Orthogonal/Diagonal

Project Description

In *Orthogonal/Diagonal*, LA-based artist Nova Jiang redesigns regional chess variants from Asia and elsewhere, by creating game pieces that sculpturally convey their rules of movement and relative power on the board. Eight of these games were 3D-printed and presented for the public to play with as part of an exhibition at Enjoy Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand.

The variants presented include Chess and its predecessor Shatranj, as well as Makruk (Thailand), Janggi (Korea), Shatar (Mongolia), Sittuyin (Myanmar), Shogi (Japan) and Xiangqi (China). Unlike Western Chess, many of these variants are little known outside their region. Their common ancestor is the ancient Indian game Chaturanga, the exact rules of which are unknown today. Treating each variant as a unique iteration of the same ancient system, the artist aims to reimagine the games as a sculptural ensemble of related forms. The games were displayed on custom CNCed game tables.

Jiang is interested in the spread of games as well as other folk forms across cultures, as well as in their structural and aesthetic mutations. She wishes to redesign the surface of these games by reflecting their underlying systems. Chinese, Korean and Japanese chess are difficult to play for those who cannot read the language. This project helps break down language barriers by encapsulating rules into the the design of the game sets. By stripping away culturally specific references, the viewers can compare the games side by side as abstract systems, exploring their commonalities as well as differences.

An important reference for the project is the Bauhaus Chess Set by Josef Hartwig, which aims to convey the rules of chess through pieces built from abstract wooden forms. 3D-printing allows Jiang to explore forms difficult to manufacture by hand, but which give more descriptive instructions, allowing her to develop a vocabulary of forms that is flexible enough to accommodate as many variants as possible. 3D-printing also allows her to quickly prototype game sets for playtesting and iteration.

To test the design, a four-hour tournament was held in the gallery where players were required to compete in as many variants as possible. The artist was excited to design a tournament where general game playing ability is more important than in-depth knowledge of any specific game. The participants included three former New Zealand Chess champions, members of the Wellington Chess club and a group of local artists. Jiang used this opportunity to observe whether the game pieces are instructive enough to make rulebooks less important and to gather design feedback from the players.

Orthogonal/Diagonal was made possible by a generous grant from the Asia New Zealand Foundation. It is currently on view at Enjoy Gallery in Wellington, New Zealand until July 5th, 2014.

Credit:

Artist: Nova Jiang

<http://www.novajiang.com/>

Project website:

<http://www.novajiang.com/projects/orthogonaldiagonal/>

Exhibition Photos: Courtesy of the Artist

Tournament Photos: Amanda Rogers

Photographer Website: <http://instagram.com/amandaliarogers>

Download Photos (42MB):

<https://db.tt/l7YbVbiu>

Links:

Enjoy Public Art Gallery

<http://www.enjoy.org.nz/>

Asia New Zealand Foundation

<https://asianz.org.nz/>