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Growing Process

Mengjiao Wang

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the degree of

Masters of Fine Arts

School of Art, Design, and Art History

May 2017

FACULTY COMMITTEE:

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Robert Mertens

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis monograph, and the body of work it accompanies to the people who were and are in my life for providing inspirations and helping me mature. Especially my grandfather, who was a big influence in my early childhood, offered me endless love and introduced me to the art world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my family, friends and James Madison University's School of Art, Design and Art History. I would like to specifically thank my advisor Sukjin Choi, my thesis committee members Lisa Tubach and Robert Mertens and also other faculty who have supported me over the past seven years' studies. Thank you for always being on my side, supporting and understanding. I feel grateful to have you in my life journey and witness my growth.

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Abstract

My MFA thesis exhibition, “growing process” is inspired by many occurrences in my life, and is especially influenced by my childhood memories. The artworks represent my loneliness and how I face and solve problems, which helped me mature as an adult. This monograph explores the shift and thought process in different life stages.

I join a long tradition of ceramic production in China by using clay as a meaningful material. Clay may contain soil, carcasses and leaves, which decompose in the earth. There is a saying in China that “fallen leaves return to the roots,” which suggests a return to one's origin. When a person dies, we bury the body in soil. Soil provides nutrition and breeds new life. It represents a process, a repetition, or a rebirth.

The process of making a ceramic work is to make the structure by hand, which will always leave my finger prints on the clay, like a memory. Letting the clay become bone dry is a process of loss. Firing clay is a process of rebuilding. All of the stages make me think of the process of growing: making memories with people, losing people, and transforming. Although I take care of my own works, I cannot keep everything under control. I treat my works like treasures because I am always afraid to break any of them, as they are very fragile. It is a metaphor of avoiding loss, instead of letting them go.

I use objects symbolically to connect to my body and soul as a means to express my feelings. Paper airplanes, feet, teeth and pinwheels are some of the ordinary objects we see around us. They may seem as if they are normal or unexceptional, but each object carries different memories with them; they always remind me of the occurrences

that happened to me and through process, materiality and symbolism; I make them extraordinary.

Background

My youth was enriched by my grandfather, who would give me everything I asked for. My grandfather, Hutang Wang, was a very important figure in my life. Unlike other children my age that attended kindergarten, I stayed at home, with my grandfather. He introduced me to art, specifically calligraphy, the traditional Chinese style of ink painting, and constructing paper pinwheels. He demonstrated the various ways art could represent the observable world. In addition, he broadened my knowledge of Chinese history and culture through trips to museums and other historical sites. Most of my childhood was spent with my grandfather, and I learned much from him every day.

When I was eight years old and beginning to truly appreciate his presence, my grandfather unexpectedly passed away. His loss was extremely difficult to cope with and comprehend, especially at such a young age. I visited his tomb every year to mourn his passing. After moving to America I could no longer grieve at his tomb; however, art has been an avenue to rebuild memories. This initial experience of losing of my grandfather helped inspire the major theme of loss in my artwork.

The other event that shaped my artistic identity was moving to the United States when I was 19 and the challenges that ensued. Moving was a difficult transition for a variety of reasons, for instance, my struggle with the English language. It was quite challenging to constantly hear English spoken and not understand, and it was also difficult adapting to a new culture. Although I eventually adjusted to living in Washington, D.C., I continued to feel culture shock and miss my family and friends in

China. Living in the U.S., I felt lonely and home sick, and I struggled to make friends.

Mealtime with my parents and phone calls to my close friends became the activities I cherished above all else.

“The strap of his knapsack pressed across his chest so that he could hardly breathe; he loosened it, but gained no relief. He saw but half the world around him; the other half he carried with him in his inward thoughts; and this is the condition in which he left. Not till he caught sight of the lofty mountains did the world appear more free to him; his thoughts were attracted to outer objects, and tears came into his eyes”¹

As illustrated in this quote by author Hans Christian Andersen from *Under the Willow Tree*, the outer world is only a portion of what the traveler experiences. Inward thoughts and past experiences also influence what the world travelers see. The travelers’ emotions are influenced by the way the inner life interacts with the external world. The past combined with the vast world he saw around him brought him to tears. Home impacts the traveler’s journey, but it is more than a place one lives. Home can be family, experiences, and memories. Therefore, home can always remain with the traveler. As a traveler myself, aspects of home are integral to my artwork. Through art, I am able to express feelings, recreate memories, and share my story. Most importantly, creating art has served as a “balm” for my feelings of pain and solitude.

¹ Andersen, Hans Christian. "Under the Willow-Tree." Hans Christian Andersen: Under the Willow-Tree. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Mar. 2017.

Pinwheels (Figure 1)

“Pinwheels” is composed of a group of ceramic pinwheels with various colors, which are displayed on a wall. The installation brings the viewer’s eyes into the crowded center of pinwheels. The pinwheel cluster diffuses as eyes flow from left to right. Looking downward, one can see a number of broken pinwheels lying on the floor. “Pinwheels” addresses the tension between letting go and holding on. I use different colors to represent the people in my life, currently or from the past. Warm and cold colors represent different characteristics of those people, such as, those who have given beautiful and painful moments. For instance, pink pinwheels represent my grandfather who was always caring and gave me unconditional love and nurturing; and some dark pinwheels, such as the black ones, reference toxicity. They indicate the people I trusted, but who have hurt my feelings. From my previous experiences, I have learned to cherish the people who are important to me, and let those people who do not belong in my life go.

The clay pinwheels were created in honor of my grandfather and those with whom I have lost contact. I used clay because ceramic pinwheels are enduring and cannot be burnt. In addition, they are in a static position to signify freezing time, but no longer functional. The ceramic pinwheels do contain cracks due to the fragility of the medium; however, the imperfection of each object can exemplify loss and estrangement. Also, the fragility symbolizes the relationship with people, some of whom are no longer in my life. The juxtaposition between the fragility and immobile or frozen

qualities of the clay pinwheels creates a sense of tension in the work that metaphorically resembles my personal story and experience-

In Christian Boltanski's work *Inventory of Objects Belonging to A Young Man of Oxford*, he sent letters to different museums in the world, proposing an exhibition that resembles the objects belonging to a deceased individual. Museum director Peter Ibsen took that project and started to collect a person's daily items and photographs.

Although Boltanski's observation deals with photography, representation of deathly stillness is true to my work. The pinwheel connects to the sorrow of my grandfather and other lost relationships. In addition, Boltanski mentions the qualities of "presence and absence." My pinwheels exemplify memories of my grandfather that can always remain with me through creating art.

Pinwheels originate from ancient Chinese folktales. The earliest were found in paintings from the Song Dynasty. In ancient traditional Chinese culture, the pinwheel was named "lucky wheel." It represents happiness and auspiciousness. Pinwheels spinning fast while they are windward, implies that time flies.² This traditional symbolism is also important in the installation. Much of the ceramic pinwheel representation concerns happy memories; however, the pinwheels also contain elements of faded and fragmented memories. The entire installation presents the viewer with contentious ideas.

²"玩具风车的历史-巨客网." 玩具风车的历史-巨客网, www.juke123.com/news-15014/. Accessed 6 Mar. 2017.

In Paul Chan's work titled *A Time Apart* he states that:

"...they³ remain, in the end, comfortless, as a reminder to anyone willing to engage them just how little time there is left, for anyone, and all that has been lost, how close it all is from disappearing, and what it takes to go on."⁴

Pinwheels are used as a "comfortless" reminder that represents a tension for the onlooker. This tension may be manifest in different ways, for example, as Chan states, such as how little time is left. Chan goes further to connect time with all that the onlooker might have lost in the past. How much the onlooker has lost can make "going on" seem futile at times.

I have repaired many pinwheels, they never look the same as the original, cracks still exist. No amount of effort can restore their initial beauty. I recognize that the pieces are not going to look the same as the original, yet I put much effort into their re-creation. Even with a beautiful new creation, I still yearn for the past and remember the way it was initially. The fixed pieces only serve as a reminder of "what was." When a piece is broken, however, I still repair the piece hoping this time will be different but subconsciously knowing that it will not.

My intense desire for lost ones to be present does not bring their return. As a substitute, memories and sentiment remain as constant companions. Though not perfect replicas, they offer a different connection to the deceased.

³ "They" in this quote refers to kairological artworks, or "The place where mortality restores."

⁴ Paul Chan, 'A Time Apart', in Klaus Biesenbach, en., Greater New York (New York: MoMA PS1, 2010) 84-5

Wander and direction (Figure 2)

For the piece “Wander and Direction,” I created dozens of ceramic feet, making several molds of my own feet in order to duplicate the form. Those feet were placed on the floor, in various poses, suggesting different gestures. Some appear to explore, some look as if they are hesitating. The ideas of exploration and hesitation are symbolic of personal conflict, a person may have the deep desire to discover the unknown but, at the same, be apprehensive about leaving what is familiar and known.

As a Chinese artist living in America, cultural and linguistic differences consistently cause problems. Especially when on my own, I give much effort to make sure I am understood, but it can be extremely difficult to communicate in a second language. In my work, the use of feet is shaped by the idea of diaspora, which is a dispersion or migration of people. As Luisa A. Igloria has stated:

“Inevitably, though, there will always be a significant part of the past which can neither be burnt nor banished to the soothing limbo of forgetfulness— myself. I was and still am that same ship which carried me to the new shore, the same vessel containing all the memories and dreams of the child in the brick house with the toy tea set. I am the shore I left behind as well as the home I return to every evening. The voyage cannot proceed without me.”⁵

As the body part that touches the earth first, feet are symbolically important. My feet carry my entire body as I travel to new destinations and create new memories. They are also another way to reconnect with my past. Since I have not visited my

⁵ Bobis, Merlinda C., and Luisa A. Igloria. *Not home, but here: writing from the Filipino*. Manila: Published and exclusively distributed by Anvil Pub., 2003. Print.

original home in years, simply the thought of walking in my old home again has become an aspiration of mine.

Feet symbolize what carry us on our way through life, and they represent my travels and the load I bare living in a foreign land. Cai Guoqiang's fireworks project inspired my work *Wander and Direction*. Cai's Footprints of History embodies the Chinese desire of hosting the Olympic Games, and the footsteps symbolized the process of fulfilling this dream. For the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games, Cai's fireworks project involved 29 gigantic footprints, signifying the 29th Olympic Games, which began at the South Gate of Beijing. The steps went across the Temple of Heaven, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City, the Jingshan Mountains, above the Olympic Village, and finally stopped in the sky at the Bird's Nest Stadium. It symbolized that history lead to this significant ceremony.⁶ Cai's work resonates with me because the feet I made also carry my dreams and expectations for my future. My feet lead me to a new destination and explore the unknown.

My work attempts to give the onlooker a glimpse of my deeper thoughts and feelings, such as, my desire to connect to my past and the isolation I feel at times. Another influential piece for my work was from the Chinese artist Yim Wai Wai's *The Touch of Tenderness*. The image in this piece is a butterfly perched on a clay heart sculpture that is half open. Her mother's photo is attached inside of the heart.

⁶ Guggenheimbilbao2009. "Cai Guo-Qiang: I Want to Believe - Footprints of History, 2008." YouTube. YouTube, 30 Apr. 2009. Web. 12 Mar. 2017.

Underneath of the heart, there is a pile of sand, which evokes the image of what that human body returns to after death. Her work both displays a yearning for her mother while also shows an organ producing feelings. According to Yim, "I like to explore what's inside of human body, such as feelings, emotions and memories, there are so many things in our bodies that we cannot see through naked eyes."⁷ As asserted by Yim, there is so much more to us as humans than can be observed. After viewing her work, I started to consider how human organs create feelings. In my work *Wander and Direction*, feet always create my relationships and stories with different locations, my feet carry my whole body to experience my life journey.

In different iterations of the piece, there is also an interactive element of *Wander and Direction*. In the gallery last fall, I created a disconnected line on the floor using my ceramic feet. Those who attended the gallery installation were handed a foot and then asked the questions in my language: "Can you place my feet anywhere on the floor?" or "I do not know what to do, can you guide me?" The goal of the task was that the attendants would help connect the line of those feet. Since I was not speaking in English, all the attendants appeared confused when asked the question, and most people continued to hold the feet. The purpose of this performance is for the viewer to briefly experience the feelings of living in a foreign country. Since it is challenging for me to express my thought clearly in a second language, it has always been difficult to

⁷ RTHK. "好想藝術：5 | following heart, artist－嚴惠蕙." YouTube. YouTube, 29 Mar. 2016. Web. 12 Mar. 2017.

understand and communicate effectively with people. These are constant feelings, and I wanted the viewers to empathize with my experience.

In my thesis exhibition this year, this piece changed with more intentional installation aesthetics. I installed floating stairs on the gallery walls. The feet were placed on each stair with different directions and gestures—some going up and some going down. This whole installation indicates expectations for the future but also carries confusions for the unknown. The many tiptoed feet displayed indicate curiousness and expectations for the future; going back and forth creates the feelings of hesitation. I was inspired by my conflicting views on graduation: I am full of hope for my future but fear to face reality; I am hesitant to make decisions; I do not want to waste my time by making a wrong move.

Message to... (Figure 3)

“Message to...” includes hundreds of ceramic paper airplanes that are hung from the ceiling facing away from the entrance of the space. The height of the installed airplanes represents the changing height of throwing a paper airplane at different ages, people grow as they become older and therefore will have higher release points for throwing objects. Different sizes of the paper airplanes indicate different ages while growing. Some airplanes are covered by decal paper made of newspaper prints from the year I was born to the present, they signify the timeline of my growing.

The installation itself plays an important role in this work because the entire space is my canvas. Furthermore, the arrangement is designed to attract the viewer's eyes inwards, directing the gaze from the path of those paper airplanes taking off and heading towards the focal point a large red airplane.

The large red paper airplane carries a poem I wrote for my grandfather: "bamboo rattan chair, opus quadratum and the old frame of family portrait, I finally realized the importance of them, but you are no longer by my side." This poem is inscribed on the large red airplane. It illustrates my maturation process from a child who could not understand precious family symbols to an adult, who now cherishes those symbols.

Childhood memories of happiness and joy help me cope when I encounter the difficulties and obstacles today. Daniel Birnbaum writes: "The past is present. Something has happened and the echoes are still resonating in my head. They are not becoming more difficult to discern; in fact the echoes are becoming increasingly loud and impossible to escape. The past lingers on, yesterday reverberates in today."⁸ In this statement, Daniel Birnbaum emphasizes how the past remains existent in the present. Although the experiences are "in the past," memories resonate with a person after time has passed. According to Birnbaum, "echoes" of the past can grow and become inescapable rather than fading away. These "echoes" or memories can be positive, negative, or a mixture of good and bad. Although the pain of losing my grandfather still

⁸ Birnbaum, Daniel, *Chronology* (New York and Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2005, second edition 2007)

affects me, his “echo” is largely the motivation of my artwork. Creating art has become my greatest passion, largely driven by the tension of wanting to reproduce the same happiness from the past but internally recognizing those moments have vanished. I agree with Birnbaum’s assertion that “echoes” become increasingly impossible to escape, however, my creative spirit increasingly develops due to this anguish.

The increasing sizes of the airplanes symbolize the transition from childhood to adulthood. Newspapers were used to create the airplanes, which is representative of another childhood memory. The airplanes are transitioning from Chinese printed newspapers to American newspapers, from the year I was born until 2015. They demonstrate the passage of time. The timeline connects childhood whimsy with adult reminiscence of early childhood.

Separate from my childhood associations, the color red is extremely symbolic in the Chinese culture. Since ancient times, red symbolizes both auspiciousness and happiness in China. Being the color of blood, red symbolizes vitality. It is also used to represent fire, which signifies positivity and enlightenment. Lastly, red characterizes the sunshine and warmth of the sun. Chinese palaces and temples were painted red both in ancient and modern times because the color deters evil spirits. For all these reasons, red is considered the color of luck. When celebrating Chinese New Year, individuals wear red and set off red firecrackers to wish good fortune upon the New Year.⁹ In my work,

⁹“红色”在中国文化里的象征意义.” 新浪博客. N.p., 21 July 2011. Web. 7 Mar. 2017.

red has two meanings: temperature and joyful moments, which both come from traditional concepts.

In my installation, some planes carry red tips, which is symbolic of temperature. In China, people are told that blowing at the end of paper airplanes allows them to fly further. The tradition is that the airplanes carry the dreams, and these dreams can eventually become reality. Since every dream is not realized, there are several fragments of fallen airplanes that signify unfulfilled dreams. In primary school, my classmates and I would make paper airplanes. We blew on the tails of the paper airplanes and hoped they would arrive at the desired locations. Paper airplanes continue to serve as a functional tool for me now, but in a different, more symbolic capacity.

As in many of my pieces, "*Message to...*" utilizes repetition, creating many ceramic airplane replications. The actions of rolling and folding clay and adding decal papers on fired pieces are repetitive. When reproducing the same object, the purpose is to rebuild the fragmented and forgotten memories. "It is an anecdote to the assumption that the less you remember, the more you repeat."¹⁰ Although repeatedly creating objects from the past does not perfectly recreate the moment, it gives an account of my history and maturation process. Repetition resembles a bridge that connects the past and present; it represents a life cycle in my work and helps me reconnect to my unrepeatable memories.

¹⁰ Fer, Briony, *The infinite Line: Remaking Art after Modernism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004)

As an adult, I am more aware of how my perceptions changed over time and the differences between memory and reality. “Only memory allows the mind to retain the past, however imperfectly, with reference to the reality of the present.”¹¹ Again, art is a bridge connecting my present and past.

Cycle (Figure 4)

In “*Cycle*” the installation includes numerous red and white ceramic teeth, which are carefully made individually by using clay. As a viewer’s vision travels from top to bottom, red teeth are funneling down to a pile of white teeth, which are placed on the floor with dirt. The installation resembles an hourglass, the combination of the hourglass and teeth symbolize different aspects of the life cycle. The height of this piece is in line with my own height. My height is a physical representation of growth, and as I gain my personal understanding of life and death has changed—from knowing nothing and wanted to grow up quickly, to avoid dealing with problems and fear of death.

“The hourglass... transforms the force of gravity into a measurement of time. But while nature may mete out time’s passage in these horological devices, it takes human observation of the heavens to set them.”¹²

As stated by Foer, the function of an hourglass is to measure time. When the sand completely filters to the bottom of the hourglass, it must be flipped to measure another time interval. This continuous turning suggests repetition through time. The

¹¹ Rorimer, Anne, ‘Subject as Object’, *New Art in the 60s and 70s: Redefining Reality* (London: Smith Elder & Co., 1856)

¹² Foer, Joshua, “Caveman: An Interview with Michel Siffre” *Cabinet*, no.30 (Summer 2008) www.cabinetmagazine.org

hourglass also reminds of the general passage of time through the life cycle: people are born like a tabula rasa, struggle with maturing, die and then are reborn. Time diminishes, the world changes, people adapt, and the years progress. When moments disappear, reminiscence becomes a treasure and past experiences remain as memories. As I grow older every day, a question has been raised in my mind: the purpose of living. I am still searching for the answer in my growing process, and working with clay helps me explore deeper meanings of life cycle.

The passage of time is also symbolized in "*Cycle*" through teeth and the aging process. Humans are born with a set of baby teeth that fall out after a few years to make way for another set, then wisdom teeth develop, and teeth begin to fall out again when we are old. In China, parents tell their children that the Tooth Fairy wants fallen bottom teeth thrown on a roof and fallen top teeth thrown on the ground, and the Tooth Fairy will allow the new set of teeth grow quickly and perfectly. Now, when I think about the act of throwing teeth, the gesture begets a sense of separation anxiety. Once thrown away, a person would have lost a connection to their past, and another memory fades and disappears. In this piece, each tooth is like a person who is no longer in my life.

The material one uses to construct a piece matters to concept of the work. The transformation of clay is a unique procedure. "There is a significant volume of literature on the disappearance and the neo-mineralization by firing in ceramic kilns."¹³ It begins

¹³ Serra, M. F., M.S. Conconi, G. Suarez, E. F. Agiatti, and N. M. Rendtorff. "Firing transformations of an argentinean calcareous commercial clay." *Cerâmica*. Associação Brasileira de Cerâmica, June 2013. Web. 14 Apr. 2017.

with a block of clay, that is fired and the quality of the clay changes due to loss of water and other chemicals.

The process of firing, building, and drying clay is reminiscent of rebirth because the same element transforms into a different form as if starting a new life. It also resembles a human being's life cycle— from being pure to experiencing emotions and gaining insight, to disappearing and starting a new life.

Wedging leftover clay pieces corresponds to the process of building through destroying. "Much of art is play in the serious sense, like magic, trying to restructure reality so that we can live with the suffering."¹⁴ Resembling the burying process, ceramic pieces wither when loaded into the kiln. During firing, the clay changes state and obtains new properties. This process coincides with a life transition. The kiln represent challenges, firing the hardships caused by the challenges, and the changed state of clay signifies the growth process as a result of the challenge.

Chinese artist Yim Wai Wai uses clay to seek the essence of life. Yim utilizes the form of human organs and biological constitution to build sculptures using clay. She then mixes sculptures with other media to imply how human beings use physical bodies to record and recall memories. *The 21 Grams Theory* by American doctor Duncan MacDougall's¹⁵ inspired Yim's *21 Grams*. Based on this theory, Yim made a series of

¹⁴ "Masks." Stephen De Staebler. N.p., n.d. Web. 19 Feb. 2017.

¹⁵ "MacDougall reported sudden weight losses for five dying patients. The weight loss at the time of death, as inferred by audible stroke of the weighing beam. Within a few minutes after death, two of the patients lost around 21 grams."

crosses and loaded them into a wood fire kiln. The heat generated in the kiln brought the clay a transition. She kept 21 grams of wood ashes from each cross, which symbolizes the weight of a soul. When thinking about Yim's work, I reflect on what beyond the physical body makes humans unique. Do the 21 grams make a difference? Similarly in my work, I explore the features of clay and extract deeper meaning through crafting art by including important aspects of life, history, and culture.

Clay records my memories of time as a medium full of vitality; it helps me explore the meaning of life and it is a media which witnesses and maintains my fragmented memories in my growing process.

"Who can deny that the past does not now exist? Yet there is still in the mind a memory of the past. None can deny that present time lacks any extension, because it passes in a flash. Yet attention is continuous, and it is through this that what will be present progressed towards being absent."¹⁶

This statement from Augustine of Hippo in the *Confessions* brings several thoughts to mind. No matter the lengths we go to forget, our past still exists. We can see the past, plan for the future, but cannot control every occurrence in the present. Through my work, I wish to record every moment from my life, to be present and not absent, to prove my existence and to write my stories in my growing process.

Persinger, Michael A., and Linda S. St-Pierre. "The Biophysics at Death: Three Hypotheses With Potential Application to Paranormal Phenomena." *NeuroQuantology*. N.p., Mar. 2011. Web. 26 Mar. 2017.

¹⁶ Augustine of Hippo, extract from the *Confessions* (397-98 CE); trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 230-32; 243

"Cycle" was influenced by the Chinese folk tale of Meng Po, a Buddhist Goddess who makes "forgetfulness broth" or "oblivion soup" for the souls of dead ones. The broth is made by equinox flowers and water from a river, mixed with some mundane medicines into an alcohol like soup. The soup has five tastes: sweet, bitter, spicy, sour and salty, which indicate mixed emotions in life. She gives people oblivion soup at the reincarnation door before they leave for the land of rebirth. After drinking it, people will forget everything of their previous life, be ready to start over, and begin a new cycle. There is no antidote to Meng Po's soup, and only Buddha is able to change the result of losing memories.¹⁷ While creating the piece, I imagined the moment of drinking the broth, remembering the people and the occurrences that I cannot let go, and thinking how it all will be swallowed with the soup. Letting go can help bring more discoveries in my life, but also appreciate and make the most of the present.

Conclusion

My work explores the timeline from my early childhood in China to my current life as an artist in America. In particular, two major threads inspire my art: family, especially my relationship with my grandfather, and my life after moving to the United States. Additionally, the artwork featured in this thesis serves to capture several aspects of personal growth. After the loss of my grandfather, I wanted to go back in time, before he passed, and remain in that blissful period forever.

¹⁷ "MENG-PO - the Chinese Goddess of Reincarnation (Chinese mythology)." Godchecker - Your Guide to the Gods. N.p., 03 May 2013. Web. 10 Mar. 2017.

Growing process contains three aspects that have profound personal significance: the use of clay, repetition, and how I install my pieces. First, in the longstanding tradition of traditional Chinese ceramics, I use clay for my creations. Clay has several symbolic features that are ideal for my artwork. It contains elements, such as soil, that can decompose and provide nutrients to facilitate new life. The processes of loss and rebuilding are represented in drying and firing clay, respectively. Using clay is also a way to more accurately illustrate personal aspects of my artwork. Clay records my memories of time and helps me explore the meaning of life.

Second, repetition is a highly important aspect of my artwork. Repetition is done through creating numerous duplicates of the same object for my crafts. This act signifies rebirth and the life cycle. Rebirth is an important concept in my belief system. As my memories of the past become unclear, I replicate objects to maintain a connection to the past. Finally, the installation process in itself is a vital feature of my creations. Unlike a painter that uses a canvas for his or her work, I use the entire space available as my canvas. Specific location, placement, and spacing provided added dimensions of interpretation. Many of my works hang from the ceiling or direct attention to precise areas of the exhibit. All of these features are essential in connecting to my past and sharing my story with the onlooker.

While reflecting on my work, I begin to understand the steps of my growth, realizing who I was and who I am becoming. Art is a method to both live in the moment

while honoring memories from the past. Through my growing process, my memories can have life and be more than a forgotten piece in history.

Appendix



Figure 1

Pinwheels

2017, Duke Hall Gallery

Porcelain and glazes



Figure 2

Wander and Direction

2017, Duke Hall Gallery

Stoneware and underglaze

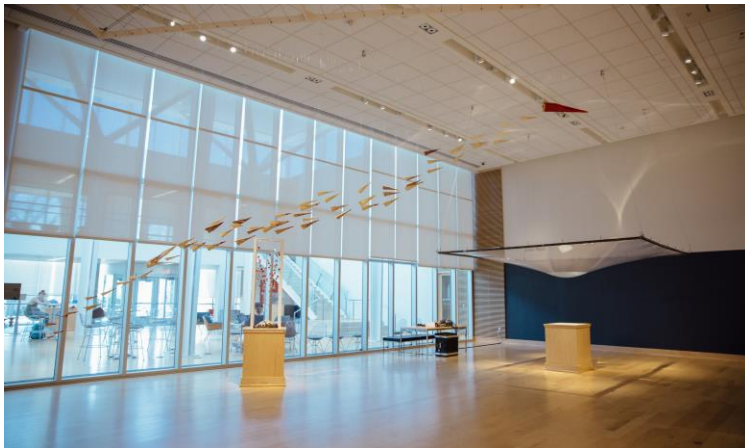


Figure 3

Message to...

2017, Duke Hall Gallery

Porcelain, underglaze and decal paper

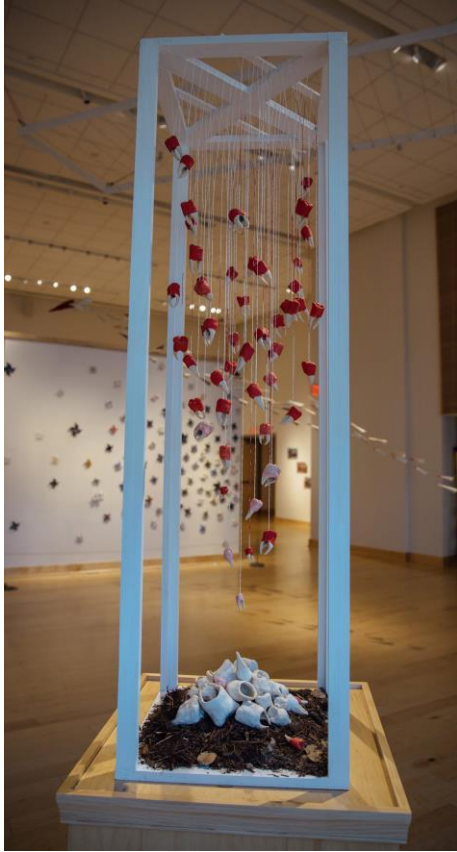


Figure 4

Cycle

2017, Duke Hall Gallery

Porcelain, underglaze and soil

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