

I Buried the Firework Under the Tree

为什么说烟花要埋在树下？

因为树是根，是枯竭，是投胎转世的期待，它是我和这个世界的链接；

而烟花是不存在的东西，是流淌在我的记忆里的，暧昧不清的潮汐

你要明白；我总是不明白

1.

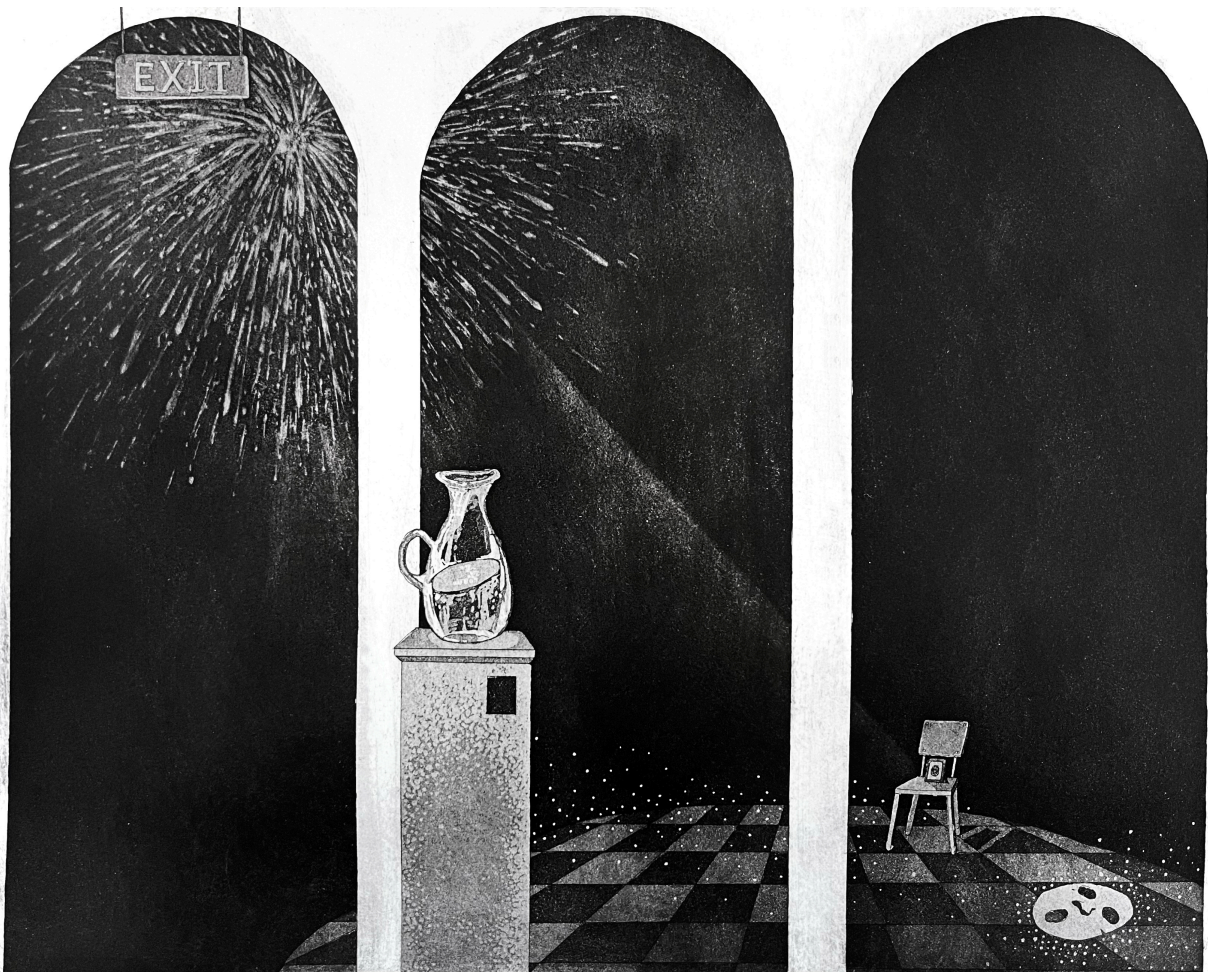


I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree (Day) 2023
20inch * 15inch
Intaglio on Gampi Paper

There is a tree in front of my house. It casts a shadow during the summer and plays music with the wind during the winter. When I was a little girl, every time I looked up at the tree outside the window from my bedroom, I felt it was gigantic – I used to think it would grow all the way up to the sky. What's in the sky? My grandma told me there was a beautiful place called 'heaven,' carrying people's best expectations.

As I grew up, I knew heaven was just a metaphor. What was up in the sky was an atmosphere protecting this planet, a vast universe, endless stars and ultimate scale. That was the first time I was introduced to the word 'infinity'. Time and space were endless, so broad that I lost myself; this fact scared me, and I missed that tree. The tree became my attachment to 'home' and the source of the sense of security from childhood to adulthood. For all those years making art, the image of a tree has appeared in my works with different ideologies. Sometimes it is just a tree, sometimes the tree appears in the form of a flying whale, a beam of light, or the moon in the sky.

2.



I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree (Night) 2023
20inch * 15inch
Intaglio on Gampi Paper

On a cold winter night in 2006, I was sitting in my dad's car.

The car was racing on the highway, and the continuous scenes were linked together in my mind as a blurry tidal flow, while my consciousness was drifting in and out. Suddenly, I heard a muffled sound, like the pounding of a heart, and the scene of fireworks blooming in the sky appeared in my memory for the first time. I remember the sky was pitch black. In the moment when I gazed at the fireworks, a bloom hit me. Then the smoke returned into the sky, effacing the moonlight. At that moment, I closed my eyes and was seized by a sense of separation without farewell, which lingered on and on, unwilling to dissipate.

"It's so beautiful," I thought, "Noir fireworks."

Intro

Unreachable memories always surround me. I've been trying to extract logical parts from my chaotic memories, hoping to find a connection with the world within the soundless, intangible black fireworks stored in my retina under the grand fireworks display. When I first encountered intaglio printmaking, I impulsively drew subconscious memories on the plate, arranging them along some chaotic storylines. Gradually, I realized that I needed to create my own logical structure. So I started using specific visual symbols and repeating them, using the repetition of the printmaking process to search for logical clues. Printmaking with its special rhythm allowed me to rediscover the connection with the world in the repetitive process of image making. The stability brought by this connection made me believe more in my intuition and thinking.

The surrealist movement, which is based on psychology, has had a profound impact on my art creation, and I am drawn to the abstract connection with the real world depicted in surrealist works. The Belgian artist Paul Delvaux's paintings are my inspiration muse. The official website of The Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum describes Paul Delvaux's work as follows: "Delvaux's oeuvre is notable for its stylistic unity. The veristic realism of his works brings to mind a dream world populated by beings so isolated and self-engrossed that they appear to be sleep walking. These figures have uncommunicative eyes and appear to gaze at themselves, and they are generally set in nocturnal scenes."¹ Every time I see the pale figures and metaphorical scenes in his paintings, my brain begins to interpret and rearrange the narrative. The subject matters in his painting were significantly influenced by his childhood experience. I can feel the fear and obsession in Delvaux's paintings. Through a collage-like approach he creates a bizarre new world, imbued with nostalgia, alienation and a sense of lost to a childlike innocence. All those characteristics profoundly changed my works.

Gentle breeze, an endless staircase, growing plants, obscure pupils, and glowing moons often appear in my imagery. There are tons of metaphors. Metaphor is a way of emphasizing beauty and pain through the medium of undeclared comparison, and it is also a way to reassemble my memory. There is a specific relationship between repetition and trauma. Growing up in a very typical Asian high-pressure society, I experienced a lot of unhealthy and painful education, which made me unable to develop emotional connections with the things happening around me. At the same time, I feel that my innate strong empathic ability will force me into a specific emotional vortex. Therefore, I often feel exclusive and numb. I particularly see art-making as a 'therapy.' I think we are constantly gathering information from this world and creating our own logical language system to communicate with it. For me, the charm of art creation, whether it is printmaking, bookmaking, or writing, lies in finding my way of communicating with the world through rigorous steps of separation - using repeated metaphors and revealing the truth hidden in ambiguous memories.

¹. *Paul Delvaux*, <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/delvaux-paul>

Verse 1: Noir Fireworks

Confession

Near to the sunset,
I chopped a branch fishing for the moon
The moment I peer into the fireworks,
a bloom, a bloom hits me
leaving a cavity
The smog returns to the sky,
effacing the moonlight

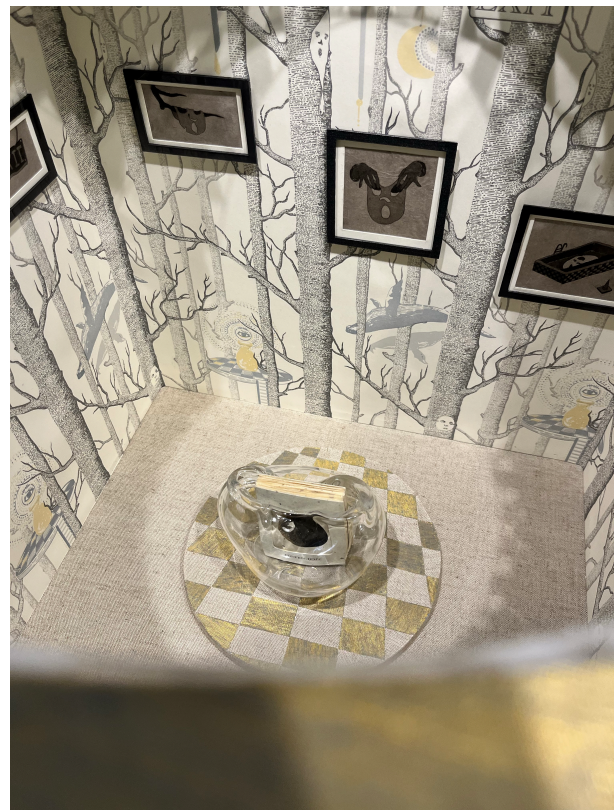
"Where did she go?"

I jumped into the water until the noir firework buries my body.
Like in where the memory dried out –
a mutely drifting swimming pool
Intangible
Inevitable
Noir firework

I know there is a way out, take me back to you
– a blanc threshold
carries the hazy scent of the turquoise sunset,
while the bursting mist fills the air.
The world there is in my vague memory
the moon is so clear
I walk slowly upon this staircase,
feel the warmth from yesterday
vanish in the air,
moist

Now, if you find me, please follow me
as I go through is blanc threshold.
There is something I want to confess
Empty darkness,
as you pass,
fireworks

The title of my thesis piece is called *I Buried the Firework Under the Tree*. It includes two parts, several wall pieces and a sculptural piece in the form of a box. The size of the box is 13*13*14 inches, and it will be placed on a pedestal in front of the large scale prints on the wall. The box displays a silent and surreal room with a breath – a glass vessel holding a little book – trapped in the middle. The interior space was covered by the wallpaper I designed, which was printed in cream-white tone paper using polymer plates. It shared a similar design with the large scale prints behind on the wall. The wallpaper included the images of trees and several spots with crippling water; checkerboard and ladders; glass jars; exit signs; an eye that's exuding 'light'. Several framed intaglio prints are placed along the wall to create a flow of narrative. The wallpaper, the floor and the cover of the box are all in neutral color palette. Compared to the flatness of the prints behind, the box is a 3-dimensional miniature of the space.



I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree (Exit) 2023
13inch * 13inch * 14inch
Letterpress (handset type/polymer plate),
Intaglio, Glass, Book board, Book cloth,
Plexiglass

The larger scale print, which is 10*10 feet was made by a combination of digital and silkscreen printing, illustrating a depressed forest reflecting my fragmented memories. Firstly I adjusted the color of the trees in different shades of gray to establish a sense of distance; after I printed the tree layer, I screen printed other essential

elements in light yellow, light blue, dark blue and warm brown. The image of this print includes three arches. The one on the left and the one on the right were in the same design, creating a continuous scene with the middle design. The drawing of the trees was done digitally, using dots. I intended to create a sense of beyond reality through a hand drawn bitmap. The wall will be painted in gray, which identifies the 'interior space' – giving the sense to the audience that they are standing inside of space and looking outside to another world.



I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree 2023

10 feet * 10 feet

Silkscreen, Ink on paper

The Exit

The color of the nightfall slowly merged into blue,
It gazes into a container of mortals,
Time is innumerable dusts

'Exit' is a very unsettling sign because it is everywhere. Its advent is closely intertwined with the development of construction and people's social needs of gathering together. Compared to a solid image of a door, this sign evokes more associations with "exit" for me. The exit sign is crucial to my current work because it symbolizes a threshold. In my thesis project, I will hang an exit sign made out of glass above the large-scale prints on the wall. I chose glass as the material for this object because glass casting is a surreal and poetic process—it comes from the deepest moment of fire and slowly cools down, becoming a piece of ice that will never melt. The material gives this sign a kind of abstract immortality. I consider this sign the 'breath' of the space because whenever you see this sign, you are told that there is a way to escape (or enter) this particular space. This sign also makes people think about whether we are in reality or on the other side of the image. By hanging a glass exit sign, it completes the picture, like an "eye" that monitors my soul—where do you want to exit to?

The Leaf

Maybe on a sunny day,
when the light flows on its skin,
the leaves will wake up from their golden dreams.



I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree (The Leaf)
2023
4inch * 5.5inch
Intaglio on Gampi Paper

An intaglio print of a leaf will hang on the middle arch. It was printed in gold on blue paper, sandwiched between two sheets of pixie glass in a grey frame. As I look at my recent works, I notice an abundance of trees, yet the leaves are curiously absent. When constructing my dreamland, I consciously avoid including anything that has "life," so the picture is filled with withered trees, wilted flowers in vases, dry swimming pools, or discarded masks. I intend to create an atmosphere of extreme tranquility through these symbolic elements. The subtle shifts of emotion and flowing thoughts can be detected only in the utmost serenity. The vitality carried by the leaves is even greater than that of concrete characters, and I like to see the leaves 'confident' and 'relaxed' appearance. This leaf exists in my imagination but is also a symbol of reality. I decided to create it. Its significance lies in preserving the rational part of me in a fantastic story.

The Vase

If I could save time in a bottle
The first thing that I'd like to do is to save every day
'til eternity passes away. ²

In the large prints, water falls from the branches and the falling trajectory leads the gaze to the vase in the arch in the middle. The image of this glass vase echoes the glass container in the box placed in front of it. The vase is placed on a 'checkerboard'. The reflection of the moon on the treetops is trapped in the water, glowing a dim light. This references a very classic symbol in Buddhism culture – “水中月 (moon in the water)”³. This expression is used to describe things like the subtle and profound beauty of poems that cannot be described in words, something that is visible but has no substance. In most of my works, there is water and vase. The presence of water gives the picture a silent flow, but at the same time, it also metaphorically implies transience. The tilted water surface implies the instability of the current space, and the repeated appearance of the vase gives purpose to the passage of time. It connects the past and present, becoming a portal for me to converse with myself. Thus, the vase becomes a symbol of abstract time.

². "Time in a Bottle", Song by Jim Croce, lyrics © H&r Lastrada Music, R2m Publishing, Spobs Music Inc

³. 《大智度论•初品•十喻》说：“解了诸法，如幻如焰，如水中月。”

Verse 2: Moon on the Papyrus

Metaphor in the Mirror

When the moment came,
he told me the story of the moon on papyrus:
The moon flew into the sky because she laughed too much.
You need to break her heart,
to get her back on the ground,
and back to you.

People are never tired of talking to the moon.
He told me she was a mirror,
hanging in the sky, hiding in the sea.
I felt she was monitoring my soul.

She wandered lonely as a cloud.
I saw the whales swimming in misty breaths;
I felt the flowers
growing on my skin.
That is the first time I met her,
my moon, my longing,
beautiful and fiery memory,
tumbling when the wave dissipates.
Is the flower a metaphor of love,
or of death?

On the ground lies a mirror

She roamed around, from sunset till morn,
ended up in my room,
leaving a tint of melancholy on my lip.
Morn reverberates with the warmth of the moon.
Humid air overflowing,
it came afar cosmos, coming from her eyes,
gathering underneath noir velvet,
the tide.
There is such solitude in her eyes,
and the reflection is you.
Then I realize, she is your moon.

Rhythm and voice are the triggers for my imagination. Music is always the biggest source of inspiration for me. It puts my brain into a deep relaxation state. I learned to play the piano when I was a child and also sang in a choir. When I was in the choir, the tuneful music that was created by layering multiple melodies fascinates me. The moment I am immersed in the world of music, I can generate my ideas by visualizing the music and language in my brain. Starting from creating repeated patterns, I then compose a flow or dialogue. Printmaking allows me to realize these working strategies. An example would be once I made a scroll called "intangible memory." It consisted of 6 prints from the same plate but printed on different colored and textured mulberry paper. This 6-meter-long scroll depicts a forest with figures and birds. This scene was drawn from an impression of a dream that confused me. By repeating this unsettling scene, I was able to reiterate my memory. At first glance, it may seem like I just stuck six copies of the same print together, but as you get closer, you will notice that each image has different highlights - I added color to different figures using the Chine-colle technique. Those various highlighted spots lead to a reinterpretation of the narrative. This work also reflects the beauty of printmaking - we can create completely different feelings and narratives by using different inking and printing techniques.

Currently, I am focused on doing intaglio prints and making books. Both practices share similarities in that they require continuous and layering thinking. Intaglio is a distinctive form of poetry with unique logic through the discrete image-making process. The layering of aquatint demonstrates a very rhythmic and ambiguous effect. The shade layers vary depending on the time we dip the plate in the acid, but all those layers still have a sort of evenness since the tone that rosin (the powder that we torch on the copper plate to create a continuous shade) creates is consistent. This effect becomes the 'structure' of the image. The main topic in my visual practice is creating dream-like scenes which present my hidden consciousness. I am working on exploring elements of time and space to form an ethereal and experiential universe, where the well-known tropes merge, meanings shift, and past and present fuse. Time and narratives always play a key role. The connection is fragile but flexible.

I also consider book making to be rhythmic. As a bookmaker, I have to come up with a theme and then figure out a structure that works best for the content. I love reading and writing. As I am reading a book, the flow of the text and the design will both significantly affect the reading experience. A great reading experience is inspiring and satisfying. Reading is my way to recharge myself, and writing is a way to balance the chaotic energy within my brain. I think those are also the reasons why I am so interested in making a book. Book art is a combination of art and design, and requires a systematic thinking ability. How to arrange each page and build up the reading experience is just like composing a piece of music in that we have to consider not only the flow of the visual language, but also the ultimate vibe or style that the book will bring. I always combine both practices because I feel the narrative with an intaglio print is so strong that it can act as a metaphor for a piece of poem; at the same time, letters could be pictorial. For example, in the book project *Metaphor in the Mirror* from 2022, I placed the intaglio prints along with my poem (shown above). This poem is a dream talk about

the moon and its metaphoric meaning. I tend to personify the moon because I think about it a lot. The moon becomes a reflection of 'me,' and we are holding a conversation about our memories. Text amplifies the metaphoric language in my prints and I see this book as an entry of my symbol analysis. It was really compelling to work with visual design of sentences depending on the narrative and vibe I wanted to convey. These two practices reflect my artistic logic – assembling fragments, building a place to store them, and then analyzing or summarizing the visual language.

Paper is the material I primarily utilize for my project. I particularly enjoyed touching the hand-made paper to feel the vitality within it. This was true especially after I learned how to make paper starting from bark. This process requires physical touch and motion. I understand how all the textures are formed in a sheet of paper depending on the motions and environment conditions. Every sheet of paper is born differently. One thing I obsess about is that paper could be fragile but, at the same time, unexpectedly strong. The paper is so thin and light, but it has a complex and delicate texture. Using paper as a material will reflect the light and color in the environment, and it will curl due to temperature and humidity. This kind of temporary change organically combines the paper with the space. Watching ideas from my brain be transferred onto a suitable paper is very satisfying. I always carefully select the paper I will use for my projects because that is fundamental to building up my work. Moreover, the paper brings with it its own language or narratives depending on the color, the texture, or even the sound. According to these characteristics, I must be cautious about paper choice because I don't want it to speak louder than my work. I have preferred handmade Japanese paper, like Gampi paper or Kozo-shi in my recent print project. Handmade paper has longer fiber than machine-made cotton paper, so they are translucent but incredibly durable. Peeling the paper from the plate after sending them through the press is the most satisfying moment because Intaglio ink sits perfectly on the paper, and all the details on the plate can be captured beautifully.

Verse 3: Under the Tree

Intangible

I remember the still waters
never touched by the sun,
trembling slightly, like a beast
Lurking beneath the trees' shades.

The engine hummed a dull refrain,
heartbeats echoed through the car.
And in my mind,
I heard the sound
of fireworks from afar.

A silent film

The lake stretched
in front of us wide,
Seemingly endless in its scope.
The ripples,
echoed time's backward-spiraling hope.

A bird flew by, a fleeting blur.
In the dimness,
I watched it gone.
Its shadow lingering on the waves,
still and quiet in the morning's glow.

In that moment,
I longed for the tree
living in my memory.
Perhaps one that I had planted,
linking me to this isolated love.

One day,
in the sunny day,
It will awaken me once more.
And I'll remember this journey,
And the sights I saw before.

Born in silence,
in silence we die.

Before I went to college, my works were filled with wild color combinations and abstract textures and patterns. They were full of energy and vitality, like a cheerful and melodious song. Then, by coincidence, I came across intaglio printing, and that song suddenly came to an abrupt end. Perhaps because intaglio was the first method of printmaking I was exposed to, my initial impression of printmaking was elegant, tedious, and quiet. I thought I would lose interest in this 'monotonous' medium soon, but after printing my first copper plate, I suddenly felt a great sense of satisfaction, as if I had found a crucial missing piece of my heart. I don't know how to describe this feeling; it is a very abstract joy. During my undergraduate study, almost all of my prints were black and white or monochrome. I immersed myself in this black and white world. The diverse shades that intaglio creates is like a silent movie, full of metaphorical and ambiguous details, which kept me lingering. After eliminating the 'disturbance' of color, my senses became sensitive to the narrative that was captured by various shades. In my senior year, I created a print in which the roots of a tree grew wildly into the earth, and fish were flying to the sky. As I looked at the black sky and the white earth in this print, I felt a sense of loss and unease again. At that moment, I could feel the presence of color again. During my time at RISD, I started to incorporate some colors into my work. The combination of ink color, paper color, and grayscale created rhythm and made the image more poetic. I never thought my thesis project would incorporate screen printing because I always thought that the flatness of screen printing would affect the formation of rhythm. However, I was surprised that the collision of this flatness and metaphorical imagery created a pleasantly unreal feeling.

Usually, I have worked on a small scale. For this project, I paid more attention to the immersive experience that my work could convey. People should be able to stand in front of the world I create, to feel the rhythm and narratives. At the same time, the floor in front of the wall will be covered by a checkerboard that 'comes out' from the image. This approach helps keep the distance between the scene and the audience. The imagery of 'trees' is a carrier of my consciousness that each dot is a message. *I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree* is an abstract and poetic scenario. Fireworks don't actually 'exist.' The scene of the fireworks explosions stopped on my irises only for about a second. In that second, I was so close to the world, and tears filled my eyes over a coincidence. That instance reflects my perception of the existence of time and relationship, as magnificent as the explosion, and then they disappear, leaving an intangible memory rippling in the air. Throughout my art practice, I try to catch that ethereal consciousness and translate it into a more direct format (image, language, or sound). I 'buried' that information under my consciousness, and eventually, it will turn into something that can complete my soul.



I Buried the Fireworks Under the Tree (Thesis book)
2023
7inch * 7.25inch
Letterpress (polymer plate), Intaglio, Glass,
Book board, Book cloth, Plexiglass