

# Art in America

OCTOBER 2003

## Cui Fei at Gallery 456

Cui Fei received her undergraduate degree from Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts in her native China and a master's from Indiana University of Pennsylvania. Her exhibition, titled "The Voice of the Voiceless," was an assembly of vine tendrils, leaves, branches and grasses arranged in formats that mimic written language or games.

In *Manuscript of Nature V* (2003), Cui created a fairly large installation composed of tendrils pinned in vertical rows on a wall. From a distance, the small, linear forms looked like calligraphy; up close, they revealed themselves in eccentricities, curling up and out against the wall and generally maintaining a poetic grace. In *A Letter from Home* (1999), Cui pinned tiny leaves to white foam board in horizontal rows, mimicking the form of a letter written in a Western language in exactly the 8½-by-11-inch size of a standard page. The brown leaves are pinned at various angles to one

another and spaced as if forming words, but their solidity rather than linear openness recalls cuneiform. She may be setting the universality of natural materials against the near-universality of written communications, without tying this expression to a particular culture.

In *Go II* (2000), Cui has constructed an airy grid of dried stems of tall grass, heads pointing outward. Dark and light handmade-paper balls are arranged in two groups, on the upper left and lower right of the grid. The piece refers to an Asian strategy game usually played with polished black and white stones on a checkered game board. The unexpected materials further abstract the game's already simple elements. In her works, by using ephemeral natural materials, Cui sets human communication and play into a larger context and time frame.

—Jonathan Goodman

Cui Fei: *Go II*, 2000, grass and handmade paper, 48 by 72 by 2 inches; at Gallery 456.

