

2nd Graders Interview

The Auburn Early Education Center

JEAN SHIN

On October 4th, 2017, Jean Shin visited the 2nd grade at AEEC. Here is what they wanted to know:

“How long did it take you to create MAiZE?”

When I work with museums, they invite me to have the show and say “what do you want to make?” The museum gives me a space and we talk about a timeline for the project. It was probably about a year and a half since the Figge Art Museum invited me to create an exhibition. I went to do a visit—I like to go and see the museum first and see if there is an inspiration there and this project did come from inspiration from that visit. Then, six months before the opening, they had set-up all of the plans to make the maze, we found all of the materials—the educators really helped with that—and for six months they invited the public to make the cornstalks for the installation.

“What other places in the world have you shown your artwork?”

I started in New York, but I have traveled all over the country, this is my first time in Alabama! I have seen many different parts of this country through my exhibitions. In the world, I have shown work in Asia, which includes Korea and China, and then in Europe. It has been really wonderful to be able to travel and see the world because of the artwork.

“How did you get the opportunity to create art in parks and schools?”

The United States has created a program called 1 percent for art. When a building goes up, or there is new construction, they say “can we keep just 1% of that budget?” That 1% is used for making art in that new building. A school in NYC chose me to make an artwork with their 1%. With this program, you have to apply and compete to be selected to spend a year or many years working on an artwork.

“Did you practice a lot to become such a great artist?”

I love that question of practice, because, YES! Being an artist is really, really tough work. I did art since I was a little kid so it has been a lifetime making art. The other thing is that it is not just the practice of art, but it is thinking about art all the time. I realize, though, that even if I tried to do art every single waking moment I wouldn't be able to finish my projects. So that is why I started inviting people to help me make my art, so that I am not the only one making my artwork. With MAiZE, lots of students, many around your age, around Davenport, Iowa, near the museum, all helped make the sculptures. So, I shared my love for making this piece with others.

“Which piece of art is your favorite and why?”

That is the tough question. Do you have brothers and sisters? Do you ever ask your mom and dad which is your favorite? (the second graders laughed and loved this!) That is a hard question—each artwork is so unique, so I love them all. They map my experience and my time making the piece and being in a certain place. For me, each one is really special, but the ones that I remember the most are the ones that were the most difficult. There are artworks that I have never done before in this way and there was something I really needed to learn and thought I might not succeed, and that is when I know when it works you feel so proud that, despite the difficulty, you could still make it happen.





“How did you get MAiZe to Auburn?”

The Jule Collins Smith Museum of Fine Art asked me to jury their outdoor sculpture exhibition ... so I had a very wonderful invitation to come to Auburn and have an exhibition at the museum. It was just after I had an exhibition at the Figge Art Museum in Iowa where the cornstalks were originally made, and I thought wouldn't it be amazing to move the cornstalks to Alabama and have it in the museum?

“Do you create the sculptures by yourself or do you get help?”

That's a great question, because filling a whole room with these sculptures to make that installation, we had 1,200 cornstalks in the original museum, which takes a lot of work. The museum collaborated and invited visitors, students, and the public to make them with me and it would be impossible for me to do that on my own. In the end, I think 800 people came together to make this installation.

“What's the largest sculpture you've ever built?”

MAiZE is up there I have to say because it is almost a 3,000-square-foot gallery space. And I went in and said, “oh my goodness this gallery is big! It is almost like a field!” I have done a lot of pieces outdoors as well, which are site specific, so they are up not only through an exhibition but in a subway, the train station, or in a park. You see works that are like landscapes themselves and take multiple walls and multiple spaces so it is not just one area—I have done some very, very large public pieces!

“How old were you when you made your first piece of art?”

I have a story that my parents told me –this is when I lived in Korea. I left for the United States when I was six, so it must have been before six, maybe when I was four or five. They were visiting a Buddhist temple and were going inside, and I stayed outside—and they said, “just stay here and wait for us!” Instead, I wandered off to a sand pad—it was a sort of garden, with beautiful sand—and I started drawing with my fingers, it was like if you were on a beach. And I was drawing circles, and things that I wanted to express myself with, and I wasn't anxious for them to come back because I was so happy in the sand garden. My parents walked out of the temple with the monk and they said “get out of there!” but instead, the monk said, let her be, she is doing just what she needs to be doing.” He recognized what I was doing was making art, that I wasn't messing up the garden, I wasn't doing something bad, in some way he gave me permission at a very young age and told the adults “shh, let her be, she is doing just what she is meant to do.”

