

ASIAN ART MUSEUM
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for Asian Art & Culture

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NEWS

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Asian Art Museum Presents *Jean Shin / Pause*

New Installation of Local E-Waste Invites Contemplation of Technology's Impact on Environment, Our Ability to Connect



San Francisco, January 7, 2020 — Over the course of a single day, the average American will check a smartphone 86 times, spending more than three hours gazing at a small rectangle of light. From Feb. 6 to May 24, the Asian Art Museum encourages visitors to put away their mobile devices to experience *Pause*, a new installation by artist Jean Shin commissioned by the museum that reassesses the role obsolete technology can play in our desire to find meaningful connections — both with the natural world and each other.

For *Pause*, Shin transformed e-waste from the Bay Area — cell phones, smartphones, laptops and cables from the past 20 years — into a visually striking installation that evokes traditional East Asian scholars' rocks and garden retreats. Sculptures made of tightly bundled cables also function as seating, inviting visitors to linger and connect in real time, hitting “pause” on their relationship with technology while considering the environmental and human costs of digital culture.

Based in New York, Shin is well-known for work made from discarded everyday items. Each of the artist's projects revolves around a single object type sourced from the local community. *Pause* began with a call for donations of old cell phones and other digital equipment, and the museum partnered with San Francisco electronics recycler Green Citizen to find key materials. “I am always thinking about the waste stream, where objects come from and where they end up,” says Shin, who has created previous installations from discarded pill bottles, umbrellas and 35mm slides. “I wanted to use e-waste to bring attention to ethics and issues of

sustainability in tech,” she explains. “Programmers are always racing to innovate, creating new software without considering how their work displaces hardware and makes functioning technology quickly obsolete.”

The artist constructed labor-intensive sculptures titled *Huddled Masses* made with over 3,000 mobile phones that are reminiscent of the scholars’ rocks in Chinese art and garden design thought to capture the essence of nature. Cables on the floor encircle the sculptures like waves. Approximately nine miles of Ethernet cables were wrapped around seven laptops, two computer towers and two hard drives to create the “e-bundle” seating. Together, these outmoded objects map our ever-growing footprint in the Anthropocene age, the geologic period defined by man’s impact on the planet.



When Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art and Programs Marc Mayer spoke with Shin about creating a site-specific installation for the Asian Art Museum, they began exploring the larger context of the museum’s hometown. “The Bay Area is the historical epicenter of both tech and the environmental movement,” says Shin. “*Pause* connects these two ideas by using e-waste as the material and the scholars’ rock symbolizing a fetish for nature, as the form,” continues Mayer. “Ultimately, *Pause* is an installation of and about technology, but without electricity, WiFi, flashing lights, moving images or sound. This disconnect is meant to spark questions in those who take a moment to slow down and think about what that might mean for them in their lives.”

Shin hopes that when visitors enter *Pause*, they will do just that: unplug from their devices and experience stillness within the meditative gallery space. “It is a place to reflect — on the increasing levels of toxic e-waste we are throwing into the landfill and the ocean, on the unsustainable practice of planned obsolescence central to our consumer culture and on finding ways to reclaim our focus in today’s attention economy.”

Shin’s installation is concurrent with the museum’s special exhibition of *Awaken: A Tibetan Buddhist Journey Toward Enlightenment* (Jan. 17 to May 3, 2020), which features vibrant sculptures, paintings, textiles and book arts made between 800 and 2016 CE that chart a transformative pathway from the distracting clamor of daily life to the serenity of awakening. While divergent in aesthetic approach, both *Pause* and *Awaken* connect thematically, underscoring art’s power to focus and refine our awareness.

“*Pause* is a potent reminder of our utopian desires, which imagine how technological innovation might make our world better while sometimes forgetting the value of what we already have. By drawing on the traditional ideals found in our historical collection in order to directly address some of today’s most pressing anxieties, Jean Shin is an exciting example of what it means for the Asian Art Museum to expand its contemporary art program,” says Jay Xu, the museum’s director and CEO. “I cannot wait to put down my own phone, take a seat and find a few minutes for deep reflection in a buzzing museum in the center of a busy city at the epicenter of the tech revolution.”

About Jean Shin (born 1971, Seoul, South Korea)

Shin attended the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine, and received a BFA and MS from New York's Pratt Institute, where she is tenured adjunct professor of fine arts.

Her works have been shown at more than 150 museums and cultural institutions, including in solo exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Philadelphia Museum of Art; and the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C. She recently completed a landmark commission, *Elevated*, for New York City's new Second Avenue subway.

Shin's work is represented in the collections of Facebook and Microsoft as well as the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington D.C. The artist lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Exhibition Organization

Jean Shin / Pause is organized by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco. This exhibition is a part of the *Asian American Experience*, which is made possible with the generous support of Glen S. and Sakie T. Fukushima, an anonymous donor in memory of Ambassador and Mrs. Sampson Shen, and Claudine Cheng. Materials for this exhibition are provided by GreenCitizen, making every day earth day.

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About the Asian Art Museum

Information: 415.581.3500 or www.asianart.org

Location: 200 Larkin Street, San Francisco, CA 94102

Hours: The museum is open Tuesdays through Sundays from 10 AM to 5 PM. Hours are extended on Thursdays until 9 PM February through September. Closed Mondays, as well as New Year's Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

Museum Admission: FREE for museum members and children (12 & under). \$15 for adults and \$10 for seniors (65 & over), youth (13–17) and college students (with ID). Please check website for updates.

Access: The Asian Art Museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information regarding access: 415.581.3598; TDD: 415.861.2035.

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