

2022

Stil-Life

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Still-Life

Yi Xiong

Thesis submitted
to the College of Creative Arts

at West Virginia University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts in

Ceramics

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Morgantown, West Virginia

2022

Keywords: Ceramics, Sculpture, Still-Life, Blue and White, Porcelain,

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Abstract

Still-Life

Crystal Xiong

This written thesis is the supporting documentation for Still-Life, my Master of Fine Arts thesis exhibition. I use handmade ceramic still-life objects to depict my specific memories and experiences about my life before and after the pandemic. Death, hope, time, and emotion are the themes explored in this exhibition.

This installation of ceramic sculptures not only recreates a historical moment in the pandemic but also captures the current times that we live in. It records the artist's life and time during the COVID-19 pandemic. The selection of still-life objects for the exhibition often has special significance on a personal, cultural, social, and philosophical level. These objects come from daily life and are arranged thematically. The installation is designed to create a journal that expresses the artist's experiences and emotions to evoke an emotional connection with the audience.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all of my committee members, professors, and fellow graduate students. I would also like to especially thank my friends for the support, conversations, assistance, and technical insights during my M.F.A. degree. Last but not least I would like to thank my parents for all of their support along the way. This exhibition concludes a three-year journey of self-guided discovery to find my visual language. I am truly thankful to everyone who played a role in my artistic development.

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Introduction

Since childhood, I have been sensitive to current events and things around me. What happens around me affects me all the time, so I like to tell my thoughts by recording what I see and hear through creating artwork, specifically still-lives. I believe objects can reflect a person's life and story. At the same time, objects are personal and carry emotions and feelings. I am Chinese and the way Chinese people express their emotions is through indirect ways and objects. For example, in Chinese culture, the moon represents reunion. The famous Chinese poet, Li Bai, writes a poem about a man who separated from his family and saw the moon was round which is a positive symbol related to the reunion. He describes the moon to express his feelings about missing his hometown relatives. I always tie my culture to my creative process and that is why I use objects to express my emotions, to reflect on my thoughts and outlook on the world. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a huge impact on my life. The pandemic made me start to think about what it means to be me.

Looking back to art history, many artists have made art objects using their experience in previous pandemics and the resulting deaths. My work is inspired by Vanitas paintings, a genre of still-life painting that widely spread in the Netherlands in the early 17th century. “A still-life artwork that includes various symbolic objects designed to remind the viewer of their mortality and of the worthlessness of worldly goods and pleasure sure”.¹

Still-life is a record and reflection of my life as a Chinese student studying abroad in the United States during the COVID-19 Pandemic. I share my stories visually through ceramic objects that relate to my life experience. It not only reflects the difference in my life as a result of the pandemic but also the connection to personal and cultural experiences. I

¹ Tate, “Vanitas-Art Term.” *Tate*, Tate Museum, 1 Jan. 1970, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/v/vanitas>.

wanted this to connect with the audience while documenting my experience.

The exhibition contains a series of thirteen sculptures. Each sculpture represents a different time experience and carries a story behind it. All my sculptures have a diary-like subtitle that not only tells the time but also the narrative behind the object. Inspired by Vanitas oil paintings from the 17th century, I create ceramic objects that deliberately represent my memories, experiences, and emotions associated with the pandemic. Everyday goods such as masks, hand sanitizer, and bleach spray sit alongside common Vanitas symbols of flowers and fruits which express ideas of life, time, and death. Using traditional hand-painted Chinese blue and white porcelain decorations, I create these ceramic still-lives to capture my unique experience during this distinct moment in history. My thesis exhibition, *Still-Life*, documents my life and time during COVID-19 - the longing for home, the hope for reunion, the fear of the pandemic, the care and worry for life, and the hope for a future.

Concepts

As a Chinese, I was taught that if I want to express my views then I should express them in an indirect way. This implicitness is quite different from how many people express themselves in the United States. In the West, many modern art forms pay attention to expression and express feelings more directly. The Chinese culture has always emphasized moderation and not going to extremes. Lao Tzu a famous Chinese philosopher, believed that the edge is the easiest place to break and sharp things cannot stay sharp too long². The sharp edge is representing extreme opinions and both can do harm, this is why overly radical thoughts may hurt you and those around you, and balanced and neutral opinions are a more lasting way to get along. Under the influence of this culture, my artistic creation uses metaphors and symbols and uses objects to narrate which are indirect ways of expression.

I grew up in Liling, China, which is a small city of ceramic art. I was exposed to ceramic art from an early age. When I was in middle school, my parents sent me to an art center to learn to paint, especially painting still-life objects, these objects were arranged by my teacher and they did not mean anything to me. It was not until later when I began to place and observe my own still-life that I discovered that objects used for still life frequently have specific importance, whether personal, cultural, or social. The concepts that surround the artwork frequently elicit contemplation and reflection in the observer. Depending on how things are arranged, the way they are portrayed can elicit a broad range of feelings. Therefore I use still-life objects as my artistic methods to tell my story and experience.

² Chan, Alan. "Laozi." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, 21 Sept. 2018, <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/laozi/>.

Recording what happens around me and reflecting on it through artistic creation is a means of my creation. Facing COVID-19 while studying abroad was a very unforgettable and special experience for me. My life has changed due to the pandemic, this experience caused me to think about my living habits which are reflected in the objects around me. These objects stayed with me during this time, and they were my testimony to this experience. I also want the audience to connect with the objects that reflect and document my life and time during COVID-19. These still-life objects represent my perception of the pandemic, my worries, and fears about life, and my changes and hopes for the future.

My main objective as an artist is to share the experience and elicit emotion in the audience. Based on Vanitas paintings, I create a ceramic sculpture installation that not only references pandemics of the past but also recreates the historical moment of COVID-19 in the current era in which we live.

Design

My creative process is just like writing a diary, and the clay is my pen. I enjoy the process of making these objects; The feeling of touching clay is intimate, it takes me back to a particular moment. I use ceramics to restore the moment and freeze this particular time during the pandemic. Ceramics has a history going back tens of thousands of years, which provides a record of ancient civilizations which otherwise would have been lost. Unlike paintings that can be easily damaged and decay over time, I choose to make my still-lives out of clay to record my experiences as it relates to the history of ceramic art. Bernard Leach also wrote about the indelible nature of ceramics in his book *A Potter's Book*:

“This substance with its precious humility becomes, through its indestructibility, the most faithful bearer of man’s message. As far back as one goes in time, the works of humanity from prehistoric times have reached us not through stone which crumbles and wears away, or through metal which oxidizes and becomes like powder, but through slabs of pottery, the writing on which is as clear today as it was under the stiletto of the scribe who traced it”³.

My making process starts with the decision of selecting the objects. My reference comes from my daily life photos, which record my life changes during the pandemic. Choices of form are not only technical but also emotional and aesthetic. Food is one of the themes that I discuss in my work. The pandemic changed my view of food. In the early days of the outbreak, people panicked about the virus and started to stock up on food in supermarkets, leading to food shortages. I also stockpiled a lot of food especially non-perishable, long-lasting food like canned goods. The biggest fear is no longer the disease itself, but the uncertainty of what life looks like in the future. When I go to the supermarket to buy instant noodles and frozen food, it's the fear of not knowing when you can buy fresh food that

³ Leach, Bernard. *A Potter's Book* (London: Unicorn, 2016),78.

motivates me to buy those things. Therefore, a lot of hoarded items became the source of my creation.

Technique

I draw inspiration from two-dimensional paintings, recreating them into a three-dimensional objects using the slab building technique. I chose to use the slab building technique because it gives me the freedom to cut out any shape I want to create the objects, and cutting out a slab is similar to drawing an outline on paper while my background in painting helps me to illustrate the objects. Although a slab is flat, I put together two slabs and manipulate their forms using my hands and ceramic ribs. By joining the mirrored slabs, I create three-dimensional objects that also have a smooth surface for decoration. I enjoy the process of hand-building, my hands are in direct contact with the clay and imitate the shape of the still-life as if I were touching the still-life.

Surface decoration is also an important part of my creative process. After passing through a Bisque firing, I paint the clay sculpture with ceramic glazes and oxides. The original bisque ware is indistinguishable, however, it is very important to let the audience recognize the object itself and have association and connection, so my painting style is realistic. I abandoned the original color of the still-life objects and chose blue and white decoration because it reflects my culture and experience of my study in Jingdezhen, China, Blue and white is a traditional Chinese ceramic decoration using cobalt washes on white porcelain to create motifs. Blue and white porcelain became popular in Jingdezhen, China in the 14th century after the cobalt blue was imported from Persia⁴.

⁴ Medley, Margaret. *The Chinese Potter: A Practical History of Chinese Ceramics* (New York, Phaidon), 2006, 217-224.

Influence

Still-life painting has always been one of the important creative themes in the art world. I practiced drawing still-lives when I was young, and I remember my drawing teacher used to tell me, “Still-lives are the way we understand the world.” I did not understand it at the time, but still-life continues to influence my work and capture moments in time. The term still-life is:

“attributed to an artistic current that is responsible for portraying the way in which the different elements present in reality are perceived, but with a certain emphasis on the things that refer to our day to day, deepening the interpretation and the dynamics of the senses of the environment from the point of view of the author⁵.”

The subject matter of the still-life changed over time. Still-life paintings have long been associated with religious and mythical themes. This reflected the times; the Church was the focal point of daily life. Society was transforming by the 16th century in that religious themes went out of favor as science established a stronger foothold. The natural world was suddenly fascinating to study and document in and of itself, rather than for religious or mythical motives. As history moved closer to the mid-nineteenth century, representing the natural world began to fall out of favor as well. The art industry was now more interested in delving into our inner realm of feelings and moods. Still-life disintegrated into geometry as the twentieth century progressed, and things were abstracted even more on the canvas. As shown in the Pop Art and Photorealism trends, the objects portrayed in paintings were elevated as commodities and acknowledged for their commercialism towards the end of the millennium.

Vanitas’ still-life painting tackled pandemic and death-based works. Vanitas’ paintings contain clusters of things that symbolize the certainty of death as well as the impermanence

⁵ Culturas, Conoce de, “Still Life,” *Postposmo*, 12 Jan. 2021, <https://www.postposmo.com/en/naturaleza-muerta/>.

and vanity of earthly triumphs and pleasures. They inspire the viewer to reflect on mortality. Pieter Claesz, a famous oil painter of the 17th century, explored these themes in his Vanitas paintings. His work, *Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill* (2022, fig. 3), used the skull as the main object to convey the message of death. “More subtle allusions to death could also be found in still-life paintings featuring flowers or fruit, such as Balthasar van der Ast’s *Fruit Basket* (2022, fig. 4). While the grapes, which often symbolized Christ, are still fresh. Other fruits are blighted by bruises and wormholes”⁶. The symbols used in Vanitas oil painting became my inspiration to create *Vanitas - Life and Decay* series.

The themes of Vanitas have influenced many contemporary artists. Dirk Staschke is well recognized for his use of ceramics to explore Dutch Vanitas’ still-life themes. His most recent body of work focuses on the area between sculpture and painting. In his art, the careful portrayal is frequently used as a foil for assessing talent and workmanship.⁷ I am inspired by his work *Soliloquy #3* (2022, fig. 6). He also uses flowers in his work and visual contrast to create beautiful fronts and chaotic backs for his sculptures. His works inspired me to explore visual contrast in my sculptures.

Beth Lipman is another artist who influenced me. She uses still-lives, site-specific installations, and photography to investigate facets of material society. She has been creating hand-sculpted glass compositions for the past ten years. Inanimate objects are used to create pictures of people and our society. Everything generated, regardless of how damaged, defective, or flawless, is integrated into the final design, capturing a moment in time. The final composition is defined by the creative process. Mortality, consumerism, materialism,

⁶ Editorial, Artsy, and Cath Pound, “These Lush 17th-Century Paintings Were Striking Reminders of Mortality,” *Artsy*, 28 Oct. 2019, www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-lush-17th-century-paintings-striking-reminders-mortality.

⁷ Staschke, Dirk, “Dirk Staschke,” *Mark Moore Fine Art*, <https://www.markmoorefineart.com/artists/dirk-staschke?view=slider>.

and temporality have all been important themes in the still-life genre from its birth in the 17th century. Like the classical vanitas paintings, her work *Laid* (2022, fig. 11) is chosen for its meanings. She writes in her artist statement, that “broken glass and overturned goblets represent human fragility and mortality.” She describes that the allure of still-life paintings is that they may teach us fresh perspectives on everyday items. Then things take on a "whole new significance once they are put in a precise arrangement and then recorded in any medium”. Everyday objects have a life beyond the ordinary ingrained in them. Their existence is documented in time⁸.

Still-life provides a means of recording time and experience. Ricky Swallow's work *Killing Time* (2022, fig. 5) is a major artistic influence on my work and has shaped the way I think about the relationship between objects as a record of time and experience. Swallow created a lavish, life-size sculptural rendition of his family dinner table, brimming with the aquatic creatures he collected and killed as a boy. His work is influenced by his father's work as a fisherman in Melbourne, as well as Vanitas' painting of the 17th-century Dutch still-life style. Swallow's art encapsulates the ambiguous topic of creation, which unites the world's delight with the deterioration that comes with it; the delight is present, but it is also present in the sense that it will ultimately die⁹.

Another artistic influence on my work is *Still-Life* by Jeanette May, a photographer who is also inspired by the Dutch Vanitas paintings. Her work *Tech Vanitas- Musical Decanter* (2022, fig. 10) embraces the worry that comes with technology obsolescence. Tech Vanitas values elegance, appreciates design, and recognizes the transient nature of worldly

⁸ Lipman, Beth, “Work,” *Beth Lipman*, <https://www.bethlipman.com/work#/laid-time-table-with-cycads>.

⁹ Swallow, Ricky, “Killing Time, 2003-2004 by Ricky Swallow,” *Agnew*, 1 Jan. 1970, www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/125.2004/.

joys. Digital photography is used by this modern Vanitas to portray the unstable arrangements of household technology moments¹⁰.

I am also inspired by many contemporary ceramic artists who are exploring themes similar to still-lives. Louise Daneel, for example, focuses her practice on creating items that have personal meaning for her. *Memory Shelves* (2022, fig. 8), is a store-cupboard installation with ceramic copies that connect to individual experiences and feelings for her. She tells us: “I made a selection of objects that play an important role in my memories and my personal life story. By being the archaeologist of my memories, I tried to bring the memories back to life in ceramic sculptures. The work brings up a memory-game of associations and stories.”¹¹ Louise tries to get her viewers to her own experiences through the settings and things that provide a visual, tactile context for something which cannot be felt directly by taking intangible memories and externalizing them as material objects¹².

Another contemporary ceramic artist, Adam Ledford, makes installations that investigate the narrative power of items which I also discuss in my work. He believes that in addition to being utilitarian objects, daily objects express the social status and represent a culture's goals and beliefs. These objects can become cultural icons, serving as national and personal identity markers. His work for example *Don't worry about the government* (2022,

¹⁰ May, Jeanette, “New Artworks by Jeanette May,” *KLOMPCHING GALLERY*, <https://www.klompching.com/new-artworks-by-jeanette-may>.

¹¹ Daneels, Louise, “Louise Daneels Makes Playful, Ceramic Illustrations of Everyday Objects,” *It's Nice That*, <https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/louise-daneels-memory-shelves-ceramic-illustration-230719>.

¹² Daneels, Louise, “Louise Daneels Makes Playful, Ceramic Illustrations of Everyday Objects,” *It's Nice That*, <https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/louise-daneels-memory-shelves-ceramic-illustration-230719>

fig. 7) uses goods and the public performance of household space to convey personal identity¹³.

Stephanie H. Shih. is an Asian American artist with a similar cultural background to myself. Her way of conveying information and emotion through objects influenced my work. Her work *Nostalgia for a Nonexistent Homeland* (2022, fig. 9) is an exploration of concepts of home. Not only as a geographical location, but also as cultural, generational, and emotional environments in which we live. Her ceramic sculptures express “nostalgia and material lineages of migration and colonization” from the perspective of the Asian American kitchen¹⁴.

¹³ Ledford, Adam, “Adam Ledford,” *The Delaware Contemporary*, <https://www.decontemporary.org/adam-ledford>.

¹⁴ Specter, Emma, “Stephanie H. Shih's Food Ceramics Nourish Asian-American Memory,” *Garage*, 10 May 2019, https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/vb9bym/stephanie-shih-food-ceramics.

Still-Life Thesis Exhibition

Still-Life is a thesis exhibition in which I record my life experience by making ceramic daily objects in the context of the pandemic. Inspired by Vanitas oil paintings from the 17th century, I create ceramic objects that deliberately represent my memories, experiences, and emotions associated with the pandemic. Everyday goods such as masks, hand sanitizer, and bleach spray sit alongside common Vanitas symbols of flowers and fruits which express ideas of life, time, and death. Using traditional hand-painted Chinese blue and white porcelain decorations, I create these ceramic still-lives to capture my unique experience during this distinct moment in time.

The exhibition is arranged in a time-oriented manner while also focusing on prominent ceramic works. The first thing visitors see when they enter the gallery is the title of the exhibition, Still-Life, and a small ceramic sculpture hanging on the wall next to it (2022, fig. 1). *Vanitas - Life and Decay, 1 of 3* (2022, fig. 12) has a skull and a vase with tulips in it. This is a typical 17th-century still-life object. The contrast between the skull and the flower suggests death and life. The sculptures, echoing the exhibition's title, lead the viewer to continue exploring. *Vanitas - Life and Decay* consist of three sculptures placed at the entrance of the gallery, in the middle of the walkway, and below the curved walkway. This series is the first to be seen by the audience. This work is a guide and bridge between the most traditional 17th-century Vanitas still-life creation background and my daily still-life in the context of the pandemic. *Vanitas - Life and Decay, 2 of 3* (2022, fig. 13) placed in the middle of the walkway contains three objects - skulls, fresh fruit in a ceramic bowl, and flowers blooming in a glass bottle. Fruit and flowers will decay and wither with time. I am interested in the

meaning behind these objects. Still-life is not just a simple object, it can speak and arouse the imagination.

Vanitas - Life and Decay, 3 of 3 (2022, fig. 14) is the most complete and rich artwork in the series. The work sits at the bottom of the walkway, on a large rectangular pedestal filled with various still-lives. Compared to the previous two sculptures, this work encourages the audience to look around the work. The themes of the Vanitas paintings of the 17th century, which remind the viewer of the decay of life and the inevitability of death, are better represented in this work. These ceramic sculptures have different decorations reflected on the front and back. For example, a bowl full of fresh fruit on the other side of an empty bowl. The fresh fruit basket on the other side is rotting. Insect-infested fruit and blooming flowers on the other side began to degenerate, discolor, and decay. Behind a gorgeous flower is a cold skull. I use contrast to make strong changes in my works to guide the audience's interest, it invites the viewer's eye to linger on them, search out the details, and think about the artist's intention in assembling the disparate parts.

The main component of the exhibition is the everyday objects that I create, which are carefully selected. They have a narrative function, telling what happened during my three years of studying abroad during the pandemic. Each sculpture is like a journal, and I use a short, chronological, narrative title combined with the ceramic sculptures to tell each special moment. *2020 October - I received a pandemic prevention package from the Chinese Embassy* (2022, fig. 15), This is the first small sculpture that the audience sees when they come down the aisle. Scattered capsules, tablets, and two cuboid medicine boxes are filled with Chinese characters. By reading the title, the audience can learn the story behind this object, which means a lot to me. As an overseas student, I was at a loss in the face of a

sudden outbreak of the COVID-19. So when I received this prevention package from the Chinese Embassy, I got some comfort and encouragement. So, the significance of an object becomes apparent.

The pandemic has been a unique experience that has had a significant impact on my shopping habits. I began to pay attention to the objects around me, which were different from each other in terms of time, quantity, and function. In *2021 February - I read an article that vitamins can improve the immune system. I bought all kinds of vitamins (2022, fig. 16)*, As you can see from the title I describe a hilarious and humorous story of my mindless shopping and hoarding of goods in the face of Coronavirus. I made various vitamin bottles with the slogan "Support a Healthy Immune System" on them to reflect my anxious state of mind.

2022 February - Cup Noodles leftover from the early days of the pandemic (2022, fig. 17). As much as I love fresh food, stocking up on instant noodles is a necessity during the pandemic. Because of the massive hoarding, I still have a lot of Cup Noodle leftover in 2022. Looking at this group of ceramic sculptures, I can recall the experience of frantically buying instant noodles and eating instant noodles, which is different from the experience of eating instant noodles before. These leftover cup noodles sculptures are my memory, I hope these sculptures can also resonate with the audience, maybe we have similar experiences during the pandemic.

My experience has changed in these three years, which can be reflected by different objects. In *2020 August - The milk I drink since the pandemic has changed because of the shelf life (2022, fig. 18)*, The sculptures are different types of milk, which differ in their shelf life. I use contrast to reflect my views and my behavioral changes during the COVID-19

Pandemic. Before the pandemic, I most often bought milk in plastic bottles, but unfortunately, it only has a shelf life of two weeks. To avoid going shopping during the pandemic and reduce my contact with the Coronavirus, I stopped buying milk with such a short shelf life but changed to milk in cartons which has a shelf life of one or two months, and canned milk powder which can last up to a year. Then I found out that the canned milk powder comes with 50 servings and has a shelf life of one year, which is the best choice. These three kinds of milk with different shelf life represent a change in my view of food shelf life, because of the pandemic, I began to notice the time represented by these objects. The same goes for other food, for example, vegetables. *2020 November - Fresh vegetables are expensive and can't be stored for a long time, Frozen vegetables can do both* (2022, fig. 19), This group of still-life objects consists of two parts, fresh vegetables, and frozen vegetables, which form a contrast, and are also different in the shape of the objects. The shape of fresh vegetables is organic and irregular, while the frozen vegetables are square and just like ice cubes. I never bought frozen vegetables before the pandemic, but fresh vegetables are hard to preserve. So, I had to change the way I shopped to find foods that would last longer. Frozen vegetables are a good idea because they are cheap and last a long time. These still-life objects represent the changes in my life experience and habits and depict my thoughts on the object's time and character during this period.

In the face of COVID-19, I not only stocked up on all kinds of food, but also stockpiled all kinds of pandemic prevention tools, such as masks, gloves, hand wash, hand sanitizer, and disinfectant spray. The huge amount of hoarding is a manifestation of my anxiety in the face of the epidemic. I use a huge amount to protect myself to make me feel at ease. *In 2020 May - I have to stay prepared to face the pandemic with these prevention tools*

(2022, fig. 20), These objects are essential representations of my three years of experience during the COVID-19. This still-life piece has eleven pandemic prevention tools, big and small, also with different functions. The placement of this work is deliberate, and I hope to show the importance of each object while showing the quantity. On the base of the large pedestal, I accumulated two additional layers of small pedestals to create a stepped display space, so these items can be displayed in front of the audience.

2020 March - My parents in China ask me to go to the supermarket to buy more canned food (2022, fig. 21), this is another artwork that also uses quantity to reflect my views and my behavioral changes during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Everyone has probably had a similar experience and can relate to this artwork. When the outbreak first started in the United States, I got concerned from my parents who told me to stock up on canned goods in the supermarket. I never buy canned food, and my family seldom buys canned food, because I was taught by my family that the salt content of canned food is too high for my health. However, because of the pandemic, my parents encouraged me to hoard canned food for the first time. The still-life piece has 14 cans of various kinds. Like the placement method of pandemic Prevention Tools, this work also has an extra base to support the cans. The cans stack up like a mountain showing the quantity at the same time it also gives the cans room to breathe. The cans were carefully selected, such as less sodium spam, common chicken noodles can, and Chinese brand of canned fish. These can goods record my changes in diet and tell about my life experience. Chinese culture is part of my life and living in America, and these everyday American products are also part of my experience.

One of the most memorable experiences of the pandemic is vaccination. So, I created a series of vaccine-related still-life objects to present my experience with vaccinations. In

2021 December - The side effects of the vaccine shots were very unpleasant, so I bought a variety of painkillers for the booster (2022, fig. 22), It contains a water cups, a variety of painkillers, a thermometer showing high temperatures, and three doses of vaccine suggesting three shots. These still-life objects are narrative which implies that my vaccination experience was not good. The thermometer says I have a fever and a headache from the vaccine, and I had to take painkillers to help me with the pain. So, I was very anxious when facing booster shots.

The pandemic has made me more sensitive to the objects in my daily life and also make me aware of how much rice I was consuming daily, and rice is an important and indispensable part of my diet, which is abundantly placed in the center of the installation.

2021 August - Rice is an important part of my diet, I socked up at the supermarket with whatever rice they had left (2022, fig. 23). It is made up of 8 rice bags of different sizes, and these are the brands of rice commonly found in supermarkets. These rice bags are a record of how much I consumed during the pandemic and they also represent my life and food culture. It is because of the special meaning and large volume of rice bags that I put this group of works in a prominent position in the middle of the whole exhibition.

The experience of hoarding toilet paper in this particular context of the pandemic is something everyone can relate to. Hoarding toilet paper is a common response to the disaster, just as hoarding food is one of the ways humans protect themselves from harm. The more you hoard, the better. Therefore, this group of objects presents quantity in a stepped way, which visually gives the audience a sense of quantity. *2020 April - The store's toilet paper section is empty however everyone's home is filled with toilet paper (2022, fig. 24)* - the title also has a sense of humor about my experience of hoarding toilet paper during the pandemic.

Conclusion

My thesis exhibition serves as a journal of my personal experiences. It does so from the beginning of the pandemic to the present - in all kinds of situations. As an artist, I visually present the changing and special moments in the pandemic's life. This exhibition allowed me to reflect on my experience and to think and be aware of the objects around me. *Still-Life* was designed as a personal experience, but I hope this work could also relate to others. The installation is narrative and story-telling. It aims to record my unique experience and try to elicit a response and interest from the viewer as they enter the space.



Fig. 1. Crystal Xiong, *Still-Life* (Exhibition title), 2022.



Fig.2. Crystal Xiong, *Still-Life* (Installation view), 2022.



Fig. 3. Pieter Claesz, *Still Life with a Skull and a Writing Quill*, 1628. Oil painting. Reproduced from <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/435904> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 4. Balthasar van der Ast, *Fruit Basket*, 1600. Oil painting. Reproduced from <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-lush-17th-century-paintings-striking-reminders-mortality> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 5. Ricky Swallow, *Killing Time*, 2003-2004. Laminated Jelutong, maple. Reproduced from <https://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/125.2004/#about> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 6. Dirk Staschke, *Soliloquy #3*, 2016. ceramics, wood, epoxy.
from [https://www.markmoorefineart.com/artists/dirk-staschke?
view=slider#2](https://www.markmoorefineart.com/artists/dirk-staschke?view=slider#2) (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 7. Adam Ledford, *Don't worry about the government*, 2017. Ceramics. Reproduced from <https://www.decontemporary.org/adam-ledford> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 8. Louise Daneels, *Memory Shelves*, 2019. Ceramics. Reproduced from <https://www.itnicethat.com/articles/louise-daneels-memory-shelves-ceramic-illustration-230719> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 9. Stephanie H. Shih, *假/家: Nostalgia for a Nonexistent Homeland*, 2019. Ceramics. Reproduced from https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/vb9bym/stephanie-shih-food-ceramics (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 10. Jeanette May, *Musical Decanter*, 2018. Photographs.
Reproduced from <https://www.klompching.com/new-artworks-by-jeanette-may> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 11. Beth Lipman, *Laid*, 2015. glass, adhesive, wood, paint.
Reproduced from <https://www.bethlipman.com/work#/laid-time-table-with-cycads> (accessed April 1, 2022).



Fig. 12. Crystal Xiong, *Vanitas - Life and Decay*, 1 of 3, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 13. Crystal Xiong, *Vanitas - Life and Decay*, 2 of 3, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 14. Crystal Xiong, *Vanitas - Life and Decay, 3 of 3, 2022*, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 15. Crystal Xiong, *2020 October - I received a pandemic prevention package from the Chinese Embassy, 2022*, ceramic, Dimensions variable.

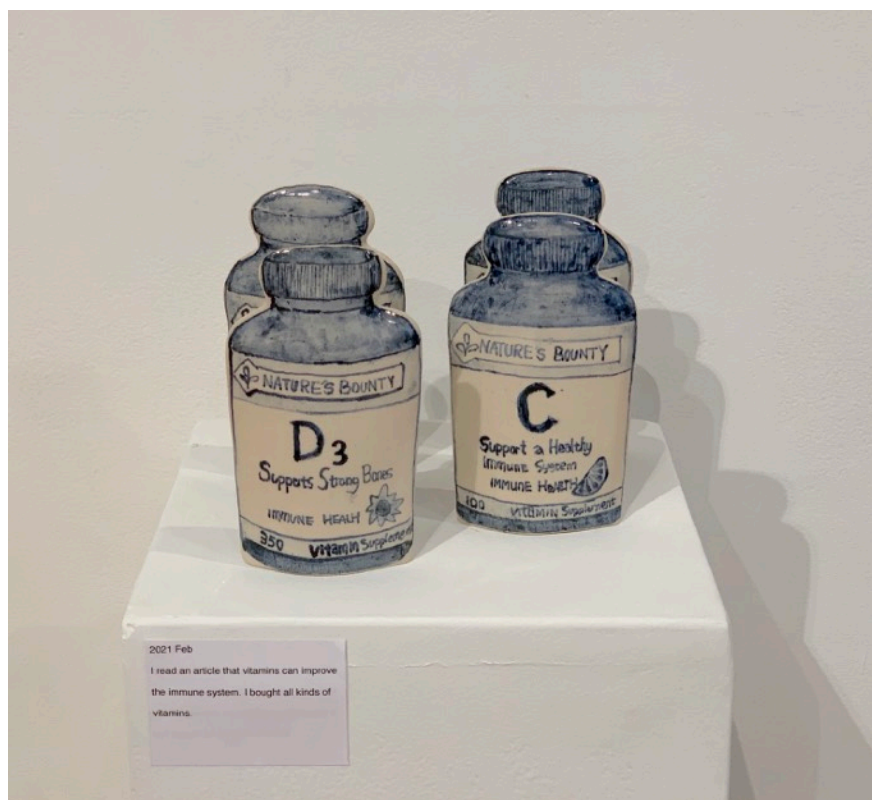


Fig. 16. Crystal Xiong, *2021 February - I read an article that vitamins can improve the immune system. I bought all kinds of vitamins*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 17. Crystal Xiong, *2022 February - Cup Noodles leftover from the early days of the pandemic*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 18. Crystal Xiong, 2020 August - *The milk I drink since the pandemic has changed because of the shelf life*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 19. Crystal Xiong, 2020 November - *Fresh vegetables are expensive and can't be stored for a long time, Frozen vegetables can do both*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 20. Crystal Xiong, 2020 May - *I have to stay prepared to face the pandemic with these prevention tools*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 21. Crystal Xiong, 2020 March - *My parents in China ask me to go to the supermarket to buy more canned food*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 22. Crystal Xiong, 2021 December - *The side effects of the vaccine shots were very unpleasant, so I bought a variety of painkillers for the booster*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 23. Crystal Xiong, 2021 August - *Rice is an important part of my diet, I socked up at the supermarket with whatever rice they had left,* 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.



Fig. 24. Crystal Xiong, 2020 April - *The store's toilet paper section is empty however everyone's home is filled with toilet paper*, 2022, ceramic, Dimensions variable.

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EDUCATION

- 2019 - Present **Master of Fine Arts**, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
Major: Ceramics Certificate: Therapeutic art
- 2019 **China Study Abroad Program, Jingdezhen, China**, West Virginia University,
Morgantown, WV
- 2015 - 19 **Bachelor of Fine Arts**, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Majors: Ceramics and General Fine Art

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- 2020 - 21 **Graduate Teaching Assistant**, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
Instructor of Record: Visual Foundation II; Drawing I
Assistant to instructor: Jason Lee; Patrick Jones
Course: Visual Foundation I; Drawing II
- 2018 - 19 **Undergraduate Teaching Assistant**, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore,
Assistant to instructor: Rebecca Chappell; Sarah Barnes
Course: Introduction of Wheel throwing; Body Work Machine

WORKING EXPERIENCE

- 2021 - 2022 **Graduate Research Assistant**, School of Art and Design Digital Slide Database, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
- 2021.06-08 **Ceramics Director**, Point O'pines Camp, Brant Lake, NY
- 2020 - 2022 **Ceramics studio Assistant**, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
- 2020 **Production Assistant**, Ceramic Program, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
- 2018 - 19 **Curatorial Assistant**, Tree Art Museum, Beijing, China
Ceramic Studio Assistant, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
- 2017 - 18 **Costume Designer**, Rivals of the West Theatre Company, Baltimore, MD
- 2017 - 19 **Student Representative**, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
- 2017 - 18 **Art Market Saler**, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

EXHIBITIONS

- 2021 **Still-life Ceramics Solo exhibition**, Laura Gallery, West Virginia University,
Distant Ceramics, Online International Ceramics Exhibition, 3rd Edition
Cohorts-Alone: Together, MFA exhibition online, University of Montana
WVU Graduate Ceramic exhibition, Taylor Books, Charleston, WV
Hand to Mouth, Sweetwater Center for the Art, Sewickley, PA
Collectors Choice 2021, Studio Channel Islands, Camarillo, CA
- 2019 **Dongxi Group Show**, Muifei Gallery, Jindezhen, China
Deck The Wall, Jubilee Arts Gallery, Baltimore, MD
Ceramics Exhibition, Middendorf Gallery, Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, MD
Juried Ceramics Exhibition, Middendorf gallery, Maryland Institute College
of Art, Baltimore, MD
Fireflies Cave,(Solo Show), Piano Gallery, Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, MD
- 2018 **7 Segments (5 Minute Hold) Ceramics Exhibition**, Middendorf Gallery,
Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
11th Annual Sketch Book Show, Brown Design Center, Maryland Institute
College of Art, Baltimore, MD
8 Course, Ceramics Group Exhibition, Main O Gallery, Maryland Institute
College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Juried Undergraduate Exhibition, Meyerhoff Gallery, Maryland Institute
College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Juried Ceramics Exhibition, Middendorf Gallery, Maryland Institute College
of Art, Baltimore, MD
- 2017 **GFA Junior Independent Show**, Lazarus, Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, MD
10th Annual Sketch Book Show, Brown Design Center, Maryland Institute
College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Sophomore GFA Exhibition, Main Building, Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, MD
The Pillowmen Show, Rivals of the West Theatre Company, Baltimore, MD
- 2016 **Studio Drawing Exhibition**, Fox 2 Gallery, Maryland Institute College of Art,
Baltimore, MD
9th Annual Sketch Book Show, Brown Design Center, Maryland Institute
College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Juried Freshmen Fundamental Show, Pinker Gallery, Maryland Institute
College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Pennsylvania Avenue Film Project Show, Jubilee Arts Gallery, Baltimore, MD
Open House, Main Building, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

AWARDS AND SCHOLARSHIP

- 2021 - 22 Mesaros Foundation Graduate Thesis Research Award, West Virginia
University
Morgantown, WV
Graduate Research Assistantship, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
- 2019 - 21 Graduate Teaching Assistantship, West Virginia University, Morgantown, WV
- 2018 - 19 Windgate Scholarship, Windgate Foundation, The Center for Craft,
Baltimore, MD
General Fine Art Departmental Recognition Award, Maryland Institute
College of Art,
Baltimore, MD
Ceramics Departmental Recognition Award, Maryland Institute College of Art,
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- 2017 - 18 General Fine Art Scholarships, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore,
MD
- 2015 - 19 Presidential Scholarships, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
NAHS Scholarships, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Creative Vision Award, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD
Dean's list, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD

ORGANIZATION MEMBERSHIP

National Council on Education for the Ceramic Art

Conferences attended: 2021- Richmond Zoom; 2019 - Minnesota; 2018 -
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Indiana Clay Conference

Conferences attended: 2021- Indianapolis

SKILLS

Ceramic: Wheel Throwing, Hand Building, Casting, Clay and Glaze Mixing

Painting: Oil, Sumi ink, Watercolor, Acrylic, Gouache

Fiber: Costume Design, Spinning, Weaving, Felting, Sewing, Embroidery

Computer: PC and Mac platforms, Microsoft, Photoshop, Illustrator

Language: Chinese as a native language, English as a second language