

Beili Liu: *Foreground, Lure/Forest*, 2009, red thread and needles; on wall, *Origin*, 2008, Chinese spirit money, 7½ feet in diameter; at Tarryn Teresa.

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS



LOS ANGELES

**BEILI LIU**

TARRYN TERESA

A Chinese legend represented by lengths of red string, a Taoist-like emblem composed of rolled "spirit money" and a miasma (so titled) of fuzzy black yarn were among the six works, each materially simple but metaphorically rich, in the inaugural show of this gallery in a rehabbed industrial building.

Beili Liu, born and raised in China, studied at American colleges and now teaches at the University of Texas at Austin. Her exhibition, "Three Thousand Troubled Threads," was in some of its references very Chinese. The gallery provided a narrative for the largest installation, *Lure/Forest* (2009), which consisted of hundreds of coiled disks of satiny red string, ranging from the size of a quarter to maybe 6 inches in diameter, all suspended a foot or so above the floor. Liu here evokes the "red thread of fate," which in Chinese cultural mythology links lovers from birth and may tangle but will never break.

Given that information, viewers could puzzle out the connections of some pairs of disks by tracing a few fine red threads among the vast number looping voluptuously on the floor below the disks. Mostly, though, the tangle proved impenetrable, perhaps symbolic of the complexity of existence. Regardless of this supplied meaning, the installation was luscious in color and expansive in dimension, as well as affectingly tremulous as each disk hung freely, suggesting both individuals in a crowd and some large, respiring organism.

The spirit-money piece, a 7½-foot circle on the wall titled *Origin* (2008), likewise had a specific cultural association as well as material qualities that made it fascinating beyond that. Spirit money—

fake currency burned as offerings for ancestors to use in the afterlife—was presented here in tight rolls, some new and some charred, that were arranged on the wall to loosely suggest the Taoist yin-yang symbol. The shallow relief piece is a powerful graphic, and the rolls echo the coiling of the red disks nearby.

A concern with process and substance was also evident in Liu's video installation, *Tie-Untie* (2008), shown in a darkened back room. On the floor a pile of cords perhaps 6 feet long and a foot high had a center depression into which, from a projector overhead, poured imagery of a knotted mass of vermilion thread floating in dark water, a pair of hands working to untangle it. The action is repetitive, perhaps futile, but certainly graceful. Gravity seems held in abeyance in the imagery, and the texture of the "screen" confuses the viewer's sense of palpability. That the video is looped resonates with the linear and circular constructions throughout this subtle show.

—Janet Koplos