

No Birth No Death

Art installation by Amy Richard



No Birth, No Death

Amy Richard, 2022

Dimensions: 8 X 9 X 8 feet

Charred paper mulberry saplings, artist-made mulberry paper, hardware and steel wire

Description of concept & process

Much of my work is grounded in a fascination with the transfer of energy that occurs in every living thing: how life manifests itself in one form and continues on to another through time or under the influence of other processes. Only recently did I discover how closely this aligns with the Buddhist precept “No birth, no death.”

For this installation, the materials I am working with come entirely from paper mulberry, a deciduous plant (aka kozo) harvested out of my front yard.

The first step was to cut saplings or “suckers” that reproduce vegetatively from underground rhizomes, much like the aspen trees of Colorado. Once harvested, the sticks were steamed in a large barrel to separate the bark from its woody core. This bark was then processed further to remove the outer layers so that I might access the inner bark—or bast fiber—used for papermaking. But before that can happen, more process: once separated from the outer bark, the fiber had to be soaked, cooked, cleaned and hand beaten into a shimmering soft pulp.

Ideas about regeneration, perseverance and resilience led me to begin playing with various leaf bud and full leaf forms fashioned from bent wire and dipped repeatedly into the silky fiber suspended in a vat of water. After numerous investigations into the proper shade of green, the fiber was dyed.

Meanwhile, the golden woody sticks were left to dry and later charred over an open fire eliciting a host of thoughts about the conversion of energy through fire and hardship ... soon followed by thoughts of hope as the smoke is absorbed by clouds, forming rain, wetting the ash and scorched earth, and beginning again.

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