

Hong Kong-born Mung Lar Lam has drawn on her Chinese heritage to make an art form out of ironing in her hometown of San Francisco, writes **Kavita Daswani**.



Lam, who has three sisters and two brothers, quit her corporate job and has been focusing on her art career, teaching to finance her passion.

"It's difficult to balance both parts of my life, which is more of a time issue. I have to be realistic; we all have to earn a living. I try to condense all my teaching into one half of the week and work in my studio the other half.

"I think I'm best known for doing work around the process of ironing textiles. I have an exhibition, called Ironings, at the Craft and Folk Art Museum in Los Angeles. I'm really



"I was born in Hong Kong but left at the age of five to emigrate with my parents to Omaha, Nebraska," says artist Mung Lar Lam. "After six months there, they figured out it wasn't the place for them so we moved to San Francisco, where I grew up."

Lam does double duty in San Francisco, in the United States, teaching at two art colleges and beaver away in her studio, working on her next exhibition.

Even though she studied fashion design, at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, she knew her real passion was for fine arts.

"It's always a little bit of a compromise to be creative and also have an industry to go into. I worked as a women's wear designer in New York for 20 years and I did another five years in Paris. But when I came back to San Francisco to get my master's in fine arts at the California College of the Arts, I decided to go back to work on my original passion."

investigating a lot through this work, questioning ideas about women and their place in society, gender and labour issues, the history of textiles and women's work."

Lam claims ironing and drawing are not all that different. "Ironing fabric is like making lines in it. I see my work as a combination of drawing, painting, architecture and sculpture – melding all these disciplines together to create my installations."

What possessed her to take up this unusual art form?

"My cultural heritage has informed my work in every way. There's no way to approach a work without all that comes with being the person you are. For me, textiles are a familiar medium because I grew up around sewing factories. My mother was a seamstress for a while when we first moved here. She made all the clothes we wore as children. I learned how to sew at a very young age – all my sisters did – and it was an innate skill I had."

Fembot fetish It's hard to know who to be angry with – Japanese men, Sega Toys or the hi-tech industry, for trying to dehumanise the planet. Let's go with Sega, which has produced a 38cm-tall robotic girlfriend that kisses on command. It will go on sale in September for US\$175. Now what kind of man wants to confess his girlfriend is an animated Barbie doll?

Using infrared sensors, this plastic Lolita puckers up for nearby human heads, entering what designers call her "love mode".

Picture: AP

"Strong, tough and battle-ready are words often associated with robots, but we wanted to make something sweet and interactive," says Minako Sakanoue, spokeswoman for Sega Toys. "She's lovable and can act like a real girlfriend."

Sega hopes to sell 10,000 in the first year. Japan – home to almost half the world's 800,000 industrial robots – foresees a US\$10 billion market. Maybe this is how the world will end, overrun by pink, kissing robots. *Daniel Jeffreys*

