



Hiromi Tango: Playful, Colourful, Wonderful

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Words by Rachael Crouch

Last month, the Gallery of Modern Art installed artist Hiromi Tango's latest work: a towering sculpture made entirely out of coloured cloth, wool, cotton and other household bits-and-bobs titled *Pistil*.

This overwhelmingly colourful piece rises up and looms over the entrance to the gallery, creating an ambiance of Elysian peace rather than the usual kitschiness often found in colourful sculptures. It is a ubiquitous reminder of how to live, laugh and play. *Pistil* has an opening at the bottom where you can sit on comfy seats, surrounded by colour and fairy lights. It is homely, safe and fun.

When I met Hiromi, she was wearing a pink poncho with stitched-on flowers and painted rosy cheeks.

"My best friend made it and it arrived this morning, so it is quite timely!". She playfully pulls on an accompanying head piece. Her smile is contagious, and I immediately fall in love with her sincerity.



photography: Grace Markham Photography

"I am part of the art, the performance side. I am interested in the blind spot in communication. I want to be in that gap between the art and the public. I want to create a dialogue".

The materials that make up *Pistil* were collected over a 7-year period and had been sent in by fellow artists and members of the public. She is part of the art; the creation, the energy and the viewing, and it means absolutely everything to her.

It started in 2006 with an exhibition titled *Item No1 -324...and to be continued*, a 6-week site specific exhibition held in the now defunct Raw Space Galleries. People would bring in pieces of their home; materials that are a part of their lives, and give them to her. She would invite people in, have tea with them and talk to them for as long as they wanted. Hiromi has truly entered the barrier between artist and public. She's not only entered it, she's pulled up a seat and is now sitting in there cosily.

Hiromi Hotel was the follow-on and ongoing exhibition which provides an open dialogue to lay people and collaboration with other artists. *Hotel* is somewhere for people of all communities to go, rest, make themselves at home, and to remind themselves of what's important in life.

When Japan was struck by the tsunami last year, Hiromi collected the most colourful materials together and turned them into *Pistil*, and the idea behind using second-hand materials is one of new beginnings and new life. She chose the most colourful pieces to convey fun and playfulness as a pathway to healing.

"People have sent in second-hand materials that are important to them. That's what this is about, healing, recovery, rejuvenation. The second hand materials could be drama, sadness or traumatic episodes that want to be regenerated. *Pistil* is the complete and imperfect flower. It desires to get better, it desires to recover."

I inquired whether the art is inspired by a "Japanese" aesthetic; the colour and playfulness seemed to be a motif, especially following *Look Now, See Forever* by Yayou Kusama, which was exhibited earlier this year.



photography: Grace Markham Photography

"To be honest, I don't know! It's not how I work; I only make art that comes from my body; from my body, to the site, to the ground and the energy surrounding it".

Hiroimi is shy, quiet and generally reserved, but these traits do not detract from her audience interactions. Rather, they encourage it. She is not in-your-face, but approachable and kind.

Despite her shyness, she is not afraid to perform when she feels the call to do so. During our interview she would break off several times, sentence hanging, to ring a bell covered in fabric or to pull down a floral mask and dance. It is evident in her art and in her manner that there is so much she wants to share with the world, but alas, there aren't enough words or time. She offers me a very soft seat and we discuss the name of her masterpiece, *Pistil*. "It's the reproductive organ of the flower. It's female. I'm interested in what makes us "us", what makes the human condition. The very depths of it."

Hirmoi is so passionate about bringing down the barriers between art and people. *Pistil* gives a surface glimpse of the relationships she has in her life, with her friends, her husband (Australian artist Craig Walsh) and her two children. Japan's tsunami tragedy cut her deeply, and it seems as though she has personally felt every cry of pain anyone every yelled. To address every single person, she created *Pistil*, to bring together every emotional complexity we have to face, and turning it in to something playful.

Hiromi Tango's work is a part of the *Contemporary Australia: Women* exhibition running at the GoMA until 22 July 2012.