

# Ran Hwang: The Snowfall of Spiders at Leila Heller Gallery

by [DANIEL GAUSS](#) on 03/05/2014 · [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

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To the Japanese samurai, cherry blossoms represented a good death – indeed, the best death. Like the samurai, the blossoms often fell in the prime of life, exhibiting the full beauty of maximum vitality. Dying in one's prime for a meaningful cause was the most wonderful life possible for the samurai. Cherry blossoms also represent a concept that pervades Japanese art – from the Tale of Genji to the films of Ozu to current anime and manga, there is a 'mono no aware' (a feeling of sadness in regard to all things) – basically a visceral awareness that nothing is permanent and that everything decays and dies. Yet, 'mono no aware' can also mean an awakening based on the awareness of the transience of life.



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Therefore the acceptance of the symbolism of the cherry blossom can also be a rejection of the Schopenhauer-like pessimism which rejects life. That there will be an end to our days does not mean our lives cannot be relished and valued. There is something beyond the basics Schopenhauer stresses: eating, competing and procreating. And, even if life is a meaningless dream, we can still feel compelled within the dream to pursue meaningful adventures and ends and meet a lack of meaning with a sense of compassion, creativity and humanity. Cherry blossoms are like the flowers in Leopardi's poem "La ginestra" – a poem about the fragrant and delicate flowers that literally bloom on the barren and acrid slope of Vesuvius. In the middle of a barren and violent landscape, these flowers 'dare' to bloom.



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In Ran Hwang's 'The Snowfall of Spiders' we see that she embraces this symbolism of the cherry blossom. Although she is a Korean-born artist, she has studied and embraced the same type of Zen Buddhism that the samurai embraced. Hwang's art is unique, however, because she creates her pieces using thousands of pins, buttons and paper. So what's interesting is that she deliberately uses industrially created objects of relative permanence to help approximate the moment when blossoms are in their full bloom. The use of so many teeny synthetic particles to create a coherent work gives the effect of monotonous, painstaking but dedicated work. It is a type of unbelievably repetitive process which, once one finally stops, yields an immense vision of engaging beauty.

In the catalogue, Eleanor Heartney makes a good point. The pins, paper and buttons help highlight the Buddhist belief in the illusory nature of the visible world. The world we see is an illusion – as are these pieces. These are not cherry blossoms, these are thousands of cheap pins and buttons and teeny pieces of paper. It is fitting, however, that Hwang uses synthetic elements because the concept of permanence that she captures is as artificial as the materials she uses to convey this illusion. The blossoms are in a plastic-induced suspended animation.

Indeed, Hwang also presents images of the Buddha to highlight the fact that the only real permanence is the enlightenment promised by the Buddha, to overcome the illusions of the world and to transcend suffering.

Also featured in this show is an installation which literally shows the passage of time and the birth, death and resurrection, in an endless cycle, of cherry blossoms. Black spiders play the role of a type of Judas here, as they perform the function of gobbling up the blossoms to set the stage for the next generation of growth. Basically you have to see these pieces by Hwang to really be impacted by them, so I would encourage you to drop by Leila Heller within the next couple of weeks to experience your own personal sense of 'mono no aware.'



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#### **RAN HWANG: THE SNOWFALL OF SPIDERS**

February 20 – March 21, 2014

#### **LEILA HELLER GALLERY**

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TUES – SAT: 10AM – 6PM

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**Photography courtesy of The Gallery and the Artists**