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Artist Behind EXTRA Projects' Latest Installation Encourages Experimentation

4-5 minutes

Those who gathered at Rebecca Tanda's artist workshop last month were in for an artistic experience of their own.

Tanda, 25, is a Chicago-based artist whose latest installation is showing at EXTRA Projects (3551 W. Diversey Ave.) through Dec. 15. She conducted her first artist workshop for the public on Nov. 17, which she structured as a dynamic and experimental working session, rather than a belabored PowerPoint deck.

"I find artist talks boring and hierarchical," Tanda told the workshop class of seven. Instead, she opted to play a soundtrack of soft rain and give each attendee a block of oil-based clay and uninterrupted work time.

She labeled the workshop as "experimental mold-making" and guided attendees through a series of prompts meant to unlock both creativity and intentionality. At the end of the three-hour session, she poured plaster over each of the molds. Once dried, participants could excavate the sculpture created by their mold's negative space and take home their creations.





"I'm more interested in the process of setting up the mold and the hollow cavity than the final finished products," Tanda told the class.

In many ways, the workshop was a reflection of Tanda's own artistry. Tanda is a graduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and will complete her MFA in December. Her installation currently showing in EXTRA Project's studio is titled, "Poorly Drawn Lines, Dismantled and Suspended." The installation features a large and ornate floating arrangement, which Tanda created by making molds and then casting them using glass.

The result is intricate and abstract, and its complexity is only intensified by the subject matter that inspired it.

"I wanted to explore the absurdity of borders and the fluidity of space through abstraction," Tanda said.

Over the course of a year, she cut out the geometry of the geopolitical borders that her project reimagines and abstracted them to create the molds.



Photo: Tom Vlodek

The idea came through happenstance, Tanda said, when she was experimenting with sand casting. But her subject matter was no accident.

"Borders are inherently a fiction," Tanda said, a reality she has seen played out in her own life. "At large, my work is interested in geopolitical territories."

She was born in Nashville and her earliest memories come from the time period her family lived

in Luxembourg. She attended middle school in Germany, high school in Brussels and undergrad in Hong Kong. Next up, she'll be an artist in residence in Paris.

Prior to graduate school, she worked as an urban planner which she said trained her to think about space and fueled her interest in cartography.



Rebecca Tanda. Photo: Tom Vlodek

She said her creative process involves getting “very obsessive about stuff” and that she created experimental mold-making as a way to combat getting stuck in the same processes.

Back at the workshop, Tanda likewise encouraged participants to work fluidly without fear of failure and judgment. Workshop attendees ranged from fellow artists to those unable to hold a pencil correctly (me), but Tanda found a reason to praise each mold.

“I’m excited for these,” she said sincerely, looking down at the assortment of molds as she prepared to pour plaster over them.

For Leah Gallant, 28, a fellow graduate student at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, the workshop was an opportunity to learn about mold-making in a more comfortable and accepting environment.

“I feel intimidated by mold-making so I wanted to learn to approach it with less precision,” said Gallant. “I can see [Tanda’s] interested in the process and materials and making in a way where the outcome is never certain,” she added.

The closing reception for Tanda’s installation is Sunday, Dec. 15 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and is open to the public. Viewings can be made prior to the reception by appointment.

Featured photo: Tom Vlodek