

Arriving at an unfamiliar place, a newcomer experiences a sense of disorientation. Strangers' eyes dissect what is visible on the alien body. One's adornments mediate between one's sense of self and what one is perceived to be. Clothing, as a second skin, fulfills a number of roles in this dynamic. It acts as a protective layer, shielding the body and its interior from the outside. It serves as an interface, making visible what is hidden within. As an enveloping skin, clothing is both capable of insulation and expression. Yet its fragility also makes it vulnerable to potential physical or social violence. Anne Cheng has written that skin is "by nature a medium of transition and doubleness"; it behaves as a "safe encasement" as well as suggests "the imminent threat of tearing, flaying, and displacement."¹ Clothing is an extension of the self: it is a home we take with us, one that is susceptible to exterior pressures.

Jeenho Seo finds in clothing a critical locus of exchange between wearer and viewer. In his work *configuration*, a massive reel, reminiscent of warping reels used in weaving, hangs from the ceiling. The reel holds a spool of clothing that feeds down into an industrial shredder suspended several feet from the ground. The viewer's movement activates the shredder: to move around the work is to set into motion a process that converts finished garment into refuse. Yet the result of this maceration is as beautiful as it is shocking: the tatters that emerge from the shredder's maw are at once rags and expressive ribbons. Beneath, the accumulating scrapheap is a constellation of color, the brilliant result of a volatile encounter.

The apparatus invokes both destruction and creation. In place of thread, clothing serves as the raw material of identity. But identity is not the product of a singular self: it is always intersubjective, constituted by one's interactions with others. It is here, in the air, at this precarious intersection between self and other, that this loom of unmaking operates, taking articles of personhood and subjecting them to the viewer's gaze. Such an interaction is inherently hazardous, ungovernable, and transformational. It recalls the destructive acts of Neo-Dadaists of the 1960s and 70s, encapsulated by the injunction of the Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel: "No not participating / No not touching / No not breaking."² Fundamental to these artists' iconoclastic acts were an embrace of ephemerality and a belief in destruction as a potentially liberating event.

¹ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28.

² Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel, "Assez de mystifications," in *3^e Biennale de Paris*, exhibition catalogue (Paris: Musée d'art Modern de la Ville de Paris, 1963), 164-8. Quoted in Dario

In Seo's work, something is being simultaneously made and unmade. A shaped identity is violated, converted into raw material. There is no not interacting, no not transfiguring in and with this piece. Having lived in three different continents, Seo, a peripatetic artist, asks us to consider identity as a continual process of transition. To him, the act of shredding is both a painful shedding and an unforeseeable reconfiguration. Such a process is both coercive and freeing, both corrosive and constructive.

On the move, the self breaks down and reconstitutes itself with found fragments. Perched on a pedestal nearby, a small sculpture by Seo suggests the emergence of something new. It is the top of a shoe cast in resin: it looks like a crustacean in the process of molting, exposing its soft, translucent shell, vulnerable and raw, scuttling away.

- Kevin Hong