



## An Interview with Hiromi Tango

Sarah Werkmeister



Japanese-born, now Sydney- (but ex-Brisbane) based artist Hiromi Tango is building something I like to refer to as 'the womb room' - but is really an installation representing the female reproduction organs of flowers - pistils. Hiromi's work has always involved an aspect of communicating with the public, creating installations that are so chaotic you force yourself to become zen with them. It's part of Contemporary Australia - Women, which opens this weekend. Sarah spoke to Hiromi about what interaction can bring, music, and the hotel we hope that she can one day make real.

Sarah Werkmeister: Hey Hiromi! How are you enjoying your time at GoMA, developing your work, Pistil? Hiromi

Tango: I only have an hour left and there's still a lot to go but it's been an amazing experience. I've been trying to be in touch with the sixth sense and intuition.

SW: Can you tell us about collaboration in your work? HT: Collaboration is a really difficult word - I'm often asked if my process is collaborative, but it's actually more site and situation responsive, or conversational. I just respond to those elements. For example, a Japanese tourist just came to say hello as an audience member, and now he's heavily involved in the project - he's actually the Assistant Director of the project. He's making a catalogue and taking lots of photographs and taking a big direction with the work. He absolutely influences the way the project looks, but it's really about conversation and dialogue. If someone is willing to give happily, then I respond and we respond to one another.

SW: A pistil is also the reproductive organ of a female flower, how is the work you're making relating to nature? The installation seems very chaotic, but very organic as well. HT: I guess the inspiration comes from the human organs, or biology that I was interested in. I was always interested in identity. Pistil responded to a personal experience where I nearly lost a close friend in Japan - she lost her home, her neighbours, her only possessions and many lives in a split second. I had no choice to make work about nature and the human condition. It's not really a deliberate process, but I continue accumulating, generating and editing. Someone told me my work was about loss and accumulation, so I guess I'm confronting those issues in Pistil. The work is lots of things that have been wrapped, so it's about wrapping emotions. The pistil is the brain part of the flower for my artistic direction and also about the rich emotions we carry that are incomplete or imperfect. I think emotions are organic, like nature. Reality is really tough and regardless of difficult issues, there's always a way to recover, and this is the object of Pistil.

SW: I see your work as very emotional, but very optimistic. You take ideas that are sometimes uncomfortable and turn them into personal objects or cathartic performances...HT: It's a funny thing that over the years I've been exploring anxiety and darker sides of our existence, and I guess my brain decides to be that area, naturally. But the natural disasters and the ongoing challenge in life have changed the way I make work. I used to make work around serious discussions, but now it's more about magic, the mystical and the playful, and that probably has something to do with my daughters who I spend most of my time with. Those are moments that I feel very optimistic. To feel playful isn't that easy, but through this work I hope to create some wonder and excitement.

SW: Hiromi Hotel was a project you undertook where you invited people to create their own space and work together - if you could decorate a hotel, or make an installation anywhere in the world, where would it be and why?HT: I want to have my own hotel! In a warehouse or hotel, where I could invite artists and they could make their own rooms and I'd have it in Brisbane, because that's where I started [my practice].

SW: Do you listen to music when you're making work?HT: Yes! Can you hear the music (there's music in the background)? My close friend in Sendai makes music for each project I do, and it creates a dialogue. I show him what I'm making and then he makes music accordingly, then I ask people to make art to his music, or to write... it's conversational. He's very talented.

SW: Can you tell us one of your favourite stories from your experiences making work in public and inviting the public to work with you? HT: I met a beautiful Japanese tourist 10 days ago when I was making my work, and he was the audience here at GoMA, and then he became the Assistant Director of the project (not so much the concept, but for for input), and it's been an amazing process - that's my favourite story - that the audience can become the Assistant Director.

SW: Thank you for talking to us Hiromi! We look forward to seeing the show. HT: Thank you!