological positions willfully manifested as unlikely exotic sculptural installations, performances and bookworks. It was through Jennifer's startlingly sumptuous book *E*V*O*L E*Y*E-LAND*S* END* that I first discovered her work and made a compelling connection between her dialogue with language, design and sculptural forms, her collaboration with the designer Richard Niessen, and our own collaborative and holistic enterprise of forging an artist run space as a public gallery. It was perhaps inevitable then that with our shared passions for the designed and printed form that we would attempt such an eccentric and special publication as this that you hold in your hands. It is with huge pleasure that we are able to introduce Jennifer Tee's work, in all its glory, to the UK in her first solo exhibition here and to continue the international dissemination of the work through this distinctive book.

Tee's synthesis of newly commissioned and key recent sculptural works typically creates a unique moment, alignment, or constellation of forms. Drawing on her travel and production over roughly a year and a half works have been produced during a residency at Hudson Valley Centre for Contemporary Art, Peekskill, New York in 2009, and time spent at Jackson Li's Sanbao Ceramic Art Institute at Jingdezhen in 2009 and 2010 for the Shanghai Expo. The restaging and combining of many different works is enthusiastically pursued in the formatting of this book which encourages the taking apart of individual elements throughout, slotted into the main body structure of the book, and potentially reordering or viewing in other configurations and in other settings. Many of the inserted elements of the book have works both front and back and

a number of the inserts fold out into A3 and A2 sized posters containing works specially made for this book by Tee, Niessen and James Langdon who is both a director of Eastside Projects and our industrious and inventive designer. Langdon has typeset this text using the new font he commissioned from Radim Pesko for Eastside Projects. Langdon has encouraged Pesko to accentuate elements of the font in response to both the gallery and to Tee's work and the idiosyncrasies of her name, hence the variations on the letter 'e' and its doubling. The font will carry traces of Tee's time spent at the gallery but will continue to evolve with new iterations responding to future projects here. The final device as an insert in this publication is Monika Szewczyk's narrative essay which takes us through the production story of each of the works explored within *Local Myths / Love Spells*. Szewczyk gained an in depth view of Tee's work during the commissioning process of Tee's Star-Crossed project for the Shanghai Expo, which Szewczyk and Nicholas Schafhausen curated for Witte de With, Rotterdam.

It is the intention of this book then to pick up on the notion of universes within universes, books within books and cultures within cultures so evident in Tee's work and to offer a way of forming new alignments. The book itself could be seen as a variation on the mobile and dream catcher forms within the exhibition – the mobile as a dynamic model of the universe, or perhaps a model of private or public sphere. The kinetic sculptural form of the mobile exploits the principle of equilibrium to tie together different elements, normally string, rods and hanging forms or weights. The mobile or set of interchangeable elements is then an example of a localized system where each form is influenced by the actions of the others. In theory experiencing and anticipating the movement of your own constellation of forces and influences would allow you to control your own destiny. Positivism pervades Tee's works through her construction of models of representations of thought processes. Love Spells are Tee's antidote to the unpredictability of local myths, providing an equilibrium within our public sphere based on patterns to magically induce love, again to utilize a pattern to affect ones destiny. Tee's patterns and forms are focal points for activities and rituals and demand precise positioning within the flows of architecture encountered throughout her travels as an artist.

The final element of the balancing act of the exhibition *Local Myths* was to be the most enduring. Eastside Projects now has an eighth column, a new freestanding pillar joining the row of seven supporting the roof of the building down its central axis. The existing columns are 5 metre high cast concrete and steel supports - elegant expressions of their functional simplicity. Jennifer Tee's *Local Myths* 2010 is a 3.5 metre tall carved carrara marble totem with regular diagonal notches along its sides and a peaked apex – an elegant expression of the artists quixotic practice. The new column supports no physical aspect of the gallery instead

supporting the notion of local myths, with the words LOCAL MYTHS carved proud of the surface in vertical succession down the length of its veined cool surface. Tee's totem is a long-term work in Eastside Projects, eventually to be located in a permanent site in the Eastside area.

Is Tee's totem to be a focal point for the expression of group wishing, as a monument to the power of stories that help to form the area of Birmingham around us, or a monument to the loss of a fictional place? One reading could question the nature of the Eastside area itself as a proposed regeneration area of Birmingham that has frequently changed its boundaries over the last ten years. Initiated by the City Council as a rebranding of the city in order to change the shape of the centre and increase the flow of business and civic functions the name has been abandoned and then reclaimed on a number of occasions. The totem may indeed represent the shift in ownership of the name of an area from the governors to the local community instrumental in making this area flourish. The authenticity of the column, its material, its weight, its gravitas, may represent the authenticating process of many people using a myth to the extent it becomes reality. The city of Birmingham is a fascinating struggle for the production of the authentic when the dominant means of production has shifted so far from its founding industries and strengths. Tee's imported authenticity of craft processes and ideologies adds to the current flux of this place mirroring, misdirecting and conjuring up new patterns and models for questioning our own seemingly home grown rituals.