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## Sweet dreams

# Lee Mingwei invites you to pore over 17 tons of sand and stay for a sleepover.

By Lauren Weinberg

Not many exhibitions include a reproduction of Guernica in sand, a letter to Christopher Hitchens and a Jewel/Osco Preferred Card, but Lee Mingwei's "Impermanence" is no ordinary show. The Taiwanese-born, New York-based conceptual artist encourages viewers to confront difficult feelings like anxiety and grief head-on—usually by helping Lee to complete his work. Lee has been collaborating on "Impermanence"—his first show in Chicago—for four years with curator Gregory Knight, deputy commissioner of visual arts for the Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. Knight became determined to bring Lee's work to the Chicago Cultural Center after seeing The Sleeping Project at the 2003 Venice Biennale.

The Sleeping Project investigates what happens when two strangers spend a platonic night together, sharing tea and conversation before sleeping near (but not with) each other in a gallery space. Its installation consists of two beautifully crafted wooden beds and several nightstands. Before "Impermanence" opened, five guests spent one night each at the CCC with Lee, leaving behind a few things that normally surround them when they sleep. The assortment of objects, which includes the aforementioned Jewel/Osco card, offers tiny glimpses into other people's lives: One nightstand holds a 1920s photograph of Lee's grandmother's medical school class and snacks from Chinatown; a second, topped with a globe lamp, sits next to a pair of fuzzy slippers; and a third holds a copy of Kurt Vonnegut's *Welcome to the Monkey House*, a bottle of scotch and a glass.

Five more volunteers will be chosen to spend the night with Lee this week. Their possessions will be returned when the show closes, but to participate in Letter Writing Project, you must give something up: The project encourages us to write letters to deceased or absent loved ones communicating the feelings we never had a chance to express. Lee has supplied three booths made of wood and translucent glass that contain stationery and envelopes. You may seal and address your letter for posting by the Cultural Center or leave it open for others to read. Visitors have already placed scores of letters in slots in the booths' walls, their addresses by turn puzzling ("To Christopher Hitchens") and poignant ("To Grandpa—Somewhere Up There").