

To Crown a Broccoli

Progressing on the path of Jungian individuation through animistic images in painting

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Declaration

I, Jiarui Li, confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This practice-led research report investigated my personal individuation journey in painting. Art has, in contemporary days, become an increasingly discursive and broad concept which contains overwhelming diversity and has a tendency to confuse not only the audience but also the artists. As a researcher as well as an artist early in her career, I faced similar questions as many others. How to find authenticity in art? How to become an individual on canvas?

Inspired by Jung's concept of individuation, the lifelong development of personality, I created a planning and analytical tool for art, the Creative and Evaluative Model of Artistic Individuation, or CEMAI. This tool consists of multiple axes of contradictions. I identified different axes on CEMAI and experimented with various visual complexities in painting, looking at Chinese (professional) and UK (liberal) art education, the interchanging identities of child and adult, and the relationship between word and image. I tried to find my position in all of this, a balanced zone among different contradictions. Inspired by the Naxi culture I realised the validity and significance of the animistic point of view. This was that middle zone, a conclusion as well as an opening of the future. Through this process, I continue to gradually progress along the path of Jungian individuation on an authentic journey of self-realisation.

The approach I have taken is largely autoethnographic, with my own stories and lived experiences acting as an integral part of and often mixed in with more methodological research.

Impact Statement

The results of this research have practical and theoretical implications that indicate potential impacts in both academic and non-academic settings.

1. I have exhibited in the Duo-Solo show in Shanghai Gene gallery and participated in Shanghai Young Art Fair.
2. One of the major results of the research, The **Creative and Evaluative Model of Artistic Individuation**, or CEMAI can be used as a planning tool before the creative process, an analytical tool for the self-reflecting process after the artwork is finished. Potentially, it can also become an evaluating, interpreting tool for the audience to break down the complexity and richness in artwork or the progress of an artist's career.
3. CEMAI sees artwork as an honest reflection of the artist's individuation, a Jungian term for self-realisation which continues over the scale of a lifetime. This automatically makes the hypothesis that artwork will grow when artists progress in their journey of individuation, which suggests an alternative direction for artists' careers which is not driven by concepts. Art practice does not have to be fixative on any concepts or subjects, instead, instead multiple ideas can be explored if we see art practice as a ever-growing journey that explores many extremes. With a unification tool of CEIMAI that identifies the extremes, and attempts to reconcile the contradictions, artworks and the artists can be more sustainable and authentic.
4. CEIMAI offers an alternative view in transcultural context. By looking at each aspect of each culture on the same axis, CEMAI functions as a way that bridges the gap between different cultures.
5. The interdisciplinary view that brings analytical psychology into art practice can potentially benefit many. Art is a magical healing process that progresses on the painting, in many cases also suggests advancing personal growth. Therefore, art itself and can be seen as a way to explore, grow, discover. Although artworks are involved

in art therapy, they are often used as materials to understand the patients. The artworks produced has no aim in progressing on its own merit. This research suggests a way of researching art for its own sake, that by progressing in art, one progress on their psychological health.

6. Finally, the research arrived at animism. An animistic view in artworks are of great necessity but under-explored in our time when facing such environmental crisis. This research call on respect and an equal attitude toward all the living or normally considered non-living being.

Research Questions

1. Is there a systemic way in which an artist can navigate the modern world in order to determine in what capacity their art may serve society at large, as well as how to place themselves in such a society which may contain differing and contradictory teachings, values, and perspectives?
2. Through what means can an artist select the ideas and material for their work and how can an artist know, whether it be before, during, or after creating a work, if the ideas and concepts explored are meaningful, authentic, and long-lasting?
3. Is there a system which one could use - during painting practice as well as on finished works - which allows one to navigate, communicate, and deal with tension, opposition, and contradiction, and might such a system be useful while working with and through differences, with an aim to respect and embrace contradiction rather than resolve or select a specific viewpoint, in order to arrive at new meaning and understanding?

Terminology

- **Adult** – CEMAI endpoint representing the positives and negatives of being adultlike such as: Pedanticism, stubbornness, worldly, wise, knowledgeable, experienced, responsible, etc.
- **Animism** – The belief that everything has spirit, and life, is equal, and deserves respect. In relation to CEMAI, animism is where the diagram balances and is in harmony.
- **Child** – CEMAI endpoint representing the positives and negatives of being childlike or childish such as: Immaturity, ignorance, inexperience, capriciousness, purity, innocence, freedom, high potentiality, etc.
- **CEMAI** – Acronym, Creative and Evaluative Model of Artistic Individuation
 - **CEMAI Endpoint** – A single point representing an idea, feeling, ideology, or the like. Endpoints always come in pairs which contradict or oppose one another.
 - **CEMAI Axis** – A line representing the middle ground between a set of endpoints.
 - **CEMAI Diagram** – One or more CEMAI axes in which some or all of the space has been filled in. Typically represented as multiple intersecting axes.
- **Image** – CEMAI endpoint representing visual ideas as a tool of communication.
- **Liberal** – CEMAI endpoint representing conceptual skill and training. References modern ideas in art education and the author’s own training in the UK.
- **Professional** – CEMAI endpoint representing physical and representational skill and training. References historical craftsmanship and apprenticeship in art and the author’s own training in China.
- **Word** – CEMAI endpoint representing language and description as a tool of communication.

Methodology

The method chosen in this report of working with the position of “I” and the use of self-reflection as a mode of academic research is a choice which I wish to acknowledge. In my artistic practice, I have found it difficult to ignore the voice of “I,” as it is so often a subjective journey. In keeping with this feeling of subjectivity, I have taken a first-person perspective in large sections of this report. I find this perspective particularly useful as a vehicle to better demonstrate the ideas in my research when communicating personal experiences. In a critical way, it is the self which is being examined when I create art, and as this report is on my practice-led research, I view it as an outgrowth of my artistic endeavours. Inasmuch as I view this report as an act of creation, it uses the first-person voice and has an introspective styling. In this section, I attempt to contextualise, situate, and understand my subjective experiences by exploring the recent history of subjective experience in academic research and reflect on how that might influence my research methodology. Particularly relevant as research methodologies are autoethnography and feminism and each warrants special consideration as to how I have positioned my research in relation to these areas of study.

Autoethnography

Emerging from the field anthropology in the early 20th century, autoethnography first formally appeared in the 1970s.¹ It could be argued at this was a major turning point in the use of the subjective perspective in academic research with the approach having been adopted in a variety of disciplines, such as sociology, communication, education, psychology, and notably, art. Autoethnography is a research method that uses personal experience (auto) to describe and interpret (graphy) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (ethno). As anthropologists began to recognize the potential for bias in their observations as well as the interference caused to groups' natural and typical behaviours, they started using personal experiences to illuminate cultural phenomena in an effort to remain objective.² Autoethnographers believe that personal experience is infused with political/cultural norms and expectations, and they engage in rigorous self-reflection—typically referred to as “reflexivity”—in order to identify and interrogate the intersections between the self and social life. Fundamentally, autoethnographers aim to show “people in the process of figuring out what to do, how to live, and the meaning of their struggles.”³

Carolyn Ellis (widely regarded as originator of autoethnography) began to champion the idea of using personal stories as a way to understand social reality in the 1990s. She argues that autoethnography allows researchers to draw upon their own experiences in order to understand and interpret the experiences of others. According to Ellis, autoethnography is, “*an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience.*”⁴ Autoethnography is able to connect autobiographical and personal experiences to larger cultural, social, and political ethnographic research. While autobiographies often focus on specific epiphanic events in an individual's life, the incorporation of field work, looking at experience analytically, and the

1 Tony E. Adams, Carolyn Ellis, Stacy Holman Jones, “Autoethnography,” *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods*, ed. Jörg Matthes (General Editor), Christine S. Davis and Robert F. Potter (Associate Editors) (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), DOI: 10.1002/9781118901731.icrm0011.

² One bit of irony to point out is that introducing the self into research ultimately opened the door to more qualitatively focused research such as my own, in direct contrast to the original goal of the originators – increased objectivity.

³ Carolyn S. Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, “Analyzing Analytic Autoethnography: An Autopsy,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 35, no. 4 (2006): 429–449, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241606286979>.

⁴ Carolyn Ellis, Tony E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner, “*Autoethnography: An Overview*,” *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 12, no. 1 (2011): Art. 10.

use of theoretical and methodological tools and research literature are key parts of autoethnography in which I have framed a large part of my research.

Feminism

Feminism, while sometimes primarily thought of as the driving force in challenging historically male-centric narratives which traditionally dominated societal discourse, also acknowledges subjectivity as one of its central tenets, allowing individuals to speak from their own perspectives and experiences. The emphasis on subjectivity and first-person perspective may often be taken as a sign of feministic influence on the writing. According to Kim M. Mitchell (Resident Nurse and professor at the University of Manitoba) “From a feminist perspective, an author cannot be completely absent from text. Thus, an exploration of writing, inclusion of voice in text, and an introduction to the power structures inherent in the process are important.”⁵

Feminism has been a champion of subjectivity in academic as well as popular writing. Adrienne Rich (1929-2012, influential American poet, essayist, and feminist) in her book, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution, combines her personal narratives with socio-political analysis to present a profound exploration of the experiences, challenges and societal expectations surrounding the complex journey of becoming and being a mother.⁶ Carol Gilligan (b. 1936, American author, ethicist, and psychologist), known for her groundbreaking book on feminist ethics In a Different Voice, explores moral development through the lens of women's experiences, highlighting the importance of relational and contextual considerations.⁷ Sandra Harding (b. 1935, feminist philosopher of science), advocates for the inclusion of feminist epistemologies in scientific research. Her book The Science Question in Feminism looks at the subjective and social aspects of scientific knowledge production.⁸ The contribution by these scholars to the advancement of subjectivity in research cannot be overlooked, and I aim to position my own use of this perspective within the field and acknowledge the influence it has had on my own writing.

⁵ Kim M. Mitchell, “Academic Voice: On Feminism, Presence, and Objectivity in Writing,” *Nursing Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (April 2017), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316168242_Academic_voice_On_feminism_presence_and_objectivity_in_writing.

⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995).

⁷ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 15.

⁸ Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

In addition, many feminist scholars have emphasised the first-person perspective validating the subjective and bringing to the forefront personal stories and lived experiences of marginalized or dismissed women. As Gloria Jean Watkins (1952-2021, American author, social critic, and prominent feminist theorist, known by her pen name of “bell hooks”), noted in her work "Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black," these individual narratives disrupt the dominant discourse, revealing the diversity of women's experiences and creating a more inclusive framework for understanding gender issues. In Virginia Woolf's (1882-1942, English author) essay, “A Room of One’s Own,” she provides, “...a woman must have money and a room of her own,” continuing, “Perhaps if I lay bare the ideas, the prejudices, that lie behind this statement you will find that they have some bearing upon women and some upon fiction.” These statements show Woolf considered these two things mandatory for women to have and drew upon subjective experience to prove it. Further, Audre Lorde (1934-1992, American feminist, professor, and civil rights activist) gave a conference talk titled “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House” which underlined the importance of her experience in terms of feminist theory and incorporated a wider range of female identities. She stood “as a black lesbian feminist”, to call on the “academic arrogance to assume any discussion of feminist theory in this time and in this place without examining our many differences, and without a significant input from poor women, black and third-world women, and lesbians.”⁹

The disruption of dominant narratives through the use of subjective experience is what I have found useful in my own work. By sharing their personal stories, and viewpoints, feminist theories assert the validity of individual experiences. The focus on subjectivity and the “I” acts as a catalyst for social change, reshaping the discourse to reflect a more accurate and inclusive representation of women’s lives and struggles. It is in keeping with this spirit which I have allowed myself to examine and take seriously my own experiences.

⁹ Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle The Master’s House,” Comments at “The Personal and the Political” Panel (Second Sex Conference, October 29, 1979), in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, eds. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1981), 98.

My Chosen Methodology

While feminist and autoethnographic methodologies may be said to intersect in their subjectivity and emphasis on the personal, there are also notable differences between the two. One major difference is feminism seeks to foreground gendered experiences and the dismantling of patriarchal structures, and autoethnography aims to provide insight into a culture through an individual's experience and does not necessarily focus on gender. However, as Virginia Woolf wrote, "At any rate, when a subject is highly controversial—and any question about sex is that—one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold. One can only give one's audience the chance of drawing their own conclusions as they observe the limitations, the prejudices, the idiosyncrasies of the speaker."¹⁰ Acknowledging the value of the subjective is not to say it is the only truth, but that it is in fact only part of the truth or may even be biased. But hopefully, when we collect enough pieces of bias, we will arrive at a more rounded view of the world.

I believe an autoethnographic methodology aligns best with my own research practice. While acknowledging the influence of feminism on the use of a subjective voice, I do not feel my experiences as a transcultural artist, and the personal growth arising from these experiences, were specific to my gender. This practice-led research is an attempt to explore a transcultural experience in art and its influence on my art practice. I wish to place this research in the bigger context of a transcultural artist and researcher. By embracing subjective experience and employing self-reflection, I aim to highlight the multifaceted nature of cultural and power dynamics and foster a more inclusive understanding of the world. While I do not reject the possibility of my gender as playing an inescapable role in my experiences, and thus being reflected in any research I do, I consider it only one small part of a much bigger whole. While I recognise the role that feminism played in bringing to the forefront subjective experience in academia, my own experiences have not brought gender to the forefront during my experiences in academia, and so it is not the priority in this discourse. An autoethnographic approach aligns best with my goal of examining complex intersecting identities and ideas in different sociocultural contexts, and is the approach most often employed within this report.

¹⁰ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, 1929, eBook, <http://gutenberg.org>.

Context and Background

While I believe the main discovery of my research, namely CEMAI, to be a unique way of approaching art and creation, much of my work (and writing) is self-reflective. In order to situate myself as part of a larger body of artists, I will introduce here a selection of artists and individuals who have influenced my own research.

In the first chapter of "The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí," Salvador Dal painted an "Anecdotic Self Portrait". Dali wrote of his eccentric relationship to food, detesting spinach because of its utterly amorphous character and appreciating shellfish due to the virtue of their shells. From this he determined that "all self-respecting food 'preserves its form'".¹¹ Dali thought extensively about meaning in his paintings but wrote that he knew "so little"¹², to say nothing of his audience. He invented the Paranoiac-Critical Method, which he defined as a, "spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based upon the interpretive-critical association of delirious phenomena."¹³ This method allows him to create actively imagine and incorporate the result into the painting. Although this is Different from my CEMAI, it is a method that conceptually guides his art.

Another relatable example is that of Sol LeWitt, a prominent figure in the conceptual art movement of the 1960s and 1970s who used diagrams in his work. His work often involved creating a set of rules or instructions that could be followed to produce a piece of art, rather than producing the art directly. Like CEMAI, these become a planning tool and guideline for the artist in the discursive process of art making. (Fig. 1)

¹¹ Salvador Dalí, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dalí*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier, (New York: Dover publication, 4th ed. 1973), e-book.

¹² Salvador Dalí, *Conquest of the Irrational: With 35 Photographic Reproductions and an Hors-Texte in Colours*, trans. David Gascoyne (New York: Julien Levy, 1935), 11-13.

¹³ *Ibid.*



Fig. 1 Sol LeWitt, A Square Divided Horizontally and Vertically into Four Equal Parts, Each with a Different Direction of Alternating Parallel Bands of Lines, (1982)

Another example is the artist Mark Lombardi, who created intricate map-like drawings that clarified the complicated connections between individuals and organizations involved in political and financial scandals. His work often incorporated diagrams and flow charts to represent complex networks of information. Similar to CEMAI, Lombardi attempted to understand complications and to disentangle them through something as effective and clear as a diagram and map. (Fig. 2)

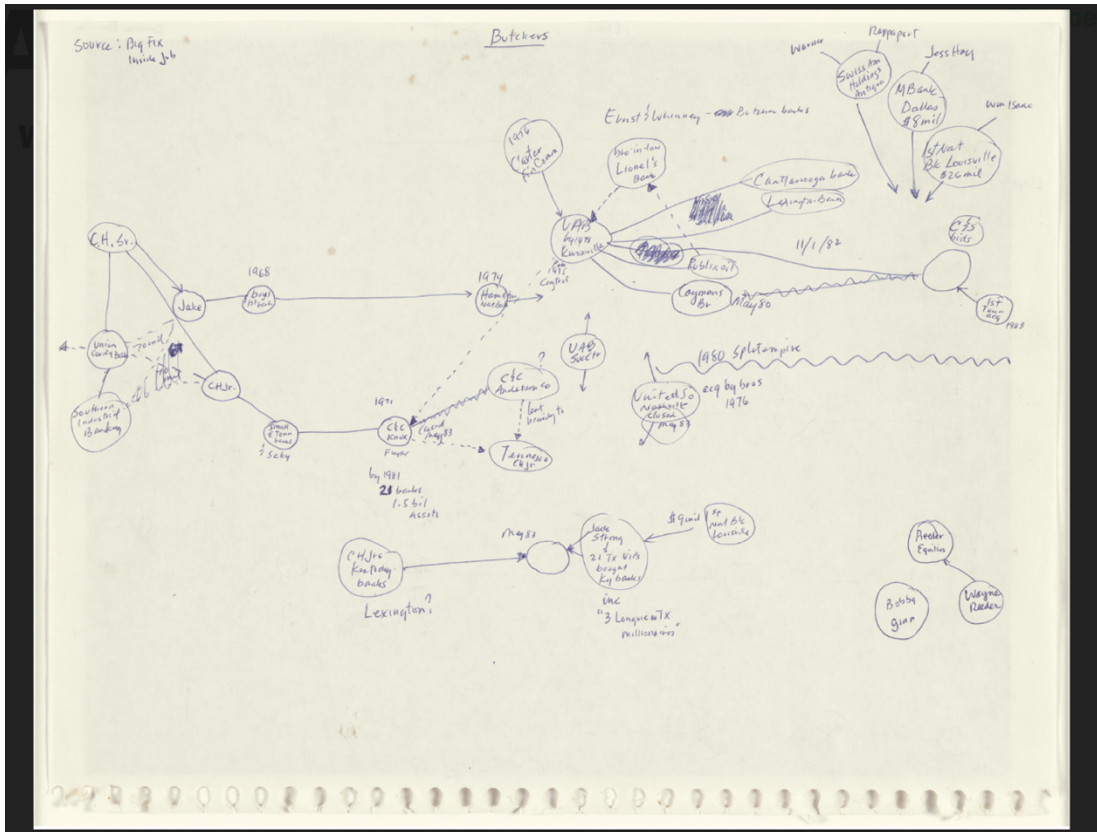


Fig. 2 Mark Lombardi, *Butchers*, Ballpoint pen on notebook paper (1994)

Tracey Emin, well known visual artist, reflects in her 2006 book “*Strangeland*,” on her life and work as well as her experiences as a contemporary artist. These “confessional writings,” as described at the end of the book, “have always formed the backbone to her work.”¹⁴ Supplementing her almost brutally honest artworks, she processed her life through another channel of expression, in this case literature. These honest confessions show Emin’s self-analytical perspective, which CEMAI also offer a structure for dissecting the psyche.

Next, I would like to look at Guanzhong Wu (吴冠中, 1918-2009), described by Sotheby as a Chinese painter who “achieved an elegant reconciliation of Western and Eastern aesthetics and became one of the acknowledged founders of modern Chinese painting.”¹⁵ In his autobiography Wu discussed his understanding of beauty in art. He considers “beautiful” and “pretty” two different concepts. “Kitsch artworks that are pretty but not beautiful, tend

¹⁴ Tracey Emin, *Strangeland*. (London: Sceptre, 2005), 211.
¹⁵ <https://www.sothebys.com/en/artists/wu-guanzhong>, accessed 11th. Mar. 2023.

to be favoured by ‘the Gang of Four’¹⁶. He continued: “The tragedies in art are often beautiful but not pretty, such as the printmakings of Käthe Kollwitz, Prisoners Exercising of Van Gogh...Lu Xun¹⁷ said, ‘tragedy is to destroy a valuable thing and showing it to people.’ why cannot visual art break the forbidden territory of tragedy?”¹⁸

I must mention Carl Jung here as he was continuously self-reflective in his work. One aspect of this is how Jung’s creative work and thinking influenced his professional and scientific work, acting almost as his soil to grow a viewpoint:

My most fundamental views and ideas derive from these experiences. First, I made the observations and only then did I hammer out my views. And so it is with the hand that guides the crayon or brush, the foot that executes the dance-step, with the eye and the ear, with the word and the thought: a dark impulse is the ultimate arbiter of the pattern, an unconscious a priori precipitates itself into plastic form.¹⁹

Jung also wrote much about rational insufficiency; and it is the reason he lent, “an attentive ear to the strange myths of the psyche”. He said, “Rationalism and doctrinairism are the diseases of our time; they pretend to have all the answers. But a great deal will yet be discovered which our present limited view would have ruled out as impossible”.²⁰ This is not to say that logical analysis of inexplicable feelings is meaningless, as it may still be a tool one can use to help understand the self, but to highlight that Jung was engaging in a form of self-reflection or self-regulation, something that he did consistently throughout his career.

I would also like to take some time to reference Marion Milner’s book *On Not Being Able to Paint*, a reflective exploration of the creative process and the obstacles that can hinder artistic expression. Milner, a British psychoanalyst, and artist, examines her personal

¹⁶ The Gang of Four (四人帮) is the most powerful members of a radical political elite convicted for implementing the harsh policies directed by Chinese Communist Party (CCP) chairman Mao Zedong during the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Gang-of-Four>

¹⁷ Lu, Xun (鲁迅 1881-1936) Chinese writer, essayist, poet, literary critic, and a leading figure of modern Chinese literature.

¹⁸ Translated from “The Beauty of Form in Painting”, *Wu Guanzhong and His art*, (Beijing, People’s Literature Publishing House, 2021), “绘画的形式美”, 《我负丹青：吴冠中自传：珍藏纪念版》：“是漂亮而不美的庸俗作品倒往往依旧是“四人帮”流毒中的宠儿。”“美术中的悲剧作品一般是美而不漂亮的，如珂勒惠支的版画，如梵·高的《轮转中的囚徒们》……鲁迅说悲剧是将有价值的东西毁灭给人看。为什么美术创作就不能冲破悲剧这禁区呢？”

¹⁹ C. G. Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*. Collected Works, Vol. 8, 1947, par. 402.

²⁰ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, revised edition, (New York: Vintage Books 1961, 1989) pp300

struggles with painting and delves into the psychological and emotional aspects that contribute to creative blockages. The book takes the form of a diary, chronicling Milner's thoughts, experiences, and experiments with painting over a period of several years. Milner emphasises the importance of self-reflection and introspection in understanding the barriers to creativity. She shares her observations on the fear of failure, self-criticism, and the pressure to conform to external expectations.

I connect deeply with Miller's self-investigation in her struggles between what has been taught and the true self in art. Her discussion with taught knowledge in outlines, colours, illusion making, and her rebellious actions in free drawing, disillusion, exploring what the eye likes and rethinking on the medium and role of images are the same struggles I experienced when trying to escape from technical art education. "It is a kind of 'can I let go and create or must I rigidly hold onto all I have been taught, but without trying it out for myself as I want to, without making my own mark on the surface, and what will happen to me if I do?'"²¹ Later in her book, she discovers that she does not have to make every one of her works a masterpiece, accepting and acknowledging the value within the dissatisfactory.

"I could now begin to learn how to paint. At least I could take the risk of covering canvases and being dissatisfied with the result and going on to try again and even of getting professional help. And this seemed partly because I now knew more or less, or thought I did, what I was trying to do; it was also because having recognised the necessity of both illusion and disillusion, I no longer expected a painting to be a magical solution to every problem of life, and so no longer made the half-admitted demand that every picture should be a masterpiece or it was not worth doing."²²

Milner's deep self-exploration of her struggles between certainty and uncertainty, "what is being taught" and "a way of letting hand and eye do exactly what pleased them without any conscious working to preconceived intention,"²³ largely resonates with my journey of artistic individuation between educational systems. My transition between two educational systems can be translated as forming a certainty, whereas the balancing between the two systems, and wanting to find the Self, is an attempt to embrace uncertainty.

²¹ Helen Taylor Robinson, "On Not Being Able to Paint - By Marion Milner. *The Hands of the Living God* - By Marion Milner: BOOK REVIEWS." *British journal of psychotherapy* 27, no. 3 (2011): 319–322.

²² Marion Milner, "Painting as making real", *On Not Being Able to Paint*, 2nd ed. London: Heinemann Educational, 1957, e-book.

²³ *Ibid.*

In keeping with the above examples, an authentic approach to art and the self may be to look at one's own life and story, as an honest examination of the self may be what is needed to fertilise the soil where great artwork can grow.

Introduction

A Life of Contradiction

Why do I paint? Painting can be confusing, complicated, and filled with contradiction - or be very intuitive. While painting, a painter may have dozens or even hundreds of concepts crossing their mind - or simple clarity. Painting may attempt to experiment with philosophy and wrestle with the abstract - or represent reality.

Even as a small child growing up in China I was an artist. I always felt the need to create, but I never knew, or even thought I needed to know, why I *must* paint and create. It was, for a while, a simple escape from reality, a way to create a world which was safe and under my own control. But any attempts to delve deeper into my thoughts and explore my motivations led nowhere. So I broadened my horizons, choosing to leave China and continue my studies in the UK. Upon arrival, I was bombarded with countless new ideas and ways of thinking.

Each one of these new ideas I came into contact with contained only a small piece of the puzzle, a fragment of the answers I was looking for. Worse, there was always another diametrically opposed viewpoint to each idea which seemed to be just as valid. What to do about such a conundrum? My attempts to reconcile these opposing viewpoints, whether it be during the conceptualisation or creation process, led only to more struggle.

There were, however, a number of ideas which I kept coming back to, time and again. There seemed to be tension between being a working artist who might be concerned with technical creation, and art concerned with the conceptual. I noticed there was conflict between the naive, apprehensive, and undeveloped - and the knowledgeable, confident, and mature. I pondered how to communicate meaning in a visual medium beyond the showing of a painting itself, and bring to light the tension between words and the images they are meant to describe. These concepts were not and are not limited to my own work: they concern art as a subject. They may even be broadened to include other parts of the human experience, and these ideas came to be like threads woven through my work and life, connecting it all together.

The Path of Discovery

As I examined each of these ideas, I realised within each there was a fundamental contradiction, and upon reflection I was able to crystallise the contradictions inherent in my own work into the following binary pairs. (Fig. 3)

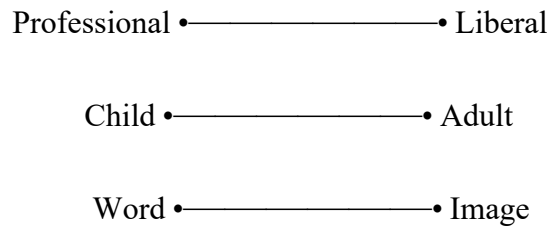


Fig. 3

It was these pairs of ideas which would lead to the creation of an entirely new way of thinking about art and the creative process. These contradictions had always been posed as completely separate questions in my mind, but upon the discovery that they were related in their containing a contradiction I realised if I let each be an endpoint to a line, it would allow me to imagine a zone along that line which a particular work might be exploring; a zone in which an answer might be found. (Fig. 4)

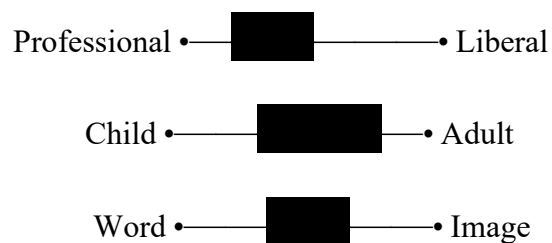


Fig. 4

From there, it was only a small step to thinking about these ideas concurrently and seeing that they could overlap. (Fig. 5)

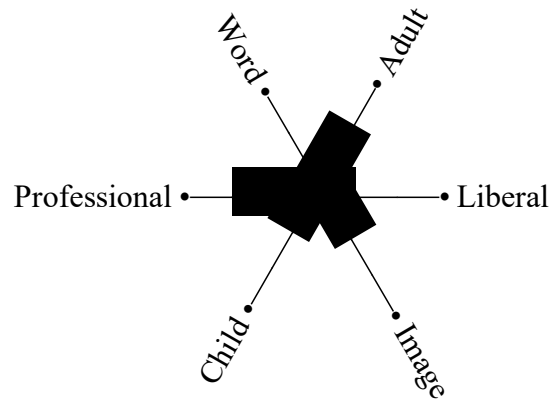


Fig. 5

I was shocked and delighted upon making this discovery, as the above figure is an example of what was to become an incredibly powerful tool. I immediately knew this was important, and as such it demanded a proper title. I call it the **Creative and Evaluative Model of Artistic Individuation**.

The CEMAI System

CEMAI is, at its core, a graph of contradictions. It takes pairs of contradictory forces and attempts to find a spectrum in the middle which works and feels right. It is a powerful and multi-faceted tool, and depending on the stage in the creative process in which it is implemented, can be used in different ways: a planning tool before an artistic experiment, a way to find meaning during the creative process, or an evaluative framework after completion are all ways in which CEMAI can be used. There can be one or many axes in a CEMAI graph. I have chosen in this text to explore the three above which are among the most important and relevant to my own work and research. One can imagine other axes and other midpoints, each with two conceptual contradictions acting as the endpoints. The core output of a CEMAI analysis will always be a diagram resulting from intersecting middle zones between contradictions, similar to the one above, as it is the exploration of these middle zones - and particularly the ways in which they overlap and ideas spread from one to another - which shed light on a particular work.

The following unpacks the discovery of the CEMAI system through the lens of my journey as an artist, with a specific focus on each of the three above axes. I have chosen these axes as I find they are some of the primary axes which appear most often on my own personal CEMAI diagrams. The first is related to my experiences in two different systems of art pedagogy, and the history of how they got to be that way. The second is largely about the stages of Jung's theory of individuation and how our true selves might be revealed through creative work. The third and final axis I will explore is about the Naxi culture of Southwestern China and my attempt to uncover the relationship between words and images, understood in terms of the contradictions on my own CEMAI graph. Finally, I integrate these ideas through the conceptual framework of CEMAI and discover animism as a paradigm of creation - a paradigm which I have been using for my whole life but was unable to name and embrace before investigating my work and life in this way.

CEMAI has been helpful to me as I explore my own art, and I believe it can be helpful to other artists as they explore their work or even to viewers and critics as they attempt to extract meaning from a work, series, or even category of art. From another perspective, it is an attempt to discover why I paint.

Chapter I - Liberal / Professional, the First Axis of CEMAI

Can I teach you how to be unique? No. Can I teach you personal style and character? No.

What can I teach you? The ability to paint. Emotional expression is about policy, not art.

- Jin Shangyi²⁴

One really important thing you learn in art school really, is the kind of sensibility of being an artist. You just got to think, 'who am I, what do I want, what am I going to say to the world.

- Grayson Perry²⁵

This section is an attempt to understand two different systems of education and consider the invaluable things I have learned from some of the main influences that shaped me as an artist. As an artist I have often attempted to use my transcultural background to bridge the two cultures and educational systems I have been a part of. Too often, it was abundantly clear that each had their own biases and blind spots. Throughout the years this gave me a deeper appreciation of some potential misunderstandings regarding art practices between the UK and China. In each system, the ideas of the other are less known and therefore underrepresented, misunderstood, and undervalued. But by examining each with respect, we can develop a decolonising perspective and understand art education in China and the UK in their own terms. While I acknowledge there are uniquely difficult challenges which are encountered in any attempt at transcultural communication, I hope this research can help to raise awareness of how important maintaining an open and understanding attitude is when those difficult situations inevitably arise.

²⁴ translated by the author from Jin's interview for Art News of China: “我能教你风格个性吗？不能。我能教你什么？基础，就是你的能力，绘画的能力，就是这样，但是我们的舆论讲的全是创新，为什么讲这个？就因为我们之前眼界很窄，压抑得很厉害，现在要放松，要风格多样化，一个情绪的抒发，是政策问题，不是艺术问题。He Wei (贺玮), Website of Art News of China, (中国美术报网), published 2nd. Nov. 2016, <http://www.zgmsbweb.com/Index/detail/relaId/10088>

²⁵ Grayson Perry: 'What do you learn at art schools?' Filmed in his studio, September 2014, published by Penguin Books UK, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xjKqr2E4QWs>

Decolonisation in research is a practical and epistemological commitment to deconstructing power hierarchies, recognising and interrogating the legacies of colonialism, and creating space for indigenous methodologies and knowledge systems. Linda Tuhiwai Smith CNZM (b. 1950, Distinguished Professor at Te Whare Wānanga o Awanuiāraangi) says, “History ... is the story of the powerful and how they became powerful, and then how they use their power to keep them in positions in which they can continue to dominate others.”²⁶ She states that deconstructing colonisation requires much more than simply, “sharing Indigenous horror stories about research.”²⁷ Therefore, in this section I have attempted to understand not only the differences in thought and process between two different systems, but how they got to be that way.

The decolonising agenda of my own research also takes inspiration from Edward Said's (1935-2003, Palestinian-American activist and professor and Columbia University) pioneering critique in his book *Culture and Imperialism, and Orientalism*. He identified the concept of “they” and “us” and the hierarchical prejudice the imperial mind is based on. He said:

What are striking in these discourses are the rhetorical figures one keeps encountering in their descriptions of ‘the mysterious East,’ as well as the stereotypes about ‘the African [or Indian or Irish or Jamaican or Chinese] mind,’ the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar ideas about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when ‘they’ misbehaved or became rebellious, because ‘they’ mainly understood force or violence best; ‘they’ were not like ‘us,’ and for that reason deserved to be ruled.²⁸

To me, the UK and China art education have each been Said’s “they” and “us” at some point, and I have identified as both a “they” and an “us” in each. The trappings of arrogance and culturally insensitive behaviour are all too easy to fall into, for example looking at Chinese art education and its way of looking at art through a Western conceptual lens might lead one to assume it to be, “native” or, “insufficient.” This type of thinking runs the risk of placing “our” values on “them.”

²⁶ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd edition (London: Zed Books, 2021),34.

²⁷Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 3rd edition (London: Zed Books, 2021),1.

²⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture & Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994), xi.

In light of this, I wish to emphasise the avoidance of placing value judgements or evaluating one with the standards of the other: Each is a valid approach to art. By validating marginalised views and systems in art education I aim to have my research contribute to the ongoing project of decolonisation in academia. In the UK, decentring dominant Western paradigms and paving the way for a more inclusive and equitable knowledge production process that acknowledges and respects diversity and multiplicity is key. The same can be said for China, one must only put the emphasis on Sinocentrism. My research aligns with the theories and commitment of the pioneers who paved the way for decolonization, striving to challenge and redefine the dominant narratives that have shaped our understanding of the world.

Therefore, it is important to note that as I present systems and ideas which seem contradictory, I only mean to present them as informing my own artistic growth. I have a great deal of respect for ideas, even the ones I personally disagree with, and *especially* the ones which have been deemed taboo by a particular authority, group, or society. I make no judgment claims and consider myself fortunate to have been exposed to a diverse set of processes and systems of thought. This directly relates into my development of CEMAI, which is about recognising and respecting ideas which may seem contradictory, and taking into consideration that polarised thinking very rarely if ever results in my own artistic output. I choose to find middle ground, and through my work hopefully can present ideas and feelings which encourage others to focus on the commonalities between “they” and “us” in order to create a bigger “we”.

The pedagogical framework of an educational system may often be taken for granted, but during my experiences in two such frameworks, they became like opposing armies battling in my mind, titans trading blows upon the canvas. Sitting in a transitional position between China and the UK I was able to see the effort I made in order to fit into each and observed their respective influences on my own art practice. This privilege of experiencing disparate cultures expanded my horizon but also left me with ambivalent ideas in practice. Consciously or not, a lot of my practice aims to ease this tension between contradictory concepts that constantly tear me apart, such as: figurative and abstract, concept and image, rational and intuitional, laws and liberty, on-canvas and off-canvas, painting as a process of knowing and as a static image - the list could go on. Pondering the differences began a years-long struggle to come to some kind of resolution. Which is right for me? Is there any common ground between them?

In this chapter I will give a brief overview of two systems of higher education in art, namely that which I experienced in China as an undergraduate at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), and in the UK as a postgraduate at the Royal College of Art (RCA) and the Slade School of Fine Art at the University College of London (UCL). Along the way a number of striking contradictions will be mentioned - contradictions which I was unable to make peace with at the time of learning about them. These contradictions would arise when trying to realise an artwork, causing many failed pieces. While I now recognise these contradictions, the first to make itself known to me was centred around the differences in the pedagogical frameworks I experienced while studying in China and the UK. Only later did I make the discovery that all the contradictions mentioned in this chapter could fit into a larger framework of the **Liberal** and the **Professional**, thus forming the first and most important axis of my personal CEMAI graph.²⁹

The idea of liberal and professional being counterparts is inspired by Dr. G. James Daichendt (b. 1975, art critic and historian), which I will explain in more detail later in this chapter.³⁰ I refer here to technique-based art education I mainly received in China as “professional”, and to UK art education which leans very much to the conceptual as “liberal”.

²⁹ I should note here that a CEMAI graph is unique to each artist, artwork, critic, viewer, etc. It is this flexibility which makes CEMAI a powerful tool. I am exploring some of the most relevant axes to me as they presented themselves during my recent journey as an artist.

³⁰ G. James Daichendt, *Artist Scholar: Reflections on Writing and Research* (NBN International, 2011), 27.

My Professional Education

I grew up in China in the 1990's and early 2000's and had a natural enthusiasm for drawing. Indeed, I had always wanted to be an artist. From a young age it was emphasised to me that the only path to becoming an artist was that of technical training, so I spent my early years immersed in as much art as I could find and learning from anyone who was willing to teach. What I learned was that in China, being a good artist meant following a clear set of doctrinal rules. What 'good' art should be, and the 'correct' process of creation was always narrowly defined. In schools there was a right answer. Memorising and reciting back this answer was the path to success. Following rules and guidelines garnered praise, while expressing original thought went unrewarded. I was told that by following the rules one could achieve greatness (albeit by that system's standards). This culture of obedience was ubiquitous, expected of me by all those in positions of authority. From teachers at school to mentors and even in my own household I would hear the same proclamations of rigid standards and had to obey unquestioningly. Challenges to the official ideology, and thus their authority, was not something that could be thought of - let alone carried out. Thus, I carried on refining my skills in the way that was taught to me, indeed the only way I knew how. My goal was simple - I wanted to get into the best university I could, and in my hometown of Beijing this meant the Central Academy of Fine Arts, or CAFA, one of the most prestigious art schools in China.

2017-2022全校本科生报考录取情况

Year	Number of Applicants	Number of admissions	Ratio of admissions	Percentage of admissions
年度	报名人数	录取人数	报录比	录取率
2022	24414	1039	23:1	4.26%
2021	30804	1132	27:1	3.7%
2020	44861	976	46:1	2.2%
2019	63233	826	77:1	1.3%
2018	40317	829	49:1	2.1%
2017	31985	831	38:1	2.6%

Fig. 6 Table of Admission and Applicants, CAFA 2017-2020

Gaining admission into CAFA is very competitive, (Fig. 6) and is decided by the results of a timed exam.³¹ The exam has a set structure which is heavily focused on technical ability and realism, hence my sole focus on realistic painting and drawing when I was young.

The large number of candidates dictated the need for standardised examinations as they can efficiently identify those with the most merit. For students pursuing oil painting, sculpture, murals, or print making, the exam includes a sketch using pencil or charcoal, painting a portrait in acrylic or oil, and doing a “quick sketch” of multiple people in a specific environment. Since there is little care given to an artist's creativity and/or originality, there is only one creative work in the exam which nonetheless still has the theme supplied to the artist. All of these are done in-person and are timed. There are no do-overs, and the exam is the sole means by which one is to be considered for acceptance. Based on my exam, I made it in, and headed off to CAFA brimming with excitement for what my future might hold.

But upon arrival, I quickly realised CAFA was only a continuation of my educational experiences up to that point. The students, by requirement, learned observational sketching techniques and painting in a realistic and representational way. I was told I had to adequately understand the principles of realistic painting and practice according to their rules. According to my professors, this was the only feasible way to reach an acceptable level of realism. One result of the exam-based approach is a shared educational experience and technical foundation among new undergraduate art students in China. This shared experience of focusing on technique over creativity makes conversations about art at educational institutions in China fall into the realm of the realist over the conceptual. Indeed, it goes further than just the exams, with realism and technical skill being somewhat synonymous with what is considered good art, and those able to demonstrate this skill, good artists. In fact, art education in China was never purposefully only for the sake of art, rather, it was born to influence and educate the masses to serve a grander aspiration, the social good. This point was brought home to me only later when I learned of Mao and what he considered good art, but we will come to that a bit later in this chapter.

I remember going to a lecture by Jin Shangyi (靳尚谊, 1934- , neoclassic oil painter, president and former Dean of CAFA, and chairman of the Chinese Artists Association) when

³¹ In the years 2017-2020, the acceptance rate stayed less than 3 per cent, with the highest at 2.6 per cent in 2017 and lowest 1.3 per cent in 2019. It was only after the COVID-19 pandemic set in the figures began to rise. CAFA website, <https://www.cafa.edu.cn/st/2023/80222004.htm>, accessed 11th, Feb, 2023

studying in high school. I arrived an hour early to reserve a seat in the lecture hall and waited, brimming with excitement. I felt incredibly honoured and could not wait to fill myself with the wisdom he was going to pass down. During the lecture, Jin talked about his overseas experience and how he had a major epiphany. He discovered the secret in handling the outline of objects so that the depth of dimension can be easily extracted.

I immersed myself in the lecture and tried to memorise every word he said. This hyper intense concentration burned through all of my energy, and when the lecture ended I was exhausted but content. Although I could not fully understand everything he said, I reckoned his words were full of wisdom and of great significance. I believed with all my heart I must strive to become a great artist just like Jin. Jin has famously said that style is not important, but only skill level.³² I believed this for a very long time without any second thought even though the definition of a great artist or good art has never been clearly demonstrated to me in the way a maths textbook might demonstrate a formula. There is indeed no such textbook in art. However, I reckoned this to be an essential question and hoped I was on the path leading to being one the greats. Consequently, I kept searching for clues from different established artists.

In my third year at CAFA, I made an attempt to paint some personal paintings outside of what I had been taught. I recalled that expressing myself was my original intention to study art. As a child, I found myself wanting to paint what was in my imagination but was limited by a lack of sufficient skill. However, when I was eventually equipped with techniques, I was scared to paint anything wrong. With many worries, I hid in a corner in the shared studio and started my first personal painting in a public space. I struggled a lot on this painting, and it turned out not even remotely close to what I wanted. I was seized by confusion and failure, and just then a tutor came in and saw me. I felt like I had been caught in the middle of a crime. She looked at me in silence for a moment, then asked, “What do you think you are painting? Why do you paint this?” Everyone in the studio laughed. I did not have answers to her questions.

And yet, I still did not challenge the fundamental axioms of this system. It was only years later and with experience in another way of thinking that I realised the severity of this

³² *Oil painter Jin Shangyi: Practice Subjects need not Ph.D. degrees* 油画家靳尚谊：实践性专业无需博士, 中国新闻网, September 30, 2020, <http://www.chinaqw.com/sp/2020/09-30/271699.shtml>

system and came to call it my “Professional” art education. The ideals and standards, the realistic aesthetics, the technical methods, propagational purpose, and narrow definition of “good” are found throughout this system and are decided by forces beyond the individual. (Fig. 8, Fig. 7) When surrounded by these certainties, I found myself trying to claim liberty and personal creativity. Today, I incorporate this “Professional” education into my art, and it is critical as an endpoint on my first CEMAI axis.

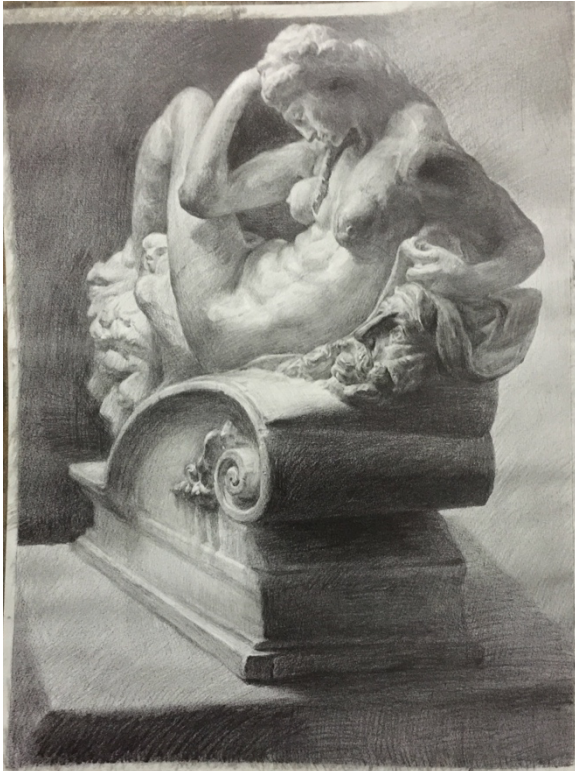


Fig. 8 *Sketch by the author (2016)*

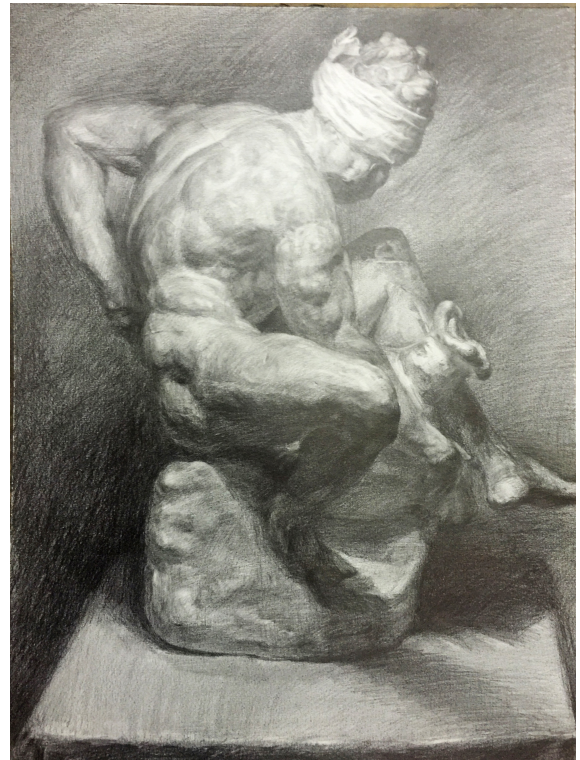


Fig. 7 *Sketch by the author (2016)*

My Liberal Education

Upon arrival in the UK, I was shocked and confused from the very beginning. Up to this point I had been surrounded by certainties, and I was lost when they were taken away. I did not understand that the common foundation of skills and shared experiences which I learned in China and took for granted did not exist in the UK. It seemed as if each person had their own unique, self-established basis of knowledge in support of their practice. In this world, the route leading to art is ultimately diverse. Some did not even have art-based backgrounds, coming from such diverse fields as anthropology, finance, or biology. Consequently, conversations were often approached from unexpected angles and totally different positions. In front of a painting, one could speak of a personal memory, a film, quantum physics, or anything at all in the range of human experience. Whether an image is “good or bad” was rarely if ever brought into the conversation. This freedom of expression and thought was contradictory to my professional education, and I would eventually come to know it as “Liberal”.

Escaping from my past education in the professional and trying to approach the liberal, I started experimenting on the canvas. I would apply careless brush marks, trying to rid myself of years of experience and learned skills. I did manage to make some strides with a few bold paintings from this time coming into being. I painted directly with fresh paint from the tube in defiance of the subtle colours demanded by realism. I applied clumsy and mundane brush marks to make war with the illusional. However, none of this satisfied me because none of it connected with the “real me”,³³ and indeed, it was this search for the ‘real me’ that I came to realise I was searching for.

Applying to the Royal College of Art (RCA) was somehow both straightforward and mysterious at the same time. Straightforward because it required only a submission of materials and a follow up interview. Mysterious because I had no clue what kind of work would be considered good or favourable, and whether I would be invited to the interview. I was asked to submit a portfolio and personal statement; however, no instruction was given

³³ The concept of “real me” is later realised to be equivalent to the idea of “self” as a centre of the psyche in the Jungian framework of individuation, and is the goal towards which the process of individuation strives. Jung used the term “true self” to denote spontaneous authentic experiences and a feeling of being alive with little to no contradiction in the psyche. I will explore this in greater detail in Chapter 2.

considering what kind of work I should present or what kind of statement I should give. Although I tried to gather as much information as I could by talking to previous applicants, it seemed no one could give me any clear instructions. Upon submitting my application, I felt acceptance was no more than a shot in the dark. I had decided to present my most honest works exploring ideas I was interested in. I was deathly scared that if those ideas were not good enough - or even wrong - I could not think of another way. Following the submission, I was surprised to receive the interview invitation.

During the interview, the examiner asked me to say a bit more about a collage work with multiple female body parts exhibited in museum space. “I feel like females are being shaped by male’s preferences and standards. We are trying so hard even to compete on that very narrow standard. Here I am just showing what males like, these up to standard female body parts good enough to be put in a museum” (Fig. 9). I was embarrassed because I had never talked about my work in this way. The examiners laughed, which made me feel even more self-conscious. I had no idea what it meant. Not long after, I got the offer letter in my mailbox.

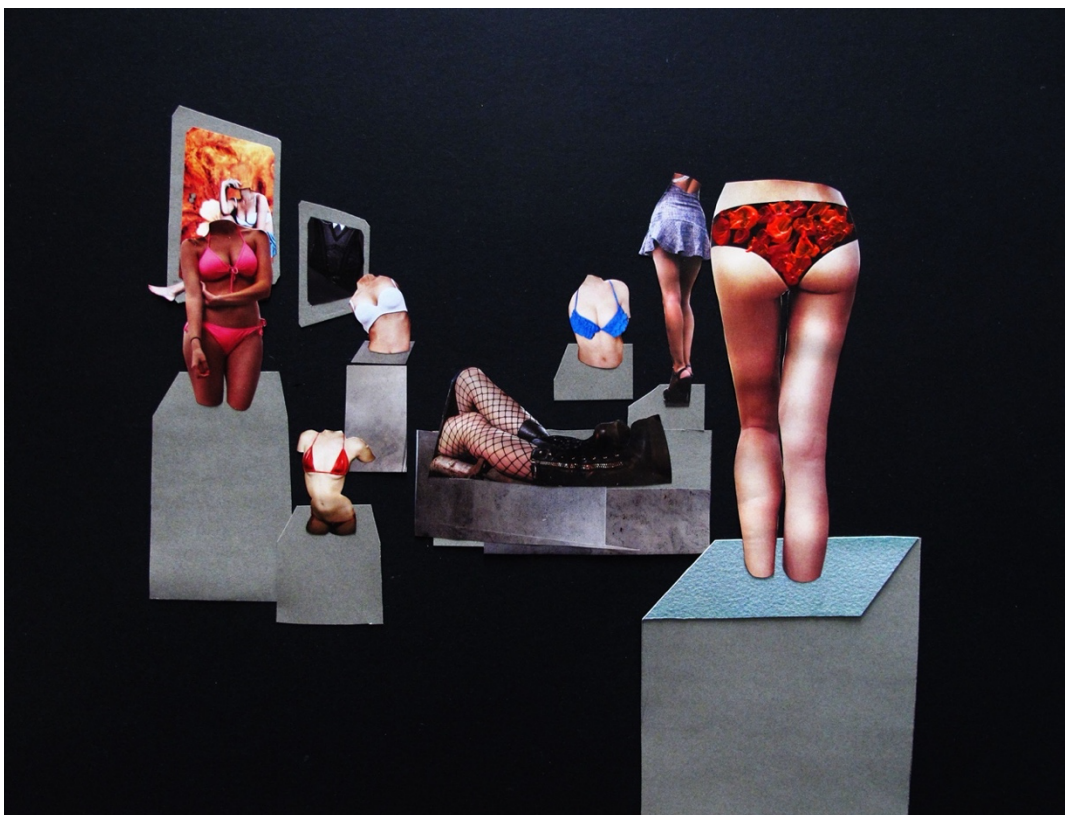


Fig. 9 Women as an exhibition. Collage (2016)

My RCA education was precisely as it stated on the website. “Through individual tutorials and group critiques, online group seminars, workshops, artist talks and the presentation of work, you are offered a wealth of opportunities to understand and advance your studio practice informed by the perspectives of your peers, faculty, and invited contributors”. Some of the educational experiences I was able to have at the RCA include group crits (critical reviews), one to one tutorials, lectures, and artists’ talk. As flexible as they are, each of these forms of studying can only cover a small number of the many possible ways of learning. In crits and tutorials, discussions can spread from how one might express certain ideas or feelings to philosophical concepts around those ideas and then back to an individual’s professional development. For lectures and artist talks, students have opportunities to be introduced to new concepts drawn from art criticism and learn from the original experience of artists who have established careers. I felt bombarded by all of this, and especially because it was all in a new and unfamiliar language. Worse, I was still stuck on the idea that in order to succeed, I needed to simply understand the rules and standards of this place, and then apply myself to achieving what was expected of me. After all, this was how I had been taught my entire life. Why would it be any different here?

And so, during my first year in the RCA, I tried desperately to grasp something certain. I searched for rules, guidelines, standards, or anything else which I could abide by, and by which my art could be accepted as good. One day, I asked my tutor, “What is good art?” She laughed it off without giving me a clear definition. “You don’t need to worry about what is good, you just need to do what you do,” she continued, “and you are here, that means you are somewhat good”. This answer left me more confused than before I had asked. “Why can’t she give me some definition of good,” I thought, “just like how (Jin) defined what great art is? Does she not know?” (Fig. 10)



Fig. 10 *The Aloe* Acrylic on canvas 40x50cm 2016

It took some doing, but slowly, over the course of months, I began to see what my tutor had meant. I found that it was not reasonable, nor even desirable, to anticipate a common base of knowledge, and there were certainly no clear rules which must be abided by when creating and discussing art. However, when there were no rules, no universal guidance, no standards, no clear definition of good, I became overwhelmed in existential fright, lost in this newfound freedom which I hadn't even known existed. I abandoned my realism, but I was still looking for some external guidance. I did not yet have the ability to look within myself for the strength which I would need to truly find what I was meant to do. During this period, I was like an imposter pretending to enjoy the free air, desperate to be seen just like the others.

I began to reach out and ask my friends about contemporary art, and generally found two main viewpoints. Some had a relatively open attitude and held that while art could be a bit confusing, they were interested in learning more. I often heard from this group things like, "Tell me more. I want to know about the artist, their story, and more information so I can understand". To the others, art is supposed to be a certain way and they found that the near impossibility of giving it a unified definition in clear words made them very uncomfortable indeed.

I continued my struggle, and eventually realised that years of training had shaped my perception, practice methodology, aesthetics, and taste to the point of becoming a part of me that could not be erased. And finally, I saw everything in a new light, and it seemed as if I was surrounded by brand new art at every turn, new concepts in every book I opened. I felt like this new place had opened me up, and provided something which had long since been forgotten, or maybe never even existed, in the institutions I had attended in China. I found myself desiring to know why and how these differences had developed. Why had China become obsessed with the professional and the classical methods, with the western world embracing individualism and originality? I became obsessed with finding the answer.

Professional Art Pedagogy

As one of the most influential art colleges in China, The Central Academy of Fine Art is the dream school of thousands of students dedicated to pursuing an artistic career. The values CAFA chooses to adopt, therefore, have massive sway over many youngsters, influencing what they may consider natural, or right. In turn, the educational model CAFA follows today was strongly influenced by its predecessors, with their pedagogical methods tailored to specific historical and political realities. As a result, bureaucracy and officialdom are intrinsic qualities at CAFA and this can be seen simply by looking at the CAFA website. Statements such as, “The development of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) has been inextricably linked to the destiny of our country,” are commonplace.³⁴ It is important to understand the recent history of art institutions in China to make sense of such a claim, and to do that we must go back 100 years to the end of the Qing Dynasty.

The Qing Dynasty came to a forced ending when the last emperor was overthrown during the Xinhai Revolution. This marked the end of the monarchical era of China, a period covering all of written history up until 1912. This sudden end to a millenniums old system of dynastic rule cast China into a period of massive upheaval and rapid change. One important development was the encouragement for leading intellectuals to be educated overseas. They were encouraged to learn the ideas of the West, with the goal of implementing their successes in China. Returning home after having absorbed these ideas of the West, there began a movement to bring science and democracy to China.

In September of 1915 Chen Duxiu founded ‘*La Jeunesse*’ (*New Youth*, 新青年), a highly influential and important magazine of the period. This publication had a strong influence on what was to become the New Culture Movement. Chen was a co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party, its first general secretary, and is widely considered to be the ‘Lenin of China’. In the very first issue of *La Jeunesse*, Chen published an article entitled “To the Youth.” In this article, Chen advocated independence over slavishness, progressive over conservative thought, enterprising energy over seclusive, worldly openness over closed-

³⁴ CAFA official website, <https://www.cafa.edu.cn>, assessed on 20th.10.2022

mindedness, pragmatism over theoretical, and last but not least, the scientific over the imaginary.³⁵

Recoiling from the shock of such ideas, more conservative thinkers would invariably invoke the great intellectuals of the ancient world, especially Confucius and his teachings, whose status in the traditional cultural hierarchy was unshakeable, with their responses bordering on religiosity. These critical voices accused the magazine of destroying traditional morals, art, religion, literature, and politics, and attacked the progressive magazine constantly. In 1919, Chen would submit another article in response. With reference to ‘Mr. De’ (i.e. ‘democracy’) and ‘Mr. Sci’ (i.e. ‘science’), he wrote:

We do not deny these accusations. We, as in those who share the same ideals as well as run the magazine, are held sinless. Only for the sake of Mr. De and Mr. Sci are we considered guilty. According to Mr. De we have to rebel against traditional arts and religion. According to Mr. Sci, we have no choice but to reject the culture and literature of the past. We now firmly believe these Two Sirs can save China from political, ethical, academical, and idealistic darkness. For these two Sirs, we do not yield to anything, no matter it be the forces of government, attacks and criticism from society, or even under the threat of death and bloodshed.^{36 37}

Set against the turmoil of the time, Mr. De and Mr. Sci seemed to be perfect replacements for past philosophies in many regards. But there was something left to be desired with respect to religion as there was nothing on offer for the faithful. In 1917, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培; 1868-1940, founder of Peking University and one of the leading educators of the New Culture movement), put forward the proposition of “replacing religion with aesthetic education” in a speech in Beijing. Ultimately Cai hoped this could be the needed replacement for religion.³⁸ In April of 1918, with the goal of realising this educational theory, Cai founded the National Beijing Art College. It was born to address a historical and collective need for students to

³⁵ Translated from Du Xiuchen, *To the Youth* [敬告青年], *La Jeunesse*, no.1 (1987): “自主的而非奴隶的, 进步的而非保守的, 进取的而非退隐的, 世界的而非锁国的, 实利的而非虚文的, 科学的而非想像的。”

³⁶ Translated from, Duxiu Chen, “本志罪案之答辩书”, *La Jeunesse*, [新青年]第六卷第一号“本志罪案之答辩书” 1919. the original text: 本志同人本来无罪, 只因为拥护那德莫克拉西 (Democracy)和赛因斯 (Science) 两位先生, 才犯了这几条滔天的大罪, 要拥护那德先生, 便不得不反对孔教、礼法、贞节、旧伦理、旧政治; 要拥护那赛先生, 便不得不反对旧艺术、旧宗教; 要拥护德先生又要拥护赛先生, 便不得不反对国粹和旧文学。...我们现在认定只有这两位先生, 可以救治中国政治上道德上学术上思想上一切的黑暗。若因为拥护这两位先生, 一切政府的压迫, 社会的攻击笑骂, 就是断头流血, 都不推辞

³⁷ Chen wanted to introduce science and democracy to the people of China, but these were completely new and alien ideas. To help people understand such foreign concepts they were personified as “Mr. De” (德先生) and “Mr. Sci” (赛先生).

³⁸ This speech was later published in “*La Jeunesse*”, titled the Theory of Replacing Religion with Aesthetic education (以美育代宗教说).

become future influencers who use art as a language to establish and promote the doctrinal ethical standards Cai envisioned. This was the first modern Chinese art educational institution and a direct predecessor to CAFA.

In April 1938, during the time of Second Sino-Japanese War, another predecessor of CAFA was founded by the Chinese Communist Party. This was to be the Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts, an institution that aimed to educate new artists who could fight the enemy on the spirit level. “The educational principles of the Lu Xun Academy of Arts was to cultivate a large number of art cadres and new artistic talents in response to fighting the wars, and to unite and train the artistic talents for the new era”.³⁹ Two months before the Lu Xun Academy was officially founded, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and others collectively published an article with the title of “The Reason of Establishment of Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts”. The article claims:

Art — including drama, music, visual art, and literature, is the most forceful weapon in propagandising, mobilising, and organising the masses. Fostering artistic cadres in fighting the Japanese is a pressing work.⁴⁰

On the 28th of April, 1938, Mao gave a speech at Lu Xun to clarify the purpose of this institution and made a declaration of what a “great artist” should be. He said: “The Lu Xun Academy of Fine Arts aims to foster artistic workers that have great expectations, abundant combat experience, and fine artistic technique... One cannot be a great artist lacking any of these three aspects”.⁴¹ The influence on pedagogical development by this foundational speech can hardly be overstated. The CAFA website even states Lu Xun had a considerable impact on the institution’s educational models and values.⁴² During these early days we can see doctrinal concepts emerging and becoming codified in the institutions.

³⁹ Official web of CAFA, <https://www.cafa.edu.cn/st/2019/10119706.htm>, accessed 13th.2.2023

⁴⁰ Translation by the author. Zedong Mao, Enlai Zhou, Boqu Lin, Teli Xu, Fangwu Cheng, Siqi Ai and Yang Zhou, 毛泽东,周恩来,林伯渠,徐特立,成仿吾,艾思奇,周扬 “the Speech in Luxun Academy of Fine Arts” “鲁迅艺术学院创立缘起”, Historical Materials of New Culture 新文化史料, issue 2, 1987, 1987 年第 2 期, original text: “艺术——戏剧、音乐、美术、文学是宣传、鼓动与组织群众最有力的武器。艺术工作者——这是对于目前抗战不可缺少的力量。因之, 培养抗战的艺术工作干部, 在目前也是不容稍缓的工作。”

⁴¹ Translated by the author. “The Speech in Luxun Academy of Fine Art” “在鲁迅艺术学院的讲话” *Mao Zedong Collected Works*, Volume 2, (Beijing: People's Press 人民出版社), 123: 毛泽东文集, 第二卷, original text: 鲁迅艺术学院要造就有远大的理想、丰富的生活经验、良好的艺术技巧的一派艺术工作者...要做伟大的艺术家, 必须具备以上所说的三个条件, 缺一不可。”

⁴² Official web of CAFA, <https://www.cafa.edu.cn/st/2019/10119706.htm>, accessed 13th.2.2023

Considering this, it is hardly a surprise that there is such a strong emphasis on technical realism.

The fact that realism is so important in the teaching methodologies at CAFA is largely the doing of Xu Beihong (徐悲鸿, 1895-1953), the first dean of CAFA. Xu considered realism to be one of the five most influential art theories in Chinese art, with ‘spirit-giving’ theory (Gu Kaizhi 顾恺之, 348-405), landscape painting (Zong Bing (宗炳, 375-443); literati theory (Su Shi (苏轼, 1037-1011), and the theory of southern and northern schools (Dong Qichang (董其昌, 1555-1636) making up the other four. Xu’s statements and ideas have had a considerable impact on contemporary art education in China, and the focus on realism in the pedagogical methods at CAFA continues to this day.

Perhaps the most important example this is the idea of *foundation* (基础)⁴³, popularised by Jin Shangyi. *Foundation* is considered to be a set of basic skills which any burgeoning artist must learn, quite literally a foundation on which everything else can be built. Jin dedicated a significant part of his life developing the theory of *foundation* in oil painting. Some of the concepts included when learning *foundation* include lighting, shading, colour, anatomy, brushwork, composition, and importantly, perspective.

By Jin’s consideration, the 3-dimensional perspective is unintuitive to most Chinese, and learning to accurately represent 3D reality in 2D space poses quite the technical challenge to Chinese students. According to Jin, “Chinese people have many inherent difficulties in creating oil paintings, because the Chinese observational methods concentrate on lines and planes. European observation is 3-dimensional and spatial.”⁴⁴ He considers many Chinese painters to be innately deficient in reference to spatial observation, and his own practice focuses on tackling this problem by focusing on spatial volume and *foundation*. For Jin, considerations such as style and theory are of trivial importance in comparison to *foundation*. “I do not paint this kind of painting for the sake of style,” Jin said, “I do it to make the *foundation* better”.⁴⁵ (Fig. 11)⁴⁶

⁴³ A more direct translation of this term might be “basic,” or, “base”. I have chosen to use the term *foundation*, which gives a more official feel, and better reflects how it is used in art schools in China. It is expected that every artist will know this term and its concepts when discussing art in China.

⁴⁴ “Oil painter Jin Shangyi: Practice Subjects need not Ph.D. degrees 【中国风】 油画家靳尚谊：实践性专业无需博士”，中国新闻网，September 30, 2020, <http://www.chinaqw.com/sp/2020/09-30/271699.shtml>

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ For a detailed reading of this work, please see the “Examination of Key Artworks” section of this report.



Fig. 11 Tajik Bride (塔吉克新娘) Shangyi Jin (靳尚谊) 60x50cm Oil (1983)

Jin relies heavily on *foundation* as a standard of evaluation when critiquing a painting and considers conceptual choices of the artist irrelevant when assessing its merit. He further claims that a PhD is of no importance to practising painters: “It is enough to cultivate a painter with an undergraduate education. Doctoral degrees are not what we need in practical subjects... In practice, we look at the work of painting. Whether a painting is good or not... has nothing to do with theory”.⁴⁷ Furthermore, he relates to the standard of painting to a bigger picture, saying, “(The evaluation criteria) are an important symbol of whether a country has culture or not. If this evaluation standard is made unclear, then this will be an era without culture”.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

Jin's practice and values grounded in *foundation* have influenced multiple generations of Chinese painters. The idea is of such importance that the entire first year of an undergraduate degree at CAFA is referred to as, "The Faculty of *Foundation*" (基础部).⁴⁹ From the moment they win the entrance competition, students are trained to hone their representational skills and must prove themselves in this regard before they are allowed to select their major. At the end of the first year, one's overall class-ranking decides the priority in which they select their major. Oil painting and sculpture are the two most sought-after choices, so to be able to select one of these two, one's *foundation* must be at the top of the class. Experimental art, as the least popular, is almost always left to students ranked at the bottom of the class, i.e., those with the weakest *foundation*. It is plain to see how this leads to a culture where *foundation* is of the utmost importance, where students are forced to strive towards having the best *foundation*, and where art and artists can be plainly and objectively judged as "good" or "bad". Consequently, the theory of *foundation* is to many students no more than a barrier walling off their dreams.

⁴⁹ Official website of CAFA <https://www.cafa.edu.cn/sp/nljg/?j=110>, accessed 13.Feb.2023: The faculty of foundation of CAFA is established in 2001. This is the earliest unified faculty established dedicating to the fine art foundation among all national higher art education institutions. Students admitted to the school of fine art will study in the faculty of foundation for a year. Meeting the eligibility at the end of the year, students will be assigned into different departments including oil painting, printmaking, sculpture and mural, according to their mark ranking in practice, literal studies and their wishes. (中央美术学院造型基础部成立于2001年,是全国第一所在高等美术院校中设立统一造型基础教学的部门。考入中央美术学院造型学科的本科生,进入基础部学习,为期一年。期满成绩合格后,根据专业课与文化课的综合成绩统一排名,填报志愿分入油画系、版画系、雕塑系、壁画系继续学习。)

Liberal Art Pedagogy

The first art academies appeared in Italy at the time of the Renaissance, and institutional focus on art in the western world would begin.⁵⁰ Many steps would be taken before standards in art courses were developed, and many more before the meaning of what it meant to be an artist was transformed. By the mid twentieth century, the university was the accepted home of art education, with pedagogical norms at art universities largely focused on individual practice-based research. From this one can infer that individualised art practice is a scholarly discipline.⁵¹ How did it get to be this way?

During the time of the *old masters*⁵² art served a very acute group of people occupying the top of the socio-economic hierarchy. During this period works of art were rarely for an artist's own sake. Art was something commissioned for a specific purpose, whether that be to represent a religious scene, record a historical event, or simply to record the appearance of an important individual. This tacit functionality of art as a trade marked a clear path to success for artists of the past.

In the European Middle Ages, people who desired to become a painter for a living began as an apprentice for a "master" before they could create their own works. They would endeavour to learn well-established techniques and become a good Craftsman who developed "the intimate connection between hand and head" and conducts a dialogue between concrete practices and thinking".⁵³ At the end of an apprenticeship, the apprentice would demonstrate their skill by producing a major work, known as a "masterpiece".⁵⁴ This system of apprenticeship was the same as that used in many other trades of the time, and indeed art was considered a trade like any other:

⁵⁰ "Academy", *Art term* in Tate Website: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/academy>

⁵¹ I wish to note here that while liberalised methods of teaching art have become the norm throughout the UK and US, it is important to note that there are still highly respected institutions dedicated to professional art education, such as the Florence Academy of Fine Arts in Florence, Italy. In China, the approach is much more top-down, with the dominant method of teaching art in China that of Foundation and in order to study art in an alternative way one must commit to operating outside of more official channels.

⁵² Although not a common term among art historians, I find the term "old masters" to be quite useful. Throughout this paper I will employ this term to mean European professional artists of circa the 17th, 18th, and early 19th centuries, as well as to reference a set of methodologies and techniques employed by the old masters which continue to be a part of many artists' professional growth.

⁵³ Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008), 9

⁵⁴ Nicholas Houghton, "Six into One: The Contradictory Art School Curriculum and How It Came About." *The international journal of art & design education* 35, no. 1 (2016): 109.

A master, who had already demonstrated his (it was almost always a male) proficiency in a craft or trade, would engage a number of apprentices, who would be provided with food and lodging and be inducted into that particular specialism.⁵⁵

In his theory of the six curricula (Apprentice, Academic, Formalist, Expressive, Conceptual and Professional), Nicholas Houghton places the mediaeval European system of art education squarely in the “Apprentice” category. “Before the establishment of educational institutions of artists, their formal training took place through an apprentice system”.⁵⁶

However, for well over a century now, artists have been challenging what it means to create art and for whom it is created. This has often been posed in the form of questions such as: Who is art for? What do artists do? How does one make art and become a professional artist? What is the purpose of art? What even *is* art? In the early 19th century, according to Kate Oakley (Professor at the University of Glasgow) and Mark Banks (Professor at the University of Leicester), art schools in the UK served,

mainly as a response to emergent industrialisation and the need for more skilled craft, creative and artisanal workers. Many art schools grew out of existing organisations such as Mechanics Institutes (established in the 1820s) as off-shoots of an established system of technical and industry education.”⁵⁷

Impressionism then emerged in the 1860s⁵⁸ followed by *post-impressionism* which lasted until 1905, and certainly any answers which may have been had to the above questions became much obscured by this time.

The impressionists (1867-1886) challenged the standard of art and how, where, and what to paint.⁵⁹ “These artists became dissatisfied early in their careers with academic teaching’s emphasis on depicting a historical or mythological subject matter with literary or anecdotal overtones. They also rejected the conventional imaginative or idealising treatments

⁵⁵ Bernard Cole, *The Renaissance Artist at Work: From Pisano to Titian* (London: Harper & Row, 1983), 45.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Houghton, “Six into One: The Contradictory Art School Curriculum and How It Came About.” *The international journal of art & design education* 35, no. 1 (2016): 107–120.

⁵⁷ Kate Oakley and Mark Banks, “The Dance Goes on Forever? Art Schools, Class and UK Higher Education,” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 22, no. 1 (2016): 41-57.

⁵⁸ Robert Atkins, *Artspeak: A Guide to Contemporary Ideas, Movements, and Buzzwords*, 2nd ed. (New York: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1997), 118-119.

⁵⁹ “Impressionism.” In *Britannica Academic*, accessed February 13, 2023, <https://academic-eb-com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/levels/collegiate/article/Impressionism/42220>.

of academic painting”.⁶⁰ Practising directly out of studios, they introduced direct brush strokes, complementary colours in shadow that brings out brilliant sunlight and compositions of “a more casual and less contrived disposition of objects paintings” compared to the traditional methods.⁶¹ It is said of the postmodernists, “most of them began as Impressionists; each of them abandoned the style, however, to form his own highly personal art”.⁶²

After the Second World War, the centre of the art world moved from Paris to New York where it was more active and rich.⁶³ Along with the post war trauma was, “a crisis of faith—indeed, a crisis of meaning. To many people, all the old belief systems seemed discredited: what could you believe in?”⁶⁴ This led to a wave of rethinking and questioning everything in the past, and eventually the very definition of art. In his 1950 book *The Story of Art* Sir Ernst Hans Josef Gombrich OM CBE FBA (1909-2001, British art historian) attempted to address questions such as: “what is beauty”, “should art be true to nature”, “what is harmony?”, by examining the works of the great masters.⁶⁵ Then, in the 1960s, several artists like Baldessari stopped making any traditional form of art and started to ask simply, “What is art?”⁶⁶ Nature, beauty, and harmony, all ceased to be important when the definition of art became ambiguous. In this period, art had started to challenge boundaries across all disciplines. It expanded from being mostly technique-centric to integrating theory and taking a more interdisciplinary approach. Today, art can be a performance, an installation, a concept, or anything else, and many artists are using their art to raise awareness and challenge social norms. By the late 20th century, art had reached a point of having a nearly complete break with the past, with its very purpose changing dramatically. This was a time of rapid and significant change in art and art education, and it is worth looking at this transition to investigate how and why this happened.

In the early 1900’s there would be rapid growth in the liberal arts departments in universities in the West, with a correspondingly significant decline in drawing courses

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² "Post-Impressionism." In *Britannica Academic*, accessed February 13, 2023, <https://academic-eb-com.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/levels/collegiate/article/Post-Impressionism/61041>.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 31.

⁶⁴ Ibid.,p.34.

⁶⁵ Tony Godfrey, *The Story of Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2020), 9

⁶⁶ Ibid.,p.9.

offered.⁶⁷ Over the next few decades this pedagogy became solidified.⁶⁸ Before this shift UK art education was focused on technical art training similar to what continues to be found in Chinese art schools today. This description by John Vernon Lord (1939-, British illustrator and Professor Emeritus, University of Brighton) about the UK's art educational system in 1946 has a striking resemblance to art education in Chinese schools today:

In 1946 the Ministry of Education organised Art and Design education into two parts. Students took a Ministry's Intermediate Certificate in Art and Crafts followed by a National Diploma in Design (NDD)...the focus of the Intermediate was that all those who passed the examination demonstrated that they could draw. In those days drawing usually meant an 'accurate' representation of the visible world, aiming for what might be described as the actual appearance of things. Anything that smacked of decorative drawing tended to be frowned upon. Students were expected to observe closely the measurement and proportion of the figure in the life drawing class. Training the eye to appreciate form and structure, and assess relationships, was seen as a basic necessity for all students in art and design. 'Objective drawing' was often given as a title for drawing classes in those days. Certain academic circles frowned upon distortion in drawing, and cartooning and comic type illustrations were seen as a carnal sin. Sketchbooks were not allowed to be loose-leafed and you were not permitted to stick items on to the pages. They had to be 'genuine' studies from direct observation.⁶⁹

In 1954, Edward John Victor Pasmore, CH, CBE (1908-1998, British abstract artist) and Richard William Hamilton CH (1922-2011, British painter and collagist) would begin teaching a Foundation Course at Newcastle University. In the Foundation Course, there was an emphasis on comprehensive training in art and design:

The artist-teachers shared their pedagogical views towards the development of a course that aimed to provide a basic training in keeping with the demands of modern visual art. Rather than imparting knowledge on how to reproduce the appearance of nature, the course offered knowledge of the causes by which these effects are produced.⁷⁰

Although the two artists had very different artistic styles in their own practice, the collaboration went well. "The groundwork for the study of formal elements had been laid by Victor Pasmore, and when Richard Hamilton assumed responsibility for the Foundation

⁶⁷ R. J. Goldwater, "The Teaching of Art in the Colleges of the United States," *College Art Journal* 2, no. 4 (1943): 3-31.

⁶⁸ G. James Daichendt, *Artist Scholar: Reflections on Writing and Research* (NBN International, 2011), 35.

⁶⁹ John Vernon Lord, *Post-war curriculum and assessment development*, <https://blogs.brighton.ac.uk/artsbrighton/2009/07/07/post-war-curriculum-and-assessment-coldstream-summerson-art-history-and-complementary-studies/>

⁷⁰ Elena Crippa and Beth Williamson, eds, *Basic Design*, First published 2013 on the occasion of the display Basic Design, Curated by Elena Crippa and Beth Williamson, Tate Britain, 25 March – 25 September 2013, 9.

Course in 1961, much of this content was retained.”⁷¹ What grew out of this course would become to be known, among other names, as the “Basic Design Movement.” The Basic Design Movement:

emerged as a radical new artistic training. It emerged in response to already-existing teaching methods embodied within the skills-based National Diploma in Design and was the first attempt to create a formalised system of knowledge based on an anti-Romanticist, intuitive approach to art teaching. What actually constituted Basic Design was disputed at the time and continues to be debated now. Its contested nature is underscored by the fact that it was variously termed Basic Design, ‘Basic Form’, the ‘Basic Course’, ‘Basic Grammar’ or even ‘Basic Research.’⁷²

Despite the ambiguity surrounding its exact definition, Basic Design courses nonetheless represented a distinct shift from technique-based courses, towards a more open-ended experimental approach which encouraged a critical attitude of mind.⁷³ The pedagogical changes which started in the Basic design movement played a pivotal role in the subsequent institutional restructuring and comprehensive integration of fine art into the university.⁷⁴ The Basic design movement also introduced important foundations and structures in a new direction in art education at the time. It reflected the social need in fostering the thinking abilities in conceptual art. As Richard Yeomans puts it:

The Basic design movement represented a distinct shift from technique-based courses, towards a more open-ended experimental approach which encouraged a critical attitude of mind. It radically challenged the realm of traditional art education including techniques, life room, style, personal expression, intuition, and promoted another side of artistic thinking in respect to rationality critical thinking, problem solving, experimenting, etc. To some level, it also reflected the wave at the time when traditional notions of artistic mastery and technical skills were challenged by the rise of conceptual art, multimedia art, performance art, and other innovative forms of artistic expression.⁷⁵

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Elena Crippa and Beth Williamson, eds, *Basic Design*, First published 2013 on the occasion of the display Basic Design, Curated by Elena Crippa and Beth Williamson, Tate Britain, 25 March – 25 September 2013, 6.

⁷³ Richard Yeomans, *Chapter 12: Basic Design and the Pedagogy of Richard Hamilton*, Mervyn Romans eds, *Histories of Art and Design Education: Collected Essays*, (Bristol: NBN International, 2005), 209.

⁷⁴ *Art School Educated: Curriculum Change in UK Art Schools 1960–2010*, <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/art-school-educated>, accessed 9th. Jul.2023

⁷⁵ Richard Yeomans, *Chapter 12: Basic Design and the Pedagogy of Richard Hamilton*, Mervyn Romans eds, *Histories of Art and Design Education: Collected Essays*, (Bristol: NBN International, 2005), 209.

The influence of Basic Design continued to spread, and in a 1986 paper entitled “Nellie is Dead,” author Cal Swann lambasted the state of art education, citing low morale, inefficient use of time, severe lack of funding, cuts in staffing, and an increase in managerial tasks and paperwork unsuited to creative types. According to Swann, “The tradition of one-to-one tutorials from practitioners passing on their experience, skills and attitudes cannot continue in its present form, and it is arguable whether it should. Nicos Souleles, designer and academic, says that Swann, “berated the well established tradition of delivering art and design courses based on a formula of setting design problems followed by a long period of individual tuition while work is going on, and then followed by a group ‘crit’ of the work at the end.”⁷⁶

By 2002, many changes suggested in “Nellie is Dead” had been implanted “including widespread use of independent and peer group learning, the articulation of learning outcomes, the development of assessment criteria, the promotion of reflective learning and the significant increase in staff– learner ratios.”⁷⁷ Learners were expected, in studio-based disciplines, “gradually progress towards independent and personally focused learning...supported by formative (oral) feedback in tutorials and through group critiques...to encourage the development of critical thinking and professional practices.”

In contemporary art, the need to abide by specific rules and customs has almost entirely faded away. The realm that used to be limited to craftsmen serving patrons has ceded to the personal wishes of an artist, and this new art led to new art education. This leads up to today and describes an educational experience very similar to the one I was a part of in the UK.

⁷⁶ C. Owen, “The Challenge of Open Learning in Art & Design Further Education,” *Journal of Art & Design Education* 17, no. 3 (1998): 238.

⁷⁷ D. Buss and T. Gretton, *Art & Design Benchmark Statement* (Gloucester: Quality Assurance Agency, 2002).

A Critical Juncture

In contemporary times, there is not a universal path to follow for artists, or, for viewers, a common standard to evaluate or guidance to understand. Will Gompertz, the former director of Tate Media, wrote:

The problem this new audience has faced, the problem we all face when encountering a new work of art, is one of comprehension. It doesn't matter if you are an established art dealer, a leading academic or a museum curator; anyone can find themselves at something of a loss when facing painting or sculpture that is fresh out of an artist's studio".

Later Gompertz narrated a conversation between him and Sir Nicholas Serota, the internationally respected leader of Britain's Tate Gallery: "He once told me that he can be a little 'daunted' when entering an artist's studio and seeing a new work for the first time. 'I often don't know what to think,' he said. 'I can find it very intimidating'".⁷⁸

In such a world, the very idea of *what it means to be art*, seems to have slipped away. The umbrella term of 'Art' is used to describe the many distinct methodologies, materials, and ideas of contemporary practitioners. Audiences of contemporary art are naturally overwhelmed and puzzled by this dynamic and varied group of things presented to them. To practising artists, the circumstances are hardly any better. When the standard of "good" fell apart, it seems for both artists and viewers, we could only stand by and accept what was presented to us. While the great diversity of contemporary art does promote dynamic art practices, it also runs the risk of shielding works devoid of value and lacking depth, simply by naming it art.

The ideas of the contemporary artists in the Western world would make it to China just as the Cultural Revolution came to a close. This was to be an era characterised by openness, creativity, and freedom of expression. Many exhibitions would be held which did not conform to the old standards and practices of *foundation*. According to Holly Rousell (b. 1989, curator, museologist, and art historian), "This era was characterised by communities of artists and poets organising exhibitions in parks and galleries around the country, the proliferation of Western music and literature in China, and exchanges between freshly

⁷⁸ Will Gompertz, *What Are You Looking At?: The Surprising, Shocking, and Sometimes Strange Story of 150 Years of Modern Art*, "introduction" (New York: Plume, 2012), Kindle edition.

liberated Chinese citizens and their foreign friends within the capital". In February 1979, Jiang Feng (江丰, 1910-1983), the forward-thinking chairman of the China Artists' Association, wrote in an exhibition preface, "Freedom does not just fall from the sky; it must be fought for with our own hands".⁷⁹ Furthermore, according to Xianting Li (b. 1949, art critic and organiser of the Stars Exhibition), "The year 1979 was a dynamic time when all forms of art, politics, and culture in China underwent major changes".⁸⁰

In January-February of 1979, two important exhibitions featuring modernism took place in Shanghai and Beijing, respectively, "*The Twelve-Person Painting Exhibition*" (十二人画展) and the "Beijing Landscape and Still Life Oil Painting Exhibition" (北京油画风景静物展). Artists in these exhibitions were among some of the first who had studied overseas in Japan, Europe, and America in over half a century. Before this, modernist styles had been a fully underground movement. Li said, "These exhibitions essentially brought modernism, which had been suppressed from the 1920s and 1930s to the 1970s, out of the underground and into the light. We can see the influence of Impressionism, Cubism, Fauvism, and Surrealism in their work".⁸¹ Despite the fact that these modernist exhibitions, "opened a new and refreshing window for viewers... there was no significant reaction from society in general".⁸²

It was in the midst of such revolutionary new ideas that in the Fall of 1979 the first Stars Art Exhibition (星星美展) was held. Unlike other exhibitions of the time that only experimented with the modernist style, the Stars Exhibition "touched on something very different. It was not merely a revolution in modernist style; it was an individual artist's expression of his suffering under the ideology of the time."⁸³ Roussell further addressed this as "a movement toward artistic democracy".⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Huang Rui, "We Want Artistic Freedom," *Stars 79-80*, ed. Xianting Li and Huang Rui (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv76v.4>.

⁸⁰ Li Xianting and Celine Ho, "The Stars: Explorers of Chinese Contemporary Art," *Stars 79-80*, eds. Li Xianting and Huang Rui (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 20-25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv76v.3>.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Xianting Li, "The Stars: Explorers of Chinese Contemporary Arts," *Stars 79-80*, edited by Li Xianting and Huang Rui (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 22.

⁸⁴ Holly Roussell, "Outside and Inside the Institution: The Stars Exhibitions 1979-1980," Li Xianting and Huang Rui, eds., *Stars 79-80* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv76v.6>.



Fig. 12 Visitors at the First Stars Exhibition (1979)

The Stars exhibition was “presented in a little garden outside the walls of the National Art Museum of China, where artworks were hung on the fence on the east side of the museum.”⁸⁵ This was an unsanctioned exhibition, having been rejected by the museum. There were more than 150 works across various mediums, and controversial ideas including nudity, political satire, death and longing, as well as studies of Western and new Chinese painting techniques were on display.⁸⁶ Even the now well known artist Ai Weiwei presented his abstract work in watercolour at the exhibition. (Fig. 12)

Although the intention of the exhibition was to last one week (27 September to 3 October) to correspond with the official 'Fifth National Art Exhibition', it was prematurely closed by the authorities. At this time, a key organiser of the Stars exhibition by the name of Huang Rui (黄锐, b.1952, Chinese artist and social activist) wrote a message on a banner, “We want political democracy! We want artistic freedom!”⁸⁷ Supported by Jiang Feng and Liu Xun (刘迅, 1923-2007, former chairman of the Beijing Artists’ Association) the Stars

⁸⁵ Xianting Li, *The Stars: Explorers of Chinese Contemporary Arts*, Xianting Li and Huang Rui, eds. *Stars 79–80*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019.

⁸⁶ Holly Roussel “*Outside and Inside the Institution: The Stars Exhibitions 1979-1980.*” Li Xianting and Huang Rui, eds., *Stars 79–80* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 34, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv76v.6>.

⁸⁷ Huang Rui, “We Want Artistic Freedom”, Xianting Li and Huang Rui, eds, *Stars 79–80* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv76v.4>.

exhibition was allowed to reopen and officially exhibit in Beihai Park from November 23rd to December 2nd, 1979. This reopening of the Stars exhibition started off with a manifesto in which personal artistic expressions, responsibilities in time, and love and passion for the “Ground beneath our feet” were among the core messages.

The world leaves unlimited possibilities for explorers. We have used our own eyes to know the world, and our own brushes and awls to participate in it. Our paintings contain all sorts of expressions, and these expressions speak to our own individual ideals.⁸⁸

Supported by Jiang Feng, the Stars Painters Association would be formally registered under the Beijing Art Association, and the second Stars Exhibition was held inside the walls of the National Art Museum from August 24th to September 14th, 1980. This was the same museum from whose grounds they had been forcibly removed barely one year prior.

The second Stars exhibition attracted a great deal of attention from the masses and showed young people new possibilities in mediums and styles other than oil painting. However, it was to carry on with the same spirit of expression and defiance, and stated in the preface: “Art is the creation and expression of life, and a resistance to death. Art makes the moments in life eternal. Thus, we feel the weight of the paint brush and chisel in our hands - we have a mission”.⁸⁹

In 1985, a successor to the Stars exhibition emerged, the "85 New Wave" (85 新潮). This new movement signified the beginning of experimental and conceptual practice in China. In November of 2007 the influential New Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art was launched in Beijing with an exhibition which surveyed the 85 New Wave movement. The title of this exhibition defined the movement as the “Birth of Chinese Contemporary Art”.⁹⁰

Considering that the influence of international art in China continues to grow and 40 years have passed since the Stars Art Exhibitions and the 85 New Wave movement, the striking fact remains that realism is still very much the mainstream in Chinese art education. More importantly the ‘official’ dogma continues to be that of the traditionalists and

⁸⁸ Huang Rui, “Preface to the Stars Art Exhibition”. Huang Rui and Li Xianting, eds., *Stars 79–80* (The Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2019), 250–51, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvzpv76v.34>.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ '85 New Wave: The Birth of Chinese Contemporary Art, UCCA Beijing, 2007.11.5 - 2008.2.17, Dawe Fei, and Zhuan Huang. *'85 New Wave: The Birth of Chinese Contemporary Art*. Shanghai: Century Publishing Group, 2007.

Foundation. Furthermore, art focused on realism and propaganda is by far the most represented at national exhibitions and among official artists associations. One's record of participation in art exhibitions such as the National Art Exhibition or National Youth Art Exhibition represents a stamp of meritocratic approval. It is crucial for new teachers in universities to have such a record of participation in order to obtain their academic titles. Furthermore, a position or title in the official artists association is proof of the artist's merit for many collectors and institutions. Exhibiting at an international art fair is, however, excluded from this evaluative system. Thus, the system will continue to produce (indeed, is intentionally designed to produce) art and artists focused on *foundation* and realism.

However, there is a new generation of overseas art students coming home to work, as well as a number of artists who have continued to produce contemporary art independent of the official channels in China. It is this group who have kept the legacy of the Stars and the 85 Wave alive, and with them Westernised art has had more and more of an impact in China. Shanghai has many annual international art events, such as the Art021 Shanghai Contemporary Art Fair and West Bund Art & Design Fair, attracting a wide range of attention and many internationally established galleries. Private museums and contemporary commercial galleries started to present artists with their individual views of the world.

Parallel to this is the more 'official' channel, where artists compete for the selection in the major national exhibitions held by the China Artists Association, such as the *National Exhibition of Fine Arts*, *National Youth Art Exhibition*, etc. Being selected in these exhibitions is considered by many as great honour. It is also the basic requirement for joining the China Artists Association a member. However, these exhibitions tend to have a specific preference in the subject matter and aesthetic of the realism, and are for propaganda purposes. (Fig. 13) For example, the official release describes the selected works in the 13th National Art Exhibition as:

Represented firm confidence and position in the Chinese culture, persisting in creative transformation and development, **based** on the new time and reality, endeavor in telling Chinese stories, sufficiently showing Chinese characteristic, Chinese style, and Chinese manner. These works carry the majestic strength of this time when the nation is rising.⁹¹

⁹¹ Translated by the author from the National Fine Art Exhibition official website, released on 20.Dec.2019, accessed on 24.Mar.2023: 这些作品体现了坚定的文化自信和中华文化立场, 坚持创造性转化、创新性发展, 立足新时代中国现实, 努力讲好中国故事, 充分展示中国特色、中国风格、中国气派。这些作品承载了这个时代民族崛起所爆发出的磅礴之力。

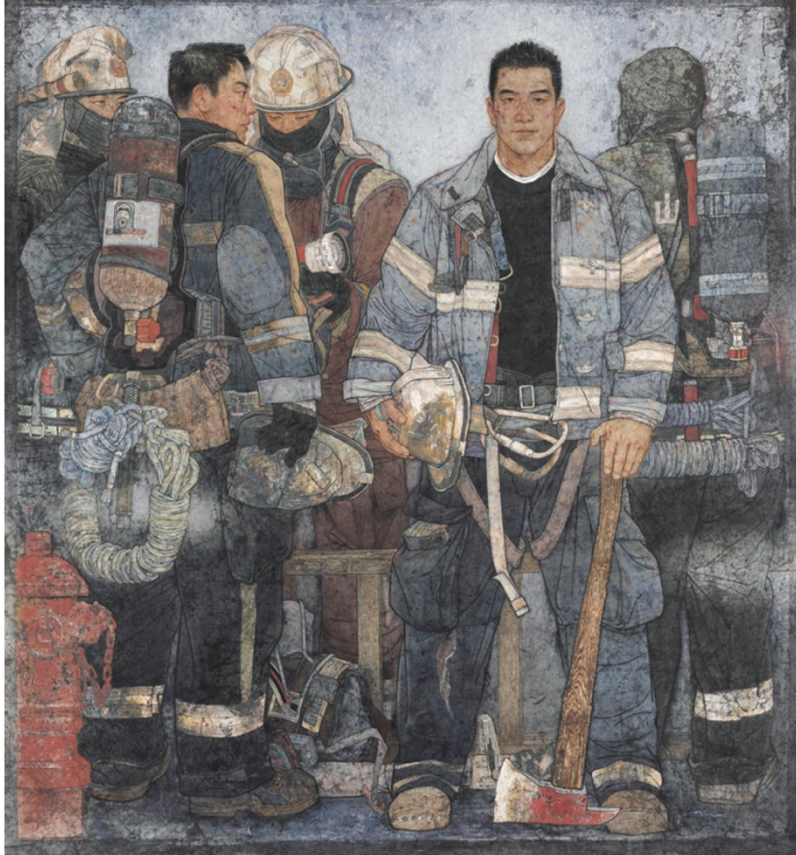


Fig. 13 Yuwang Li 李玉旺 *Mission* 《使命》 traditional Chinese ink painting 中国画, One of the Winner of the the 13th National Art Exhibition

Here we can see two independent and distinct art systems co-inhabiting China. The two systems of evaluation and philosophy are almost entirely exclusive of each other; an artwork considered good in one system is most likely passed over in the other, a highly regarded artist from one system excluded in the other. The teachings of *foundation* are seemingly irrelevant in the more Westernised contemporary art world, and the concept of individual perception does not add to one's merit in the official mainstream.

CEMAI as a tool of understanding

As Houghton notes, apprenticeship has not been thrown out completely. He claims, “All of the six curricula jostle for a place in contemporary art education”⁹². Investigating art pedagogy from another perspective, Daichendt happens upon some of the same conclusions as Houghton: “Separate but related to this history of art education is the division between liberal arts education and professional education experiences (education in the guild or art academy)”⁹³. It seems that both Daichendt and Houghton agree that there are multiple schools of thought in contemporary art education, with the “Professional” as a distinct pedagogical category. However, Daichendt has taken it one step further, specifically singling out the “Professional” in order to contrast it with the “Liberal”.

According to Daichendt, liberal art education and professional art education can be seen as counterparts, with the former representing the “love of learning and knowledge for its own sake regardless of its connection outside the university”⁹⁴ and the latter representing craft-based education. The goals of professional art education, including technique and craftsmanship, can appear to be utilitarian, vocational, or old-fashioned. Furthermore, they do not fit well in the context of a university. They may be seen to fit better into craft guilds or family workshops.⁹⁵ Further, As Sir E.H. Gombrich said in his widely disseminated and popular book *The Story of Art*, “when people talk about ‘modern art’, they usually think of a type of art which has completely broken with the traditions of the past and tried to do things that no artist would have dreamed of before.”⁹⁶ There seemed to me to be some unresolved tension here.

For a long time, my continuing participation in these two very different systems was the very definition of what it meant to live a contradictory life, and attempting to exist in both at the same time led to irreconcilable issues which tied my hands when painting. As I made more and more of an effort to fit into each system, I was unable to fully surrender to either. I had been taught by the Chinese system to work to a standard - even if this standard is set by history and not by me. In the UK, immersed in a different language and context of art, I

⁹² Nicholas Houghton, “Six into One: The Contradictory Art School Curriculum and How It Came About.” *The international journal of art & design education* 35, no. 1 (2016): 109.

⁹³ G. James Daichendt, *Artist Scholar: Reflections on Writing and Research* (NBN International, 2011), 27.

⁹⁴ Daichendt quotes on L. Menand, *The Marketplace of ideas*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company. 2009).

⁹⁵ G. James Daichendt, *Artist Scholar: Reflections on Writing and Research* (NBN International, 2011), 27.

⁹⁶ E. H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1995), 557.

realised that those standards and rules were merely one option among many. I was always displeased with the strictness found in *foundation*, but at least something certain and safe was on offer. When I was freed from these standards it led to anxiety and existentialism. As I grew more and more familiar with these opposing ideas, the tension between the two grew until it could no longer be ignored. A critical juncture in my development as an artist had arisen: I could not give up any of what I had learned, as it was all valuable to me and deserved to be seen. But, I wanted to find my own way of painting which did not require me to present falsehoods on the canvas. There was truth to be found in each of these systems, and I continued to be artistically paralysed.

Both systems called to me as much as restrained me, and the only way I could direct myself was to realise an organic combination of the two different art languages, keeping the act of painting itself as the utmost priority. This approach opened me up to new unexplored territory and allowed me to go beyond art as just an image. In a distinctly artistic contextual framework, I was suddenly able to break all boundaries, real or imagined, and cast off the chains of history and society which had restrained me for my entire life. I recognised these two systems, and all the contradictions between them, could be thought of and contained in Houghton's and Daichendt's "Liberal" and "Professional". I saw these as two contradictory endpoints on an axis. I saw that I could find a, "zone that works," on this axis. I saw, through my struggle with this particular contradiction, that there were many other pairs of contradictions along which one could draw an axis. Upon further reflection, I began to appreciate this as an entirely new way of thinking about art. The Creative and Evaluative Model of Artistic Individuation, or CEMAI, was born.

In this chapter I have explored the two educational systems which I experienced in China and the UK. In China, art is taught with a focus on technical skills, realism, and obedience to authority. On the other hand, in the UK there is an emphasis on individual exploration and self-discovery. I have discussed the differences between these two systems and how they shape the art produced in each country. I have also introduced the concept of Liberal and Professional as a way to understand these differences, forming the first axis of CEMAI. Now that we are comfortable with my UK and China history, I can use that in the rest of this paper and move more seamlessly between them in discussing other theories. Everything will start to become a web which can be woven into a picture of my art-making process itself.

Examining the first personalised axis on CEMAI, there are two polarities with one standing for the infinitely liberal and the other infinitely professional. With both technical skill and a liberal mind, one would have a very much elongated axis. This leads to the next question: how could I know which space on this axis was right for me? How does one mark down a zone that feels right and true to oneself? What does finding the middle zone and the final pattern on a CEMAI axis (and later, the intersection of axes) mean? Finally, how does the pattern change through the development of *individuation*?

Chapter II - Child / Adult, the second axis of CEMAI

A life directed to an aim is generally better, richer, and healthier than an aimless one.

- Carl Jung⁹⁷

My discovery of Carl Jung

During my research I found there are some deep parallels that run through my painting practice and Jungian psychotherapy. Some crucial terms in the Jungian framework, such as *self* and *individuation*, are helpful for understanding what I intuitively call my goal of “figuring things out” within a painting practice. In this research led by painting practice I use the concept of individuation to refer to a painter’s personal development and the process of a painter discovering themselves and reconciling contradictory psychic forces. At the CEMAI diagram level, this corresponds with the Child/Adult axis. Through this axis of individuation, one can explore different areas within each set of polarities and find the artistic principles that best suit them.

I have always felt painting reflects the self, with truthful representations of the self contained in living brushstrokes helping to ease tensions and calm the mind. For most of my life I relied on my gut to achieve this, but while this was successful some of the time it just as often left me painting works I was unhappy with and which did not represent the true self. I often wondered why so many of my paintings didn’t work, or if there was something fundamentally wrong with my approach. Was there a better way to fill my paintings with life - paintings which reflected my true self.

I began to think about that gut feeling, and how to define it. I thought that if a work was representative of my true self, then it should feel right and uncontradictory. If it felt right and uncontradictory, I could interpret this as meaning it felt natural. If it felt natural, then almost by definition I was following a gut feeling. This was something, but it did not really

⁹⁷ Carl Gustav Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 8: Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), par. 792.

get me any closer to an understanding of what I was doing. I had no idea if following my gut was the right way to go or if it might just end up causing me trouble.

I had very complex feelings towards some of the first experiments I painted near the end of my undergraduate years. (Fig. 14, Fig. 15, Fig. 16) However, I did not dare move too far from what I was familiar with. Was this acceptable? Did it seem amateur? Was this good or even right? These questions flashed in my mind with every brushstroke. Until this point I had only been doing what society expected of me, with little or no contradictions in my mind. At this stage the contradictions had not yet been differentiated. They existed, deep down, but only as a mixed, unidentifiable, struggling, restricted feeling that spread through my body when facing a painting. My work from this period reflects these feelings and were only barely serviceable for the purposes of my degree show and portfolio. There was something in me which kept screaming, “this is not right.”



Fig. 14 *Woman in glass* Acrylic on paper (2015)



Fig. 15 *Untitled* Acrylic on paper (2015)

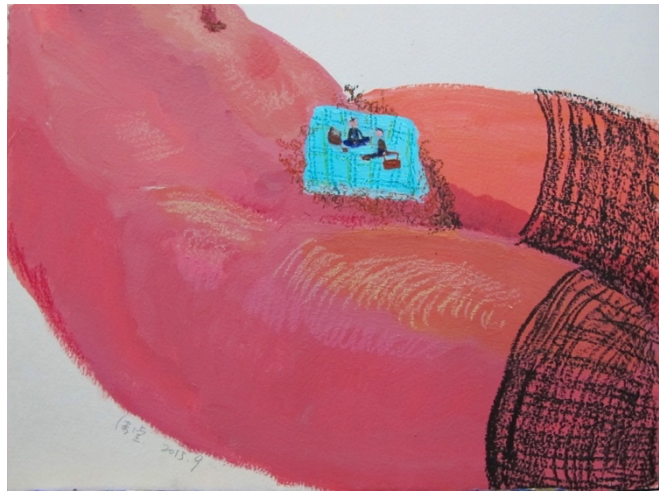


Fig. 16 *Picnic* Acrylic on paper (2015)

Then, in the summer of 2020, in what would become a huge influence on my work, I discovered Carl Jung. I became immersed in his work and devoured everything I could get my hands on. I took a particular interest in his autobiography, and found some striking parallels with my own life and thoughts. Learning about Jung's theories of psychological development caused my prior understanding of identity to completely shatter and a new insight to manifest. It was like a bomb going off in my head. What I had understood as a gut feeling was really just one part of my psyche, and there were other parts which needed to be uncovered. I had always had an insatiable urge to be sure of my direction and longed to work towards some identifiable goal, but was held back by my inability to make sense of what I felt like were completely different pieces of my psyche. I knew I needed to learn much more about Jung.

Through Jung's theory of individuation, I began to see that only by recognising the different and contradictory parts of my psyche could I find the meaning in much of my practice. Through my personal growth and individuation, I was set free and could direct the aim of my work. Later, by becoming comfortable with the theory of individuation, I was able to recast some of Jung's ideas into the CEMAI framework, with endpoints as Child/Adult becoming a primary - the axis of individuation. A key to remember as we work through this axis is that as one becomes more individuated, the middle area *grows larger*, as they are able to incorporate more aspects of their psyche into the self. This axis can then be explored and thus a chance may arise to dissect and understand the abstract feelings of the gut, and ultimately make use of them.

Jung as an Artist

Here I find it important to draw a distinction between Jung's scientific work, his art, and my own artistic work and research. Jung himself was a painter, but the reasons why he painted and how his work and painting interacted are very different from my own. Indeed, it could be said they are balanced opposites, with Jung's painting being a tool he used for his work, and Jungian psychology a tool I use for mine. Jung intensely rejected the idea of his painting or drawing being considered art. He was deeply worried that if these images were taken with artistic appreciation, it would challenge the validity of his research as well as his identity as a scientist.⁹⁸ He could not even accept when his inner voice, his "anima", called the images he made, art:

... a voice within me said, 'It is art.' Obviously what I was doing wasn't science. What then could it be but art? ...I said very emphatically to this voice that my fantasies had nothing to do with art, and I felt a great inner resistance. ...Then came the next assault, and again the same assertion: "That is art." This time I caught her and said, "No, it is not! On the contrary, it is nature."⁹⁹

Jung uses the images as first-hand materials for scientific research, through which he "took great care to try to understand every single image, every item of my psychic inventory, and to classify them scientifically...and...to realise them in actual life,...and to convert insight into them into an ethical obligation"¹⁰⁰ I, conversely, have taken Jung's ideas of individuation and used them to advance my research, all while letting the art itself lead the way in my paintings. I see progression in art as genuine Jungian individuation, whereas art in the Jungian psychotherapy context is used mainly as a tool to decode one's psyche.

⁹⁸ Carl. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, (New York:Random House,1961, 1989), 186.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 192

The Theory of Individuation and Self-Progression

Before we dive directly into the 2nd CEMAI axis, it is necessary to further investigate this idea of individuation. The term individuation, adopted by C.G. Jung, is a central concept in Jungian psychology. It can be thought of most simply as three stages. The first stage of individuation is the child stage, hiding away from society, which for me meant using art as a safe place for my own reasons. The next stage is the adult stage, obeying teachers and following techniques taught to me. The third stage is individuation, combining these elements together and letting the self manifest through the framework of what was felt as a young person and learned as an adult. In Jung's terms, the first stage of the child is, "consisting in merely recognising or 'knowing; is an anarchic or chaotic state". The second stage comes the "psychic birth," developing an ego-complex and, "*with it the conscious differentiation from the parent*". The third, "brings another step forward in consciousness, and consists in an awareness of the divided, or dualistic, state."¹⁰¹ In other words, the first stage is when psyche is born and just barely enough to function. The second stage, is starts to be conscious of its existence looking through the mirror of the outside world, in the third stage, the psyche tries to make balance that is truthful to the self and acceptable to the society.

According to Jung, to individuate is to recognize and bring together the disparate parts of the psyche, "I have found myself obliged to give the corresponding archetype the psychological name of the 'Self' —a term on the one hand definite enough to convey the essence of human wholeness and on the other hand indefinite enough to express the indescribable and indeterminable nature of this wholeness."¹⁰² As Murray Stein (contemporary Jungian psychotherapist, former President of the International Association for Analytical Psychology and former President of The International School of Analytical Psychology-Zurich) said, "It is perhaps his major psychological idea, a sort of backbone for the rest of the corpus."¹⁰³ Jung first introduced the concept of individuation in 1915 in his

¹⁰¹ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), paras. 749-759.

¹⁰² C.G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 12: Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 18.

¹⁰³ Murray Stein, "Individuation," *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006), 196.

anonymously published little book *Seven sermons to the Dead*. In his later works, *psychological types* and, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, he expanded on the concept. According to Jung, “Individuation means becoming an “individual,” and, insofar as “individuality” embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one's own self. We could therefore translate individuation as “coming to selfhood” or “self-realisation”.¹⁰⁴

The term “individuation” continues to be crucial in contemporary Jungian psychotherapy with Stein claiming individuation is, “indicating a person’s potential for full psychological development”.¹⁰⁵ Stein clarified the three main stages of individuation to better fit today’s practice: “First, the containment/nurturance i.e., the maternal, or in Erich Neumann’s¹⁰⁶ terminology the “matriarchal” stage, second, the adapting/adjusting (i.e., the paternal, or again in Neumann’s terminology, the patriarchal) stage, and the third, the centring/integrating (in Neumann’s terminology, the individual) stage”.¹⁰⁷ Stein’s reframing is critical in understanding progression to the last stage of individuation as involving an incorporation of all the previous stages of the psyche and finding centre.

To simplify further, Donald Winnicott (psychoanalyst and former President of the British Psychoanalytical Society) uses the terms, “true self,” and, “false self.” According to Winnicott: “The True Self is the theoretical position from which comes the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea. The spontaneous gesture is the True Self in action. Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real”.¹⁰⁸ By contrast, “False self”, can be seen as a defence for the true self, “a defence against that which is unthinkable, the exploitation of the True Self, which would result in its annihilation”.¹⁰⁹ The False Self hides “the True Self, which it does by compliance with environmental demands”.¹¹⁰ False Self

¹⁰⁴ C.G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 7: Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), 173.

¹⁰⁵ Murray Stein, “Individuation,” *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology : Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006), 197.

¹⁰⁶ Erich Neumann was a psychologist and student of Carl Jung’s. He was instrumental in further developing Jung’s life stages and integrating them with classic methodologies.

¹⁰⁷ Murray Stein, “Individuation,” *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology : Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006), 200.

¹⁰⁸ Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (1965; rpr. London: Karnac Books, 1990), pp.148

¹⁰⁹ Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (1965; rpr. London: Karnac Books, 1990).147

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

attempts on the part of the individual to solve the personal problem by the use of a fine intellect, however, "... a True Self feels real, the existence of a False Self results in a feeling unreal or a sense of futility."¹¹¹ This is not to say that the false self only has a negative impact and has to be banished. As a matter of fact, the false self protects our vulnerable True Self at all times and enables socially functional human beings. "The False Self, if successful in its function, hides the True Self, or else finds a way of enabling the True Self to start to live."¹¹²

We can look at this in relation to Jung's three stages of individuation. Jung used the term "true self" in a way that is related but independent from Winnicott, to denote spontaneous authentic experiences and a feeling of being alive with little to no contradiction.¹¹³ It is important to note that the time of transition between the three stages can vary from one to another and it is essential to know that these three stages cannot be discreetly looked at. Instead, as Stein suggests, the three stages are only indications of the emphasised, predominant attitude during the significant era of a person's life.¹¹⁴ In other words, individuals are constantly influenced by surrounding factors, such as social norms, culture, education, etc., and how one presents is constantly changing depending on current circumstances and the surrounding individuals.

Jung and Winnicott both hold that the true self is essential for one's well-being. The true self, or in the Jungian context, the Self, is the in the direction of individuation. I will now take a closer look at each of Jung's three stages of individuation in order to clarify the process of individuation.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 148.

¹¹² Donald W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment* (1965; rpr. London: Karnac Books, 1990), 148.

¹¹³ Salman Akhtar, *Good Feelings* (London: Karnac Books, 2009), 128.

¹¹⁴ Murray Stein, "Individuation," *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006), 197.

Stages of Individuation I - Containment/Nurturance

Containment/nurturance is the time when the individuation process has not yet begun and is largely contained in the family environment and the only truth known is what the parents depict. Little scepticism occurs and barely any contradictory psychic force stands in the way. Jung suggests that as children are wholly dependent on their parents, there are few problems in consciousness, as though the psyche has not yet been born but is, “still enclosed in the psychic atmosphere of its parents”.¹¹⁵ Following his research in ancient heroic mythologies, Neuman refers to this stage of containment/nurturance as a *matriarchal stage*, analogising the time when a hero is being bred by his mother and has not started his own journey. Neuman quotes Jung’s *Psychological Aspects of the Mother Archetype*:

Anything big and embracing which contains, surrounds, enwraps, shelters, preserves, and nourishes anything small belongs to the primordial matriarchal realm. This initial stage when ego consciousness is still on the infantile level is marked by the predominance of the maternal side of the Uroboros.¹¹⁶

Uroboros, or Ouroboros, is considered by Neuman “as the round ‘container’, ie., the maternal womb, but also as the union of masculine and feminine opposites, the World Parents joined in perpetual cohabitation”.¹¹⁷

This, in reflection of my practice journey, will be the stage when I was fully dedicated to techniques and *foundation* in art, without being exposed to any possible contradictory forces.

¹¹⁵ C. G. Jung, “Stage of life”, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 8: The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), paras. 749-759.

¹¹⁶ Erich Neumann, “The Uroboros”, *The Origins and History of Consciousness* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954), 14, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvx5wbkw.8>.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.13

Stages of Individuation II - Adapting/Adjusting

The second stage, named adapting/adjusting, is a stage when contradictions start to emerge. Jung used the term persona to describe an individual adapting to adult life as a functional and acceptable individual. Leaving the family containment, one starts to be influenced by a bigger system such as school or society, and has to become functional in the environment. This attempt at adaptation will inevitably cause anxiety and frustration. However, if it happens at the right time in one's life it can be of great benefit and lead to personal growth.

That is not to say that this stage is without conflict. Stein notes, "Jung believed that the ego develops through 'collisions with the environment', and Fordham on the other hand introduced that 'the ego develops through cycles of de-integration and re-integration'. Both notions feature the element of optimal frustration".¹¹⁸ This suggests also the significance of frustration and other hard feelings in personal growth. In this stage, we have to temporarily put aside our true self and, rather, try to be accepted as a functional member in society, fulfilling the will of the time, which often does not pace up with the voice from "the Self", that Jung viewed as "the centre of psyche... and the goal towards which the process of individuation strives".¹¹⁹ Jung referred to this social adaptation of the personality as "persona".

In the adapting stage, social pressure forces a split in a united psyche. These can be thought of as opposite pairs, with the one more valuable to collective interest strengthened, and the less constructive compressed. Some examples of these pairs are direct-thinking / dream-like thinking, persona (good person) / shadow (bad person), masculine / feminine, child / adult, rationality / intuition.

Adapting to society by putting on a functional persona and being accepted by the collective conscious is a heroic move. Becoming socially acceptable means suppressing unwanted aspects of the true self causing constant anxiety and frustration. However, as one grows and makes progress in wearing the persona of a functional adult, that persona merges

¹¹⁸ Murray Stein, "Individuation," *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology : Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006), 205

¹¹⁹ Warren Colman, "The Self," *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology : Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006), 153.

into the self with less discomfort. “The nearer we approach to the middle of life, and the better we have succeeded in entrenching ourselves in our personal attitudes and social positions, the more it appears as if we had discovered the right course and the right ideals and principles of behaviour”.¹²⁰ The persona will become more and more prominent as it is rewarded by success in society and personal achievement. As one feels more adept in wearing the persona which was developed initially for coping with difficult situations, the impact of suppressing the true self in service of the persona will become increasingly significant. Eventually, the persona will become hard to identify, merging into the self. This may then cause psychological problems as the true self, even largely restrained, still exists and seeks ways of being. Jung suggested this may happen in the subconscious, or what he called the “shadow”. “Consciousness constitutes the momentary process of adaptation, whereas the unconscious contains not only all the forgotten material of the individual’s own past, but all the inherited behaviour traces constituting the structure of the mind.”¹²¹ It is in the next stage Jung describes how to bring together the disparate parts of the psyche.

¹²⁰ C.G. Jung, "The Stages of Life," *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 8, Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche* (Princeton University Press, 2014), par. 772.

¹²¹ C. G. Jung, “The Transcendent Function”, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 8, Structure & Dynamics of the Psyche* (Princeton University Press, 2014), par.132.

Stages of Individuation III – Centring and Integrating the Self

The third stage of individuation is that of centring and integrating. In this stage one's goals shift from being a "responsible member of the community" and "self-sufficient" to becoming a "whole individual".¹²² In this stage one is able to see the suppressed part of their psyche and accept it in their own way. According to Murry Stein: "Entering the stage of centring and integrating means gradually abandoning the previous collective definition of identity and persona ... assuming an image of self emergence from within." In this stage any further adapting and fulfilling social expectations will impede the process of individuation. Progressing in this stage, one is faced with a choice: "As the light between these two psychological structures widens, an element of choice enters concerning what kind of person one is and will become. This new person is more unique and individual, less a social construction ."¹²³

Jung further described individuation as a coming to self hood or self realisation and a, "*unity of the personality*".¹²⁴ This may be thought of as finding the self in the centre of the psyche, consciousness and subconsciousness combined. Jung said, "The self is not only the centre, but also the whole circumference which embraces both conscious and unconscious; it is the centre of this totality, just as the ego is the centre of consciousness".¹²⁵ This process of inner reunion brings together the disparate pieces of the psyche, and one will adapt and find a middle ground in the psyche.

¹²² Murray Stein, "Individuation," *The Handbook of Jungian Psychology : Theory, Practice and Applications*, ed. Renos K. Papadopoulos (London: Routledge, 2006),(London: Routledge, 2006), 210

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ C. G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 6: Psychological Types*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), par. 789.

¹²⁵ C.G. Jung, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 12: Psychology and Alchemy* (Princeton University Press, 1968), par. 44.

My Path towards Individuation

My development as an artist is very much a classic story of Jungian Individuation. The stage of containment / nurturance depicts my early education in China. The craft-based practice was the only known path to becoming an artist, with an according system of evaluation fully structured. Although it was not by choice to subscribe to this system, it spared me from the confusion and struggles caused by contradictions. The dedication in perfecting the *foundation* and standing out in competition also gave me a meaningful purpose. Otherwise, surviving the everyday repetitive life drawing training for years would be unimaginable. The system, with clear values, standards, methods and goals was like a contained family environment that bred me from a blank canvas. I was almost growing without conscious awareness, merely following guidance given by the “established adults”.

My adapting / adjusting stage spans across parts of both my ‘professional’ education in China as well as my ‘liberal’ education in the UK. During the eight years of skills training I received in realism, I worked hard in learning the “right ideas and principles” in painting, and it perhaps became a persona I wore for a substantial period in art. I was proud of it as I was “winning”, and this learned persona served me in getting a position in my dream college. I painted technically correct paintings and chased a religious standard of what it meant to be a good artist. This persona wished to one day be good enough to paint vividly a grander view of multiple people, and have it recognised by the official art committee.

Similarly, during the first few years of my liberal education, I was terrified of being discovered as not interesting or intelligent. During this period I forced a wild assortment of concepts into my paintings. I tried to explain the different scales of figures I painted as different scales of a multiverse, therefore shaping my narrative on canvas as science fiction. I tried to connect my perspective to the female gaze, to show my work stemmed from my female identity. I intentionally tried to avoid my skills and rules I had learned in China, and pretended I had not learned those principles and had no standard for what art was good. But none of this felt right. Instead of liberation, it became a new restrictive force which tied my hands all over again.

Art in pursuit of realism or art in pursuit of conceptual expression were never the true reasons I had first pursued the career of an artist. My true self kept reminding me of the child

in me who initially only wished to express herself and depict her imagination through painting, as she found the visual medium safe and comforting. The technique she wanted to grasp was only a tool for figurative expression, and conceptual expression through art was something which never even occurred to her.

In a conversation in 2017, Neo Rauch, a German contemporary painter whose work influences my own, talked about his feelings of discomfort and loss when thinking of the modern shift in art. He said, "It (modernity) is basically inhuman; it reduces man to a flow-through particle, to an economically measurable functional element. ... (it) Devoid of warmth".¹²⁶ These words also echo Jung's accusation on modern collective culture merely valuing the "function" in a person.¹²⁷ We may see Rauch's paintings manifest themselves as a place of "comfort", balancing this imperfection of reality. He said, "Comfort in terms of an emotional value is, in fact, a concept that has been widely discredited in the wake of Modernism," and continued, "yet we all need relief for our minds, we all need zones where we can feel safe, feel comfortable, and of course, such zones must be furnished appropriately."¹²⁸

Rauch's paintings are not consistent logical narratives. They are more like junctions of multi-layer visual enigmas. Whenever viewers start to see a thread or a logical setting, he instantly breaks it with another interjection of space, as if he is contesting rationality through the image. For example, In *Hüter der Nacht* (Fig. 17), a man is lying in bed with his eyes closed. He seems unwell. A lady came in; she might be his caregiver. But why is she wearing gigantic, coloured claws? A door that appears behind them which opens into another space but does not close on this one. A man is standing in front of the frame of the door, apparently in both spaces, or neither. He appears to be cleaning something, but what is he cleaning? Papers on the floor or the yellow house? A tree grows out of the house, or shall we say the tree is stuck in the house? It splits the image in two and guides us to the right side, where it is another world. None of this makes sense logically or connects as a coherent narrative.

¹²⁶ Neo Rauch, "Just as you cannot cultivate dandelions," in conversation with Ralph Keuning, July 18, 2017, *Neo Rauch: Dromos Painting 1993-2017*, exh. cat. (Zwolle: Museum de Fundatie, 2018), 118.

¹²⁷ Jung, *Psychological Types*, 74.

¹²⁸ Neo Rauch, "Just as you cannot cultivate dandelions," in conversation with Ralph Keuning, July 18, 2017, *Neo Rauch: Dromos Painting 1993-2017*, exh. cat. (Zwolle: Museum de Fundatie, 2018), 117.

However, visually, these surprising figures flow smoothly from one side to the other. It is an alternative space for the inexplicable where we can rest in comfort.



Fig. 17 *Hüter der Nacht (keeper of the night)* Neo Rauch (2014)

Rauch's work may be seen as an example that painting serves many artists (including myself) as a safe zone, and in developing a piece of art an artist may to some extent be able to skip the second stage of individuation. A painting that does not need to be acceptable to any authority or system can manifest itself directly and the artist can integrate their psyche through this practice. This does not mean that an artist living on the canvas can escape from social

expectations and necessary adjustments entirely, just that the psychological tension caused by social adjusting/adapting can be explored and balanced in an unharmed way in art.

Connecting to Jung and Individuation

At 86 years of age, Jung would write his autobiography. In the beginning of the book he told a secret story from his childhood through which a thread can be drawn to his later research. As a primary school pupil Jung had a yellow varnished pencil case with a lock and a custom ruler. He carved a 2 inches long manikin on the ruler and equipped it with a frock coat, top hat, and shiny black boots. "I coloured him black with ink, sawed him off the ruler, and put him in the pencil case where I made him a little bed...All this was a great secret. Secretly I took the case to the forbidden attic at the top of the house and hid it with great satisfaction...---- for no one could ever see it! ... I felt safe, and the tormenting sense of being at odds with myself was gone."¹²⁹ Jung would later describe the secrecy of his little manikin as a shelter in his mind for "all difficult situations".¹³⁰ Jung's openness towards his feelings validates the peculiar childhood behaviour, and emphasises the significance in recognising, understanding, accepting the past. I had a similar peculiar behaviour when I was a child.

When I was growing up, Chinese herbal medicines were sold in small packages sealed with a thin layer of wax. This wax was, for a time, a primary creative material for when I called myself a, "life-making god (造物主)." I would collect the wax by scratching it off the package, soften it with the warmth of my hand, and carefully craft the amorphous blob into swans of various sizes. I would even mix the wax with ink to give it different colours signifying different species. The most crucial step, however, was giving them eyes. Although it only meant to poke a small hole with the tip of my pencil, it instantly brought them to life and gave each its own particular character. Till this day, I still am extremely cautious in painting the eyes or the gaze, as a few simple strokes one way or the other can give entirely different life to a character.

I stored the swans in a small wooden container always placed on the bookshelves, and no one ever bothered to open it. In this box was a regime of swans, and I was the ruler. Every day when I got back from school, I snuck into my swan nation where no one else would know and created new lives and imagined an alternative universe. Like Jung's pencil case, it

¹²⁹ C.G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, revised edition, Vintage Books Edition, New York, 1989, 21.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

became a secure place where my mind would go to in difficult times, a place where I had full control.

I don't intend to explain or evaluate the swan regime I created and ruled, like the art education I went through, I rather choose to observe and acknowledge it. Jung felt similarly of his childhood manikin:

The meaning of these actions, or how I might explain them, never worried me. I contented myself with the feeling of newly won security, and was satisfied to possess something that no one knew and no one could get at. ...Why that was so I did not ask myself. It simply was so.¹³¹

In a way, Jung had never ceased this eccentricity even as he moved into the adult stage. He integrated active imagination, drawing, and creative writing into his profession as a psychologist. I have perhaps been continuing these childhood secrecies as well, only to transfer them onto the canvas. By reflecting on my "regime of swans", I began to understand my obsession in painting small people and worlds which co-existed yet were on distinctly different scales. Painting may still be a source of safety for me, something that I can fully control. Within this safe and controllable environment, I can set free the inner child who neither wants to prioritise the grander good over her own feeling, nor learn to suffer in poor conditions like great adults.

Suffering in order to be a good adult is something that was emphasised to me as I was growing up, and it is something that I began to challenge upon learning more about Jung. I also began to recognise that the silly activities I was embarrassed about as a child and tried to ignore as an adult were indeed crucial fragments of the true self. These are two contradictions which each needed to be reconciled with each other. I could investigate this through painting, as the process of balancing ideas on canvas is also a visual portrayal of my inner battle, in which, as a living person I was trying to find balance between these contradictions, a place for psychic harmony.

A person advanced in the process of individuation could reflect on a more peaceful, harmonious psychological state, similar to that pursued in Chinese Daoism. To quote Jung again, "the "superordinate personality" such as a king, hero, prophet, saviour ...or in the form

¹³¹ Ibid., p.22

of a totality symbol, such as the circle, square or cross (or mandala) ... When it represents a *complexio oppositorum*, a union of opposites, it can also appear as a united duality, in the form, for instance, of Dao as the interplay of yang and yin..."¹³² Correspondingly, if a painting shows a functional reunion of some conflicting features to the artists themselves, it will be not only a satisfying painting experience or a piece of work, but also a fruitful journey in psychological integration, and a new phase in individuation.

¹³² C. G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, par. 790

CEMAI Middle Zone and Individuation

With the guidance of Jung, I started to rethink my earlier work and how I would collect fragments from the world that interested me. It was like finding missing puzzle pieces crafted from my true self, and putting them back together through new paintings was an important step of individuation. However, while the fact that the more tolerant system of education in the UK allows my inner voice to be explored on the canvas, I continued to imagine being judged by previous tutors, and my prior experience did not cease to influence me. When I am collecting pieces from life and drawing or painting from them, I cannot help but wonder: “Is this method in practice derived from the ‘real me’ or the persona I got used to wearing?” Are the pieces I collect driven by my interest or my incapability to develop an alternative method that is not observation-driven? This girl I saw in the street, why does she stay in my memories? Am I feeling a connection to her, or is it just an old habit inherited from my previous training in observing people? Now that I have new tools of exploration such as the axes of child /adult or observation / imagination, to what extent do I cling to the persona used to cope with the adult world and to what extent can I or should I take it off?

To answer these questions, we first need to take a deeper dive into the CEMAI graph, the centre zone on each axis, and the joined pattern in the end. The centre of CEMAI, a point where all the axes meet and all the contradictions come to a perfect mid-point, may be analogous to a balanced status that is told in ancient literature. In the beginning of *Doctrine of the Mean*, or Chung Yong (中庸), one of the one of the Four Books of classical Chinese philosophy and a central doctrine of Confucianism, the author explained:

Being without inclination to either side is called Chung; admitting of no change is called YUNG; By CHUNG is denoted the correct course to be pursued by all under heaven; by YUNG is denoted the fixed principle regulating all under heaven.¹³³

In Greek mythology, Daidalo the builder of a magnificent labyrinth, was arrested and imprisoned in the labyrinth he made with his son Ikaros. Ikaros and his father famously

¹³³ Confucius., and James Legge. Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean. Newburyport: Dover Publications, 2013, pp.383

attempted escape by flying off with wings made of wax and feathers. Before setting off, Daidalo warned his son, “not to soar too high, for the wax would then be melted by the sun, nor to descend too low, for the wings would then be damaged by moisture from the sea.”¹³⁴ Ikaros did not listen to his father, soaring higher and higher until his wings melted and he plunged to his death in the sea. An area of the Eastern Aegean was known as the Ikarian Sea ever afterwards.¹³⁵

In following the wisdom of the ancients, we may be wise to avoid extremes (eg. on the axis of professional/liberal, being skewed too far towards the professional may hint of a lack of imaginative creativity; conversely, too liberal may suggest a lack of skill or depth), or risk losing the chance to find our “true self”. In most cases, the centre is an imaginary status, as we each are intricately unique individuals moulded by distinct personal histories with distinct qualities and longing for diverse things. These differences, portrayed in painting, may be shown as differences in technique, palette, subject matter, methodology, personal style, and aesthetics. Even though the centrepiece of CEMAI represents a balanced state similar to the above examples, I believe that achieving perfect balance is misguided and instead we should strive to incorporate these differences, accepting and embracing all aspects for what they are.

This path of acceptance is offered by Jungian Individuation. Individuation requires us to call on the unknown self, the frowned-upon, the unspeakable, the shadows that are constantly suppressed - and it cannot progress without first acknowledging these parts of the psyche before integration. This process can be very difficult, but fortunately painting spares us from sacrificing our life and allows us to have these wild discovery journeys safely. Once accepting these parts of the self, I was able to make choices more consciously and confidently express myself through artwork without worrying about other people’s judgement. I no longer felt as confused or frustrated when trying out new things. I began to intentionally explore different areas within each polarity such as mixing traditional techniques with contemporary ones, or combining realism with abstraction etc . This exploration opened the path towards finding the true self. As Paula Rego (1935-2022, Portuguese-British Artist) said,

¹³⁴ Hard, Robin., H. J. Rose, and H. J. (Herbert Jennings) Rose. *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology : Based on H.J. Rose’s “Handbook of Greek Mythology”* / Robin Hard. London ;: Routledge, 2004,pp.348

¹³⁵ Ibid.

“ The picture allows you to feel all sort of forbidden things...you get at things that you didn’t realise, and you are allowed to do even outrageous things.”¹³⁶

While moments of true inner integration and individuation are quite rare in practice (as they should be), they become valuable milestones and the path to them is well worth investigating. One such moment for me resulted in the first work I was truly satisfied with, *Veg Out Like Broccoli* (see pamphlet, pp. 26-31). Although I was unable to articulate the reason, the moment I finished I knew it was a crucial painting for me. The full meaning did not reveal itself until two years later. When I went back and analysed it through CEMAI, I saw that in this painting I made a reunion of three counterparts that had entangled me for a long time, observation/imagination, abstract/figurative, child/adult.

Thus, the endpoints of child/adult are another fundamental axis on most of my CEMAI diagrams. Here I am speaking of my personal definition based on lived experience of the child and adult. The Jungian concept of “Child” contains qualities unwanted by society, especially in a more restrained one that values the collective good over the individual. Qualities labelled as childish or immature carry negative connotations, and might include being overly emotional, sensitive, oblivious, disobedient, unwilling to sacrifice or follow traditions. In contrast, good adults should suppress their childish qualities, and appear to be wise, reasonable, knowledgeable, calm and willing to give their whole heart and life to the people and the social good. It is through recognising and accepting these disparate and often contradictory parts of the psyche and finding a middle zone that individuation is achieved. For me this meant finding a middle zone between child and adult, as well as liberal and professional. As I moved forward in my practice and research, the complex ways in which these axes intersect became more interesting and I was able to explore ideas and concepts which I would have never thought to. My path of individuation led to the open exploration of additional contradictions, and I was now able to incorporate these ideas more freely. One such example was the tension between words and images. This tension had a significant impact on my work and led directly to another axis of CEMAI which I will discuss further in the next chapter.

¹³⁶ Paula Rego: *Giving Fear a Face*, HENI Talks, <https://heni.com/talks/paula-rego-giving-fear-a-face>, accessed 27th.Feb.2023

Chapter III - Word/Image, the Third Axis of CEMAI

In this chapter, I will investigate the previously established CEMAI axes of professional/liberal and child/adult, through a focus on the third axis of word/image without spending too much additional time on how the axes are built and polarities selected. For the professional/liberal axis, I made an introspective investigation into Chinese and UK art education systems and the impact each of these systems has had on me and my art. Through this investigation, I was able to establish the concept of contradictory pairs of points and how that might influence me. Then, by incorporating analytical psychology and especially the Jungian idea of individuation, I discovered the axis of child/adult and determined the importance of finding a midpoint, a “zone that works”. This zone is always between the two extremes, and it is important to keep in mind that it is not simply a point in the middle, but a range incorporating ideas from both polarities and can certainly be biased (but not necessarily so) towards one side or the other. When extracting the contradictions that lie within the polarities of child/adult and professional/conceptual, I began to think of realise in order to move forward I would need to understand how the process of finding a middle zone (i.e. individuating) could be visualised through painting, and, if it can ever be achieved, does a balanced state look like in a work of art? These are key questions which the CEMAI system can help answer.

I have always had a vague, visual answer about how to find the middle zone, but was unable to come to a concrete conclusion through painting alone. I thought it could be helpful to approach the problem from another angle, but articulating them as clear ideas in language is another matter. Describing my work clearly in language was a struggle that went on for years anytime I was asked to describe it. How can I speak of something which is meant to be communicated visually? Is not the answer right there for all to see?

My experience with the Naxi

In the summer of 2020, I went on a short trip to investigate the Naxi culture of Lijiang, located in Yunnan of Southwest China. This region is just to the North of Laos and Vietnam and East of Myanmar, and is as far West you can go in China before encountering the great Tibetan plateau. It is one of most diverse regions in China, due to the number of languages spoken, different species of flora and fauna, ethnicities in the area, and in many other beautiful and intriguing ways. Upon my arrival, I was struck by the incredibly rich and ancient Naxi culture. I immediately knew there was some key which the Naxi held which could unlock my own work and help to lay bare complex CEIMAI polarities. I was desperately struggling with disparate polarities which I had been unable to reconcile and it was clear to me the answer lay in the Naxi culture.

Following this first short visit, I conducted a research trip to the Lijiang Museum and the Dongba Culture Museum in December, 2021, when I had the chance to talk and learn from both the Naxi people and museum scholars. I applied for a research trip to the Lijiang museum and was granted access. I spent a month in Lijiang learning about the Naxi and their culture from many of the Naxi people.¹³⁷ I am very grateful to my Naxi friends for inviting me to dinner gatherings and allowing me to be included in their life. To this day I keep close contact with my dear Naxi friends. Although we have different cultural backgrounds, we share a similar modern life. They offer me a contemporary and native scope for me to see the culture from the inside – a view that can hardly be found on paper.

While I was amazed by the ancient Naxi culture, I also experienced a sense of familiarity. There was something very deep contained in their culture and way of thinking to which I was connecting. I began to think deeply about the animistic images and concepts which began finding their way into my work when I was a child and continue to play a central role in my mind and painting practice. But before explaining how interacting with my Naxi friends and how that influenced my painting practice, I should first give a proper introduction to the Naxi ethnic group and their culture.

¹³⁷ This research trip has been ethically approved by approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee, 9.Nov.2021.

The Naxi primarily inhabit Lijiang, Yunnan province, in southwest China. The origin of the Naxi culture can be dated back to the ancient Qiang (羌) people.¹³⁸ The Naxi have had multiple names given to them by outsiders throughout history, but they call themselves the Naq (纳). In 1954, the Yunnan ethnic investigation group gave the official name Naxi to the Naq, according to the will of a majority of the Naxi people.¹³⁹ In the Naxi culture, there is an important role of the “Dongba”¹⁴⁰ (东巴), meaning a wise person. A Dongba acts in a role comparable to that of a priest or shaman in a Naxi unit. Dongba(s) are the main inheritors of the Naxi culture, and are highly respected by the people. Becoming a Dongba is by no means an easy journey, as a prospective candidate must go through rigid training from a very young age, including music, painting, writing, medicine, Dongba rituals and religious training. A Dongba is expected to offer explanations and solutions to anything brought to their attention, whether it be for medical help, birth/death rituals, or simply a need to write a document in a traditional way.

During my research visit, I was introduced by Zhang Chunhe (张春和), film director and contemporary Dongba painter, to a senior Dongba who can speak mandarin, which is most often not the case. The Dongba (he prefers to remain anonymous) and Zhang have been friends for decades, with the Dongba participating in multiple films concerning the Naxi ethnic group Zhang directed. Dressed in simple modern clothes, one would not be surprised to see him in any major cities in China. The sun shone on his beautifully tanned face, and he smiled warmly at me while Zhang made the introduction. The lines on his face did not betray his advanced age, but instead portrayed inner tranquillity and optimism. He patiently answered my many questions concerning Naxi culture and Dongba practice. Pointing at the hand-written Dongba scriptures, the Dongba told me some fascinating stories about the ancient Naxi world such as the origins of the Shu (the Naxi gods of nature) and the epic war between the Shu and humans. In his expressive voice and infectious enthusiasm, these narratives were brought to life.

¹³⁸ Guoyu Fang, Zhiwu He, “The origin, migration and distribution of the Naxi ethnic group”方国瑜, 和志武, 纳西族的渊源、迁徙和分布 *Ethno-national Studies*, [J].民族研究, 1979:1.

¹³⁹ Gan Xuechun 甘雪春. *Chinese and Western scholar's study on the Naxi history*“中外学者与纳西族历史研究.” *Journal of Yunnan normal university* 云南师范大学学报(哲学社会科学版) July, Vol.33. No.4 (2001): 35-40.

¹⁴⁰ Dongba, from Chinese pinyin, and dō-mba according to Anthony Jackson

At the same time, however, I was also confused. His stories were markedly different from the versions given by the Lijiang Museum scholars or the ones written in books, which left me with many questions. Before meeting the Dongba, I had already heard a couple of these same important stories, but each version was a bit different. I felt it important to my research to find the one, true version of these ancient mythologies, and I would trouble everyone I met for details of the stories. It was only upon hearing them from the Dongba that I realised it is the very nature of living aural folk stories to have many different versions, just as there are different interpretations of an image.

A remarkable trait of this senior Dongba is that despite his rich knowledge and lifetime commitment to traditionalist Dongba learning, he keeps an open mind to modernity. “If someone comes to me and complains about a stomach ache, I will often tell them to go to the hospital instead of seeking traditional medical treatment which I could provide”, he said. “Modern science is useful. What I do is only to keep the tradition and culture.”¹⁴¹ However, it seems keeping the tradition has become increasingly challenging as younger generations are not interested in tradition. “My son is interested in computers, the internet and those modern things. He has not the faintest interest in what I do. My religious instruments are inherited from my father and grandfather, but now, I have no one to pass them down to,” the Dongba said. Although these heavy words came out calmly as if it was meant to be, I sensed the commiseration in his voice. I know it was by no means easy for him to make this act of acceptance. He continued: “It is ok. Young people have their own life.”¹⁴² I was struck by these words, hit by a feeling which left me speechless. This was a turbulent time in my life and research with all the contradictions which would eventually make up CEMAI filling my mind. Speaking with the Dongba, I felt that there was a way forward, and many of these pieces could start to be put together.

Within my practice, reconciliation of contradictions is done on canvas and made possible through symbols. I was beginning to understand my **painting as a form of living symbolically**. It is truly a form of life. Through painting, more axes reveal themselves and are reconciled when needed. In paintings, I can notice and explore contradictory polarities, bringing them onto canvas in a specific way. For example, to paint a cabbage is not simply to copy its representation, but instead is the exploration of the relation between me and the

¹⁴¹ Taking from the interview with the Dongba in Dec.2021

¹⁴² Ibid.

cabbage, which is far more than simply a spherical leafy vegetable on a shelf processed by modern food suppliers. A cabbage can symbolise the raw energy of life, wild freedom to blossom, and in comparison modern structure and the restriction of all these being reformed for humankind's interest. When I am painting, the cabbage breaks free from its stereotype and becomes a blossoming flower embracing the unknown, or an important person dressed up in the conversation of art. This might be said to explore the polarities of freedom/restriction, or assumed/appreciated. It could even mean inexplicably more to different people (see pamphlet C, Cabbages). Said another way, making a painting work is about finding the balanced zone on the CEMAI axes. This process is perhaps impossible to comprehend through words alone, however we may be able to understand more by borrowing a framework once again from Jung, this time concerning his writings on what he calls psychological alchemy.

Jungian Alchemy, Archetypes, and Symbols

It is natural for modern people to reject alchemy, but Jung considers alchemy real in a psychological sense and believes it to be a metaphorical expression of the psyche. According to August J. Cwik (clinical psychologist, hypnotherapist and Jungian analyst), “The alchemists were projecting unconscious psychic processes onto the transformation of matter in the laboratory”.¹⁴³ What was the concern of the alchemists was not to create common or vulgar gold, but “the higher man” or “the perfection of nature”.¹⁴⁴ In Jung’s own words: “Alchemy describes, not merely in general outline but often in the most astonishing detail, the same psychological phenomenology which can be observed in the analysis of unconscious processes”.¹⁴⁵ He further states, “...from its earliest days alchemy had a double face: on the one hand the practical chemical work in the laboratory, on the other a psychological process, in part consciously psychic, in part unconsciously projected and seen in the various transformations of matter”.¹⁴⁶ Through this understanding we can view painting as an alchemical process in finding reconciliations between contradictions. Painting is, on the one hand, a practical visual work in the studio, on the other, a psychological process, in part consciously psychic, in part unconsciously projected and seen in the various transformations of matter. Some may see this as an important part of the individuation process.

In his later career, Jung paid an unusual amount of attention to alchemy when most of his peers considered it a mere precursor of science. His interest in alchemy has been unceasingly challenged by scholars, even to the point of calling him insane: “If analytical psychology definitively left the discipline of psychoanalysis with Jung’s assertions of the collective unconscious, psychoanalysis believed Jung left the world of sanity when he turned to alchemy as an earlier road to the unconscious,” said Beverley Zabriskie, a Jungian

¹⁴³ August J. Cwik, *Alchemy*, Web Page: <https://iaap.org/alchemy-2/>

¹⁴⁴ Stanton Marlan, “Alchemy”, *the Handbook of Jungian Psychology: Theory, Practice and Applications*, Edited by Renos K. Papadopoulos. London: Routledge, 2006. pp.263

¹⁴⁵ C. G. Jung, *The psychology of the transference*. CW 16. Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press.1946, par.399

¹⁴⁶ C. G. Jung , *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW12, par. 380

analyst.¹⁴⁷ However, I give Jung more credit than this and believe there is important substance in the tremendous amount of work and writings he has on the subject.

In light of his psychological and clinical background, Jung also viewed alchemy as nonsensical and even “impossible to understand,” at least at first glance. However, once he discovered the sophistication in the work of alchemists, he accepted their thoughts and methods. For the next 30 years, alchemy would play a crucial role in his research, claiming that the alchemists were, “talking in symbols”.¹⁴⁸ Jung saw a relation between alchemy and analytical psychology, and He spent considerable time deciphering alchemical transformations into psychological symbols to learn what they might have meant to the alchemists. Through alchemical study, Jung found a historical foundation for his psychic contents, such as fantasy-images and the empirical materials, to “fall into places”. In his autobiography, he wrote: “The possibility of a comparison with alchemy and the uninterrupted intellectual chain back to Gnosticism, gave substance to my psychology”.¹⁴⁹

Just as there are those who dismiss Jung’s foray into alchemical analyses, there are researchers sympathetic to Jung’s understanding of alchemy. They have noted its significance as a complement of rationality and modern science, from which a therapeutic function can rise. Edward Edinger (1922-1998, medical psychiatrist and Jungian analyst) noted that alchemy provided a “treasury of analogies that ‘corporify’ or embody the objective psyche—analogy is a process of relationship, a making of connections by as if”.¹⁵⁰ And “Taking as a whole, alchemy provides a kind of anatomy of individuation”.¹⁵¹

Further exemplified by Cwik is William Blake’s notation: “all things acted on earth are seen in them; these are exemplary images that govern our understanding of the world;

¹⁴⁷ Beverley Zabriskie, *Exiles and orphans: Jung, Paracelsus, and the healing images of alchemy*. Quadrant, XXVI, 9-32. 1995, p9

¹⁴⁸ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, revised edition, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, pp204

¹⁴⁹ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, recorded and edited by Aniela Jaffé, translated from the German by Richard and Clara Winston, revised edition, Vintage Books, New York, 1989, pp205

¹⁵⁰ Edward Edinger, *Anatomy of the psyche: Alchemical symbolism in psychotherapy*. Chicago: Chicago:Open Court, 1985, p. 100

¹⁵¹ Edward Edinger, *Anatomy of the psyche: Alchemical symbolism in psychotherapy*. Chicago: Chicago:Open Court, 1985, p. 2

and, Michael Maier, the renowned alchemist, described them as ‘thought pictures to reach the intellect via the senses’”.^{152 153}

Hillman pointed out the importance of studying alchemy: “Besides the general theory of alchemical transformation and besides the particular parallels of alchemical imagery with the individuation process, it is alchemical language that may be most valuable for Jungian therapy. Alchemical language is a mode of therapy; it is therapeutic”.¹⁵⁴ This language of alchemy “allows mythopoetic imagination about the transformative process rather than nothing but rational thinking in clinical approach.”¹⁵⁵ To be more specific, the rich imagery and “language” in alchemy, in Jung’s framework, analogises the invisible psychic transformation. This is also to say that an element or procedure in alchemy can mirror a corresponding psychic component or movement. In this way the alchemical process is indeed a projection and symbolisation of the alchemist’s mind, instead of the mere lab work to transform other metals into gold or find the philosopher's stone.

According to Jung, the alchemists were ultimately leading a “symbolic life” through a material manifestation in which their psychical activities were portrayed. For example: “In alchemical writings the word "Mercurius" is used with a very wide range of meaning, to denote not only the chemical element mercury or quicksilver, Mercury (Hermes) the god, and Mercury the planet, but also—and primarily—the secret "transforming substance" which is at the same time the "spirit" dwelling in all living creatures”.¹⁵⁶ Therefore when mercury is added, certain psychological, spiritual transformation is expected. However, in Jung’s consideration of Alchemy, this has nothing to do with scientific laws or whether it actually will happen, the symbolisation is already enough.

The importance of symbols in Jungian psychology can further be understood by examining symbols as archetypes. Archetypes can be understood as the natural laws of the psyche, just as the material world is ordered according to the laws of physics. Archetypes cannot be seen, they manifest themselves in symbols as a law of the psyche. This is explained

¹⁵² August J. Cwik, *Alchemy*, the website of International Association for Analytical Psychology (IAAP), <https://iaap.org/alchemy-2/>

¹⁵³ Alexander Roob, *The Hermetic Museum: Alchemy and Mysticism*. (Köln: Taschen, 1999)

¹⁵⁴ James Hillman, *Alchemical Psychology*. New Orleans: Spring Publications, 2010, pp.10

¹⁵⁵ August J. Cwik, *Alchemy*, Web Page: <https://iaap.org/alchemy-2/>

¹⁵⁶ C. G. JUNG, *Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 12: Psychology and Alchemy*. Edited by GERHARD ADLER and R. F. C. HULL. Princeton University Press, 1968. pp.26, footnote 13. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hhrm3>.

by Marie-Louise von Franz, psychologist and a very close colleague of Jung. She explained, “In terms of Jung’s concept, every archetype is in its essence an unknown psychic factor, therefore there is no possibility of translating its content into intellectual terms. The best we can do is to circumscribe it on the basis of our own psychological experience and form comparative studies, bringing up into light, as it were, the whole net of associations in which the archetypal images are enmeshed”.¹⁵⁷ For example:

All babies are archetypally predisposed to experience a mother, but the individual woman who humanises this potential is not the archetype. The Mother archetype is a transpersonal principle found in all mythologies and religious traditions. She is given local names and colouring, but regardless of her name, there is always and everywhere a Great Mother, a Queen of Heaven, or a great Goddess who represents the feminine aspect of the divine.¹⁵⁸

Strictly differentiated from stereotypes, archetypes are not reified essence. They suggest potentials that need to be further completed with lived experience. Von Franz further claimed that emotional connections are a key factor in understanding archetypes, writing, “Only if it has an emotional and feeling value for an individual is it alive and meaningful. As Jung said, you can collect all the Great Mothers in the world and all the saints and everything else, and what you have gathered means absolutely nothing if you leave out the feeling of experience of the individual”.¹⁵⁹

A distinction may be drawn here between a symbol and an archetype. While symbols may be an attempt to display an aspect of an archetype in its true form, an archetype defies these attempts unless there is some connection to an individual’s emotion. Jung wrote: "A term or an image is symbolic if it means more than it describes or expresses. Every psychological expression is a symbol if we assume that it states or signifies something more and other than itself, which eludes our present knowledge".¹⁶⁰

All of this relates back to my own work in that I use many images not as literal depictions of the world, but as symbols in an exploration of concepts which have struck my

¹⁵⁷ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Revised Edition* (C. G. Jung Foundation Books Series) Kindle Edition

¹⁵⁸ Lionel Corett & Murry Stein, *Contemporary Jungian approaches to spiritually oriented psychotherapy*, In L. Sperry & E. P. Shafranske (Eds.), *Spiritually oriented psychotherapy* (pp. 51–73). 2005, American Psychological Association.

¹⁵⁹ Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Interpretation of Fairy Tales: Revised Edition* (C. G. Jung Foundation Books Series) Kindle Edition

¹⁶⁰ C. G. Jung, CW 6, par. 817.

mind. An relevant example is the use of food and vegetables in my work, such as the broccoli and cabbages. The broccoli in my painting is a symbol. It is the archetype of underestimated individuals in the world, manifested through the strokes of my brush. It is restricted potential. It is differing value-systems from my transcultural experience, laid bare. Although the concept of archetype is often used within the context of collective unconsciousness ¹⁶¹, here I choose to incorporate the concept mostly in representing my personalised psychic laws. For example, my emotions towards broccoli and willing use of broccoli as a symbol in painting can be the result of the archetypes I believe broccoli embodies.

It is highly possible that the archetypes behind symbols were what kept attracting me to represent them in painting. One archetype which came up again and again in my work is that of “restricted potential,” which symbolically manifested itself not only in broccoli, but also in girls’ figures (Fig. 21, Fig. 20, see also pamphlet: *Veg out like Broccoli*) It may further be interpreted by my feelings experienced as a result of being educated in both a conceptual and technical way, which led to this pair of contradictions as well as the axis of liberal and professional. This is also entangled with different values observed in my transcultural experiences. Painting broccoli to my level of satisfaction, and having it play an essential role in the painting, is to give some important archetypes the attention they deserve through the use of symbols. In *Veg out Like Broccoli* (see pamphlet pp 26-33), the seagull is a symbol analogising a personal archetype of an adult, and the girl hiding in the back represents a child. The enlarged broccoli, normally a mundane vegetable, represents that which is overlooked and the elongated aloe vera leaf with a tiny human on it is meant to show a sharp, piercing concept. With a painting properly done and the narrative discovered through archetypical symbolisation, reconciliation between different forces can finally be found. The next step must be to communicate such discoveries.

¹⁶¹ Jung believed, people are not born tabula-rasa, or a blank broad in psyche, like other genetic qualities inherited from our ancestors, we also bare some knowledge in the subconsciousness collectively



Fig. 21 sketch of a girl in street from memory pastel on paper 2017



Fig. 20 Brave New World inset details see pamphlet Brave New World no. 3

Between Words and Image

During my earlier education in China, I always thought that my paintings wanted to stay as enigmas. In the UK, however, an attempt at interpretation very often involves language at presentations or group crits. During these I had to speak and answer unexpected questions about my practice. This was extremely challenging for me, as my previous education left me like a blank canvas when trying to give painting any verbal framing. My efforts at descriptive language only served to sabotage an image. The contradiction between word and image began to reveal itself and thus another fight had begun.

I recall that the first week I was in London, every word I managed to squeeze out of my lips was a disaster. Even my voice seemed to change awkwardly when trying to speak English. It simply did not resonate with me. This began to cause great frustration and emotional detachment from verbal expression, typically a primary means of communication. While I endeavoured to untangle my tongue, twisted by this foreign language, I was conscious that the words had deeper meanings to others, and the richer dialogue I wished to have was being lost in my blunt attempts. Constantly tongue-tied in those days, my paintings began to replace language in compensating for my emotional loss. Even though I could not articulate myself verbally, painting managed to transform the information through another channel.

Although this feeling of disconnect gradually faded away when my language improved, the experience evoked the idea that there may be a gap in translating thoughts and expression in general. This friction may never become seamless. However, with experience, we may be able to choose a better medium for translating creations of the mind. As Lynette Yiadom-Boakye (b. 1977, British painter and writer) explained: "I write about the things I can't paint and paint the things I can't write about." Words and images cannot replace each other as they both shine in unique ways, and sometimes may even reject one another. Words cannot be fully transliterated into images while images, especially paintings, often refuse translation. Nevertheless, an organic combination of the two may compensate for some insufficiency in each form, and therefore achieve an integral reunion of the opposites.

I knew there must be some better way, and discovered the relationship between words and images is no novel matter. It is a crucial relationship to explore, especially as a visual artist in the modern world, and indeed the tension between words and images is intrinsic to contemporary art. W.J.T. Mitchell metaphorically writes, "the domains of word and image

are like two countries that speak different languages but that have a long history of mutual migration, cultural exchange, and other forms of intercourse".¹⁶² Mitchell also used the word "invasion" to describe the influence of literary theory on the image.¹⁶³

It seems that words and images can be integrated harmoniously, especially when it comes to painting and poetry. The reason behind this could be the similarity in painting and poetry in that they are not entirely productions of logic, which Jung believed is a "modern acquisition which earlier ages lacked".¹⁶⁴ Instead, they contain the inexplicable. Both Chinese and western views acknowledged the interchangeability between language (especially poetic usage in language) and painting. Simonides of Ceos called painting 'silent poetry,' and poetry 'speaking painting: "Painting is silent poetry, and poetry painting that speaks"¹⁶⁵ Often quoted is the observation in which Su Shi (苏轼) the influential and well-known poet in the 11th century Song Dynasty, epitomised his view of the convertibility of poetry and painting in the 8th century Tang Dynasty poet Wang Wei (王维) : "I savour Mojie's (another name for Wang Wei) paintings within poems. I view Mojie's poems within paintings."¹⁶⁶

During those days where I felt the most lost and confused, I used to go to weekly lectures held in a hall at the Royal College. While I can't recall the lecturer's name, it was at one of these talks I heard something I will never forget: "You should never talk **about** your work. You should talk **around** it." These simple words so elegantly distinguish the fine line between sabotaging an image and adding value to it. But how? How to talk around something without talking about it? I can still hear his voice echoing in my head.

CEMAI offers an approach to resolving this problem. One polarity is marked with archetypal stories, the other by archetypal symbols. The question then becomes, "how to find the middle zone?" I attempted to explore the tension between these polarities on canvas, but could only grasp at partial solutions in the metaphorical narrative which might accompany an

¹⁶² W.J.T. Mitchell, *Word and image, Critical Terms for Art History* / Edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff. 2nd ed. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003. pp53

¹⁶³ W.J.T. Mitchell, *Word and image, Critical Terms for Art History* / Edited by Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff. 2nd ed. Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003. pp52

¹⁶⁴ Jung, C. G. *Symbols of Transformation : An Analysis of the Prelude to a Case of Schizophrenia* / C.G. Jung ; Translated by R.F.C. Hall. 2nd Ed., with Corrections. ed. *Collected Works of C.G. Jung* ; 5. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967. Pp.16

¹⁶⁵ Plutarch's *Moralia, De gloria Atheniensium*

¹⁶⁶ Su Shi. *Dongpo Tiba Jiaozhu 东坡题跋校注* (Su Shi's Painting Inscriptions with Annotation), annotated by Tu Youxiang 屠友祥, (Shanghai: Shanghai Yuandong Chubanshe, 2011), 250.

image. I was unable to find a middle zone through this method and was simply left with each polarity in isolation. However, the Naxi have an alternative solution on offer.

Naxi Pictographic Writing

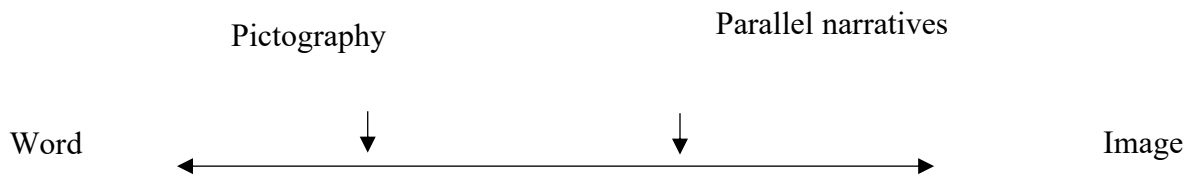


Fig. 22

The Naxi have a sophisticated pictographic written language which is still in use today. The pictographic characters can be read as words, yet still leave space for imagery (Fig. 22). Dongba have a collection of writings called the Dongba Jing (东巴经, Dongba religious scripture), which has become the primary material to understand the ancient culture, including divination, medicine, ritual dance, religion, mythology, etc. Zhang Chunhe metaphorically said to me, “all Dongba culture is kept through drawing, as the words themselves are drawing. The characters are created by years of observation of the world”.

There are roughly 1400 words which are commonly used in Naxi Dongba writing, and 4000 in total. Like Chinese characters, one Dongba character can also contain multiple meanings. As Dongba scriptures are written in a laconic and poetic language (also similar to ancient Chinese writing), one or a group of characters tend to include one or a few concepts or even a complete narrative. For example, below is one of the Dongba classic, Ji Shu (祭署, sacrifice for Shu), a piece of Dongba Scripture telling the story of the Naxi people with the god of nature Shu (Fig. 23).



Fig. 23 He liuhua, Mu chen

In translation:

If one don't know the origin of Shu and Dragon, one should not tell the story of Shu and Dragon. In the ancient time, when human beings have not had intercourse, the sky and earth have first had intercourse. Sky and earth changes, white clouds and black clouds appears, white clouds and black clouds change, white wind and black wind emerges. White wind and black wind change, white dew and black dew appears. White dew and black dew changes, the Meilida sea appear. In the Meilida see emerges a yellow egg. This yellow egg changes, a gigantic golden frog appears. One year, in the east of the holy mountain, in the egg basket of the white trumpet shell, a pair of white eggs of the trumpet shell colour was born.¹⁶⁷

Analogous to my CEMAI middle zone between 'word' and 'image', the Dongba scripture has a certain level of ambiguity that leaves room for diverse interpretations. Mu Lichun, an Naxi scholar, said, "if it were interpreted by a master Dongba, there would be more syllables and more sentences".¹⁶⁸ The broadness and vagueness of the Dongba script made the interpretation very open. The openness and freedom in the interpretation, instead of reading, largely depends on the interpreter — the knowledge and temperament of the Dongba themselves. It offers a great opportunity for them to improvise with artistic creativity, at the same time the possibility of passing on something inaccurate. The scriptures are only offering a main idea, improvisation plays a big role in the religious activities where Dongba tells the story to the vernal believers. By the altar, even with the same scripture, same story, a talented Dongba can give a vivid and fascinating performance, while the less talented one can hardly keep the audience awake. Sometimes, the improvisation triggers the interpreter himself in a way that never happened before, so that a great unforeseen art performance comes into being. However, Mu's statement here may only refer to a live rephrasing/telling/translating process, instead of a direct reading.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁷ Translated from He liuhua, Mu chen, He libao translated and annotated, Naxi classic of ecology with translation and annotation, Kunming, Yunnan, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2021, pp41:不知道署和龙的出处与来历, 就不要讲署和龙的故事。古时候, 起初人类没交合, 天和地先交合。天地作变化, 出现了白云和黑云, 白云和黑云作变化, 出现了白风和黑风, 白风和黑风作变化, 出现一滴白露黑露。白露黑露做变化, 出现美利达吉海, 美利达吉海里出现一个黄蛋。一个黄蛋作变化出现一只金色大蛙。有一年, 在神山东方, 白海螺色的蛋篮里, 生下一对螺色白蛋。

¹⁶⁸ Mu lichun, Yangzhonglu, 木丽春, 杨仲禄, *A story collection of Dongba Scripture* 东巴经故事集, Yunnan People's Publishing House 云南人民出版社, Jan. 2003, pp 2-4

¹⁶⁹ According to the Dongba scholar in Lijiang Museum, each Character has its agreed pronunciation therefore, it should be the same when readout.

In this sense, the interpretational performance of the Dongba is largely similar to interpreting a painting. Their ambiguity and openness empower images and make them irreplaceable by language, even in the form of a more refined symbolic system as the Naxi characters. To a large extent, Naxi pictographic characters maintain meaning even in their visual representativeness. They are more like a small, symbolic drawings of the original. As Anthony Jackson noted: “The Na-khi pictographic script consists of little stylized drawings of men, animals, trees, stones, etc.”¹⁷⁰ Compared to contemporary simplified Chinese writing that is more of a symbolic system, Naxi Dongba characters can naturally bridge between image and language. In some cases, one can guess the meaning without learning the language. For example (Fig. 24): This character above vividly illustrates the meaning of bird as a noun and fly as verb.






Fig. 24 n. bird; v. fly

Some contemporary Naxi Dongba painters are also inspired by the close relationship between Dongba characters and images, and therefore incorporate it in their paintings. One example can be the contemporary Dongba painter Zhao Youheng (赵有恒), who organically presents the ancient characters with artistic intelligence in his oil painting.

¹⁷⁰ Anthony Jackson, *Na-Khi Religion: An Analytical Appraisal of the Na-Khi Ritual Texts*, Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter Mouton, 2011, pp.60.



Fig. 25 The household of the ancient Naxi, 96x96cm, Zhao Youheng

In Zhao's work the household of the ancient Naxi (Fig. 25), he depicted a traditional Naxi family based on the original Naxi character  meaning family (Fig. 26). To break down the painting into components, we can see a series of visual indications to the Dongba characters, such as the fire between the two figures is a direct reference to the Dongba  character of fire (Fig. 27), the symbol on the right-wing of the roof portrays the Naxi character of the tree  (Fig. 28).

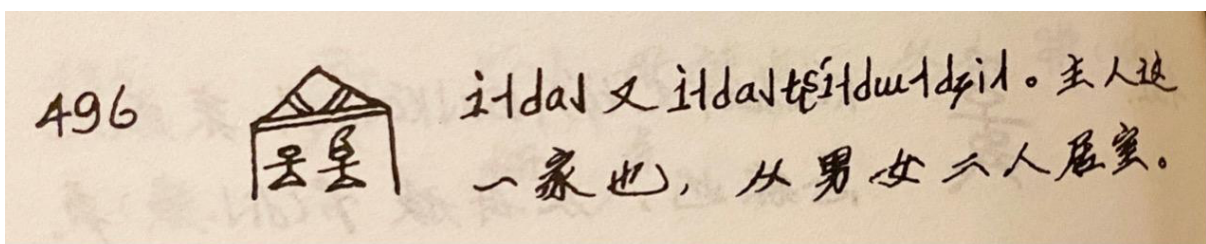


Fig. 26 Naxi to mandarin dictionary connotations of *Family*

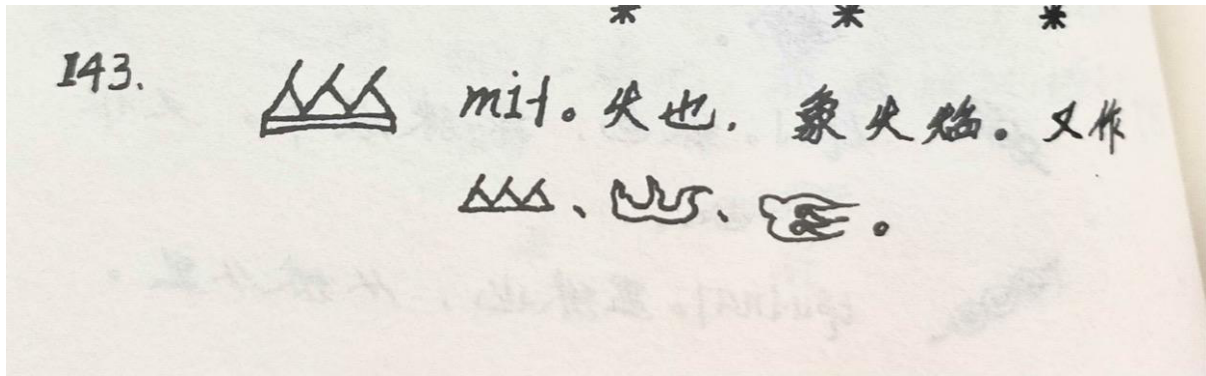


Fig. 27 Naxi to mandarin dictionary connotations of *Fire*

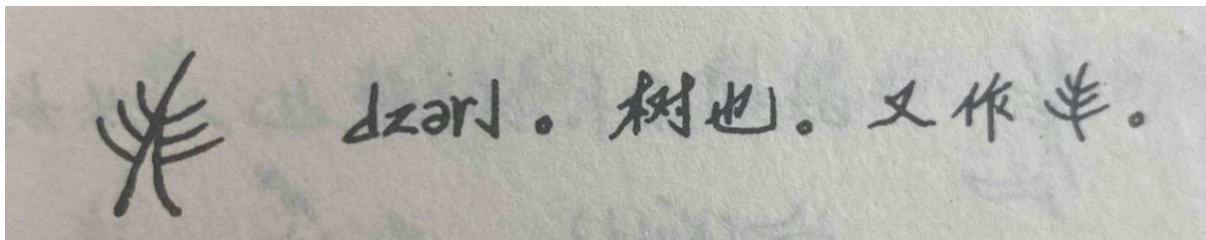


Fig. 28 Naxi to mandarin dictionary connotations of *Tree*

Zhao's experimental practice in manifesting the Naxi Dongba characters into painting brings the characters as signs of communication back into the aesthetic. However, to people who understand Naxi Dongba written language, the instruction in the characters is also evident. Zhang's visual interpretation of the Dongba characters injects into the aesthetic another dimension of the historical, the painting accordingly has become a legitimately readable optical phenomenon.

However, despite Zhao's unique strength, his practice mainly focuses on combining Dongba pictography into the art-making process, emphasising the aesthetical feature of characters. Alternatively, from the perspective of the language function, these mythical characters can also play an essential part in the interpretation process. Standing perfectly in between images and language, they can function as a seamless connection in bridging painting and concept, illustrating the principle of opening a parallel universe shared by artist and audience without disrupting the enigmatic nature of the visual.

As artists, we cannot always accompany our works and offer verbal interpretations. However, the responsibility is still on us to invite the viewer into a shared space for understanding. Instead of a verbal narration of my seagull story (pamphlet, p. 29), perhaps a title or subtitle in pictographic characters can cast the necessary spell. For example, what if the story about the seagull can be replaced by visual suggestion? Inspired by the Naxi

Dongba language, I asked my tutor in Naxi Dongba culture, He Libao (和丽宝), a respectable Dongba scholar in Lijiang Museum, to translate the seagull story into Dongba. This version of the story, in beautiful hand-written Naxi Dongba characters, is as shown in the following picture (Fig. 29).¹⁷¹

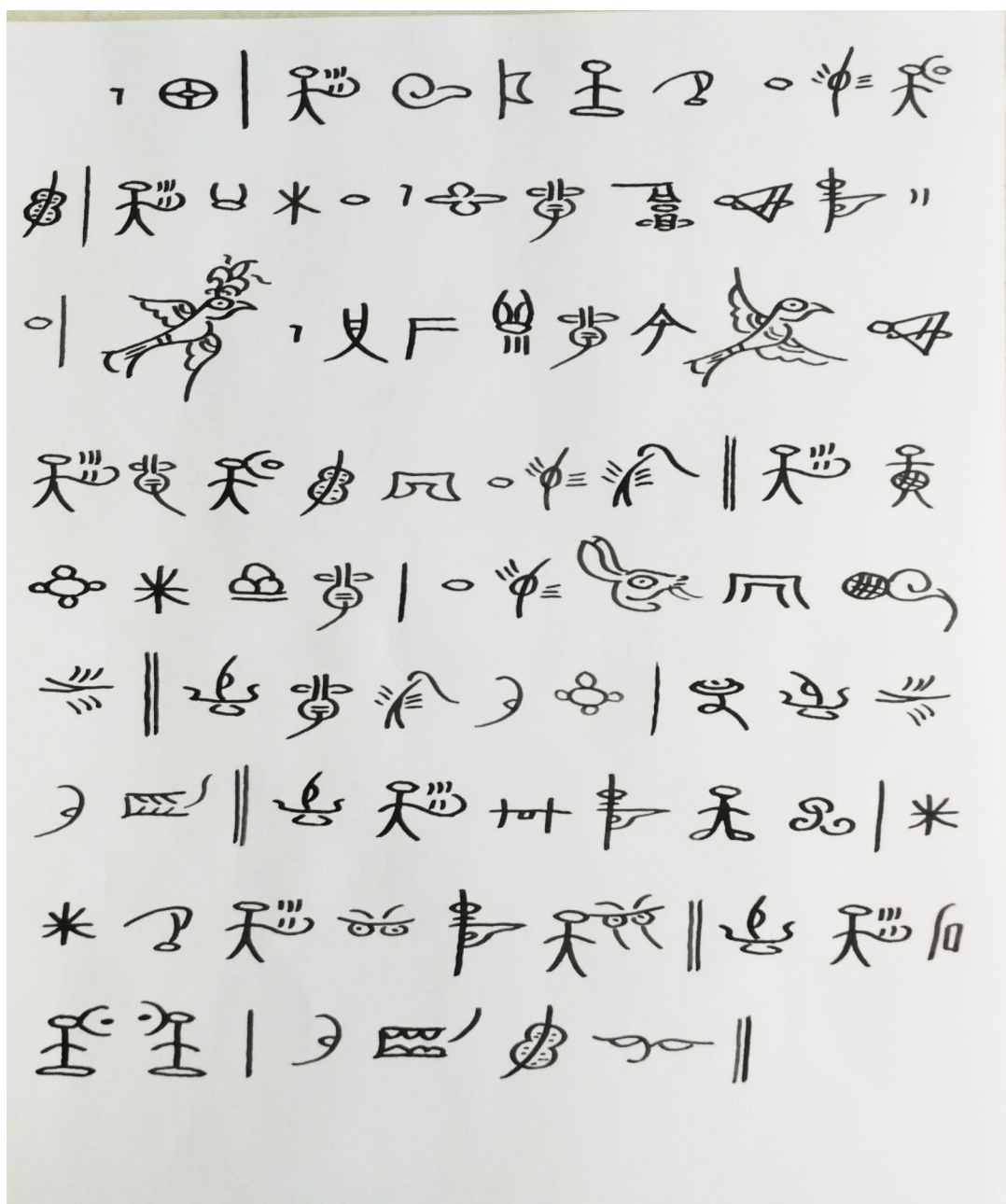


Fig. 29 Translation of the seagull story in Dongba characters, translated and hand-written by He Libao.

¹⁷¹ Annotation from He Libao: “seagull” does not have a corresponding translation in Naxi Dongba language; therefore replaced by the character meaning beautiful bird; the “|” refers to a comma, and “||” refers to a full stop.

This piece of pictograph can be overwhelming at first glance; however, a few characters instantly caught my eyes, and they happen to transmit the most imperative element in the narrative, the criticising stares. (Fig. 30, Fig. 31, Fig. 32) I found it remarkable that so much meaning could be transmitted through a written language which I could not read. Perhaps I could not read it, but I could in some sense understand.

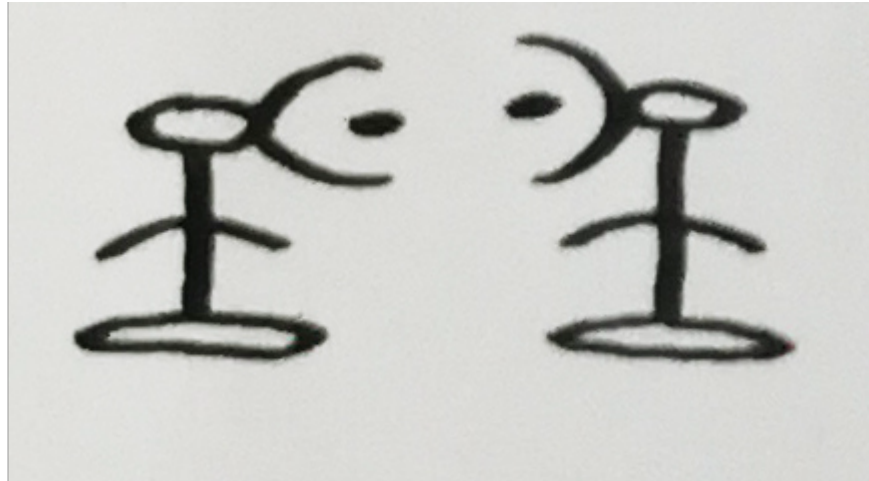


Fig. 30 Criticise

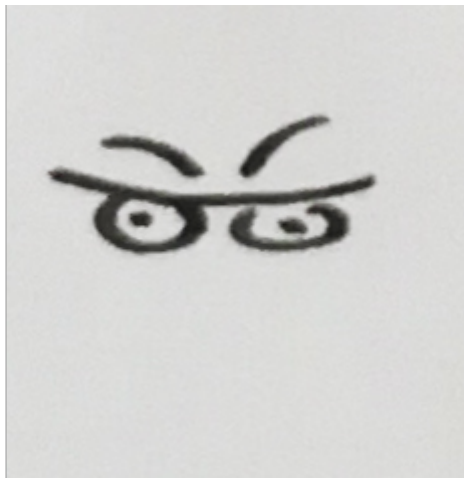


Fig. 32 Stare



Fig. 31 Beautiful Bird

Seeing this deeply personal story written in a language I did not speak with characters I could not read, somehow suddenly made me think of the alchemists of the past. They felt as if there was some deeper meaning which they only had to uncover in order to unlock the secrets of transforming lead into gold. I was suddenly having a very similar psychological journey as them, and felt as if I was on the cusp of a breakthrough, the groundwork of which had been being laid for my entire life up to that point.

I had the professional and liberal axis, with years spent within two different educational systems in China and the UK. I had the child and adult axis, through my research into Jungian individuation. Finally, I had the word and image axis, found through different points in my life but elucidated through my understanding of the Naxi pictographic language. The groundwork was laid, and I had all the tools I needed to combine the axes - but there was still one, final piece missing.

I had found a way to comfortably research a middle zone on each of these axes individually, but what did the full graph with these intersections mean? How to explore the complexities which arose from the intersections? How did that affect my painting practice and life at large? What conclusion(s) was I personally able to draw? The discovery of the answers to these questions will be the focus of the final chapter of this report. I was about to figure out what was at the centre of my personal CEMAI graph.

Conclusion - Animism and the Meaning of the Middle Zone

In the previous chapters, I performed an analysis of my painting creation process as well as of my paintings as art-objects. This was done primarily through the investigation of individual pairs of contradictions. Through the discovery of these contradictions we were able to think of them as axes on a CEMAI graph, and explore how one might go about finding a middle zone. In this section I will investigate primarily the intersection of these axes with special attention paid to the area in which middle zones overlap. I will discuss how this might impact my work at this stage in my career and moving forward, as well as the impact this might have on a larger scale.

Jungian psychology enlightened me of the purpose of individuation and in finding the whole self, and I extrapolated this to finding a balanced zone on CEMAI diagrams. Inspired by Jung's concepts of symbols and archetypes, I realised the significance of my feelings and narratives to the figures and objects on the canvas. They are essential symbols revealing my personal archetypes, my psychological laws.

As I started to see that reconciliation between contradictory forces largely depends on symbols and archetypes, I was able to draw further connections to my experience with the Naxi. Specifically, the pictographic language in ancient Naxi culture offers up a possible solution which can be directly expressed in art when it comes to reconciling words and images. It provides clues as to how one might use a tool such as CEMAI to draw connections between seemingly unrelated areas and reconcile tensions beyond the limits of what a system might directly express when taken at face value. Learning about Naxi pictographic writing and the ways in which it is used would reinforce my ideas about animism, and the characteristic animism that Naxi cosmology evokes and validate my animistic way of thinking and painting, which also helps to reconcile the contradictions in my work and process of individuation between child/adult and professional/liberal.

Animism, a balanced zone

The Naxi believe humans and nature are essential counterparts, in balance with each other. Nature has its biological and spiritual features and rights that humans must respect. This attitude in treating nature with equality manifests in their myths. For example, the story of Shu (署神) (Fig. 33), the god of nature. According to Dongba scriptures, Shu is a half-brother to humans who oversees everything in nature including, wind, fire, mountains, water and animals. Shu will punish humans for their misbehaviours with thunder, earthquake, flood, and plague.¹⁷² Different versions of the Naxi stories exist, but most say Shu(s) are born from an egg. A lot of Naxi rituals are dedicated to Shu for atonement, as humans in development inevitably need to take resources from nature. These rituals are recorded in the Dongba scriptures, and Shu is a central character if also often used in the written pictography. Just like what this pictographic character shows, Shu is pictured as half human and half snake.



Fig. 33 the Naxi character of “Shu”

¹⁷² He liuhua, Mu chen, He libao translated and annotated, *Naxi classic of ecology with translation and annotation*, (Yunnan, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2021) ,6-7.



Fig. 34 Title page of the battle between Shu(s) and Dapeng bird

To the ancestors of Naxi people, the Shu gods may be said to symbolise the Jungian archetype of the unpredictable and powerful side of nature. Ji Shu(祭署), meaning worshipping Shu(s), is a crucial traditional scripture concerning environmental ethics.¹⁷³ This scripture tells one of the core stories of the battle between Shu(s) (署神) (Fig. 34) and Dapeng Bird (大鹏鸟), which tells of the relationship between humans and nature.

According to the story, nature and humans were born from the same egg. The first Shu god, half-brother to the leader of the humans, was fond of cleanliness and did not eat meat. All the resources in the world were distributed fairly to humans and Shu(s):

*The beautiful wasteland is distributed to Shu(s) and the fertile field is distributed to humans; Beautiful highlands are distributed to Shu(s) and lovely villages are distributed to humans; livestock are distributed to humans and wild beasts to Shu. The only things not allocated to anyone are the treasures left by their father, including a precious hat, a magic instrument and a lucky knot.*¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³ Translated by the author from He liuhua, Mu chen, He libao translated and annotated, *Naxi classic of ecology with translation and annotation*, (Yunnan, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2021),109.

¹⁷⁴ Translated into english by the author from the translation of the pictographic scripture by He liuhua, Mu chen, He libao translated and annotated, *Naxi classic of ecology with translation and annotation*(Yunnan, Yunnan People's Publishing House, 2021) 117-119 :美丽的荒地被署分到, 肥田被人类分到;美丽的高原被署分到, 村子被人类分到;美丽的山丘被署分到, 家畜被人类分到, 美丽的野兽被署分到。金色的法器智金没有分, 吉祥宝物如意结也没有分。

Shu and humans agreed to keep these treasures together. At first, Shu and humans kept their agreement and thrived in their own respective territories. However, as the human population grew, they needed more resources from nature. They killed the yellow boar, shot the muntjac on the pine tree hill, and stole honey from the cliff. They slew the wild bear, rooster, big fish in the sea, and green snake on the tree... Shu was furious! He started to punish humans by forbidding them to expand, and sank the treasures left by their father to the Meilidaji sea (美利达吉海), where the Shu(s) live. The humans were irritated. The intellectuals, priests, and all capable people were gathered together for a summit.

They figured the only solution would be to ask for help from a higher god, Dongbashiluo (东巴什罗) and the Dapeng bird who lived on the 18th level of heaven in the sky. Hearing the complaint from humans, Dongbashiluo sent the Dapeng bird down to slay the head of Shu, Zuonalichi (佐纳里赤). The Dapeng bird was very smart and after a few battles, the Zuonalichi were caught in its bronze beak and iron claws, dragged out of the sea, and cuffed in the mountains. Zuonalichi cried to the Dapeng bird: “The great Dapeng Bird of the colour of a trumpet shell white, we do not have quarrel, do not kill me”.¹⁷⁵ “At that time, the water in the Meijidaji ocean started to dry; Hanyingdabao, the saint tree started to die... There was no rain in the sky, and no plants on the ground. The tail of the snake was dry, and the mouth of the frog is dry”.¹⁷⁶ Zuonalichi truthfully told the Dapeng bird and Dongbashiluo that it was not him who started the fight but the humans. Dapeng bird realised there is more to it than what the humans have said. Zuonalichi indicated he wanted to cease the fight and asked Dongbashiluo to be the mediator and judge between human and Shu. Dongbashiluo then reached the verdict that humans could use the resources of the Shu territory - but only reasonably and with respect.

This ancient story and associated rituals in worshipping Shu are to remind people to treat nature with consideration and gratitude. Although it might be true that these religious stories and traditions do not serve as direct and pragmatic a purpose as science, we might do well to ask if the rational thinking of science is the only way to approach life. Is it sufficient

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.,139-141: 白海螺色大鹏神鸟呀，我们两个之间没有祸事之争，不要来杀我。

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p.141: 美利达吉海的海水好像要干涸，含英宝达神树好像要枯萎...天上没下雨，地上没草长。小蛇的尾巴干了，青蛙的嘴干了。

for the wholeness of humanity? What about our psyche and emotions, the things we feel but cannot name or understand? Is it possible that the ancient stories and rituals are complementary to rationalism as a shelter of the mind, a reunion of the psyche and matter? Now, as these ancient cultural heritages gradually dissolve into the vast ocean of time, when we are so busy chasing rationalism and materialism, can this ancient story provide insight into how to resolve contradiction and conflict?

He Libao told me that when he was a child, adults would tell him to be quiet under the trees or near water, as it is where the Shu gods live. It is also disrespectful to kill near water or put feet into the water. By giving everything a human-like character, the Naxi people are proud of their effort in protecting and being considerate to the environment. I feel deeply connected to this way of approaching the outside world. Here I find a historical foundation in the Naxi stories which provides me with more resources in painting. I told He Libao how much the Naxi Dongba culture has inspired me spiritually. Their animistic universe carried in pictographic language speaks to my psyche so dearly, and I believe it contains unique values irreplaceable by modernity. Although I cannot live a Dongba's life, I wish to keep these values alive in my paintings.

After my first visit to the Naxi, I made some paintings referencing their mythologies (see pamphlet. Brave new world). I pulled the characters from the mythological narrative and ritual miniatures and assigned them to a modern nightclub scenery with fluorescent paints. The contrast between the ancient fantastical universe and aggressive neon nightclub metaphorically speaks to my inexplicable feelings about encountering Naxi culture. Importantly, the Naxi Dongba culture became a historical foundation on which my animistic perspective could firmly rest. In the process of painting, I realised there were contradictory forces between tradition and modernity. Within the last few decades, humans have made incredible progress that changed our lives. Supported by modern science and technology, we have more power than ever in human history. However, this wild development is at the expense of nature. According to the ancient Naxi story, this might be the anger of the Shu. We have broken our promise once again for our own benefit. However, animistic thinking and a respectful, considerate manner towards nature may be what we need as modern people.

Animistic thinking is sometimes considered a sign of immaturity both in collective and individual human development. In 1871, Sir Edward Burnett Tylor (1832 - 1971, English Anthropologist regarded as the father of cultural anthropology) coined the term in his 1871

work, "Primitive Culture". For Tylor, the concept of animism was the most rudimentary form of religion.¹⁷⁷ Later Jean Piaget (Swiss psychologist known for his theories of cognitive development) refers to animism as one of the features in what he named the preoperational phase (roughly 2-7 years old). "During this phase the child's representational thought first takes wing, with all the attendant distortions and instabilities that its sensory- motor ancestry can bestow: concreteness, phenomenism, irreversibility, egocentrism, animism, precepts, and transductive reasoning."¹⁷⁸ According to Piaget, "The basic fact of child thought (is)... to endow physical objects and events with the attributes of biological-psychological entities, e.g., to endow them with life, consciousness, will, etc. This is animism".¹⁷⁹

Due to underdevelopment of logic, reason, and an incapability in distinguishing the self from the outside world, children project themselves onto the world and think nature is alive, conscious, and has a purpose. Piaget also suggested this kind of undifferentiation between self and the world will decline with age, and these "child's primitive causal notions (animism, artificialism, etc.) may first begin to give way to more mature ones through his daily interactions with machines, broadly defined."¹⁸⁰ Thoughts such as these were meant to diminish animism and support human brutality in manipulating the environment.

While I agree that animism supports thinking in which nature is alive, conscious, and has a purpose, I disagree that such thoughts are childish, and I do not see animism as primitive or immature. It strikes me as close-minded and arrogant to place humankind above the natural world, and to make decisions based on thinking that is largely, if not entirely, anthropocentric. I see the relationship as much more synergistic, with all natural things, up to and including human-kind as being on more equal footing. This interpretation of animism-like thinking never left me.

For a time, I ignored my feelings for the world around me in order to become a reasonable and functional individual in society, but through the process of my development involving differing educational pedagogies and cultures, learning the process of individuation, and my experiences with the Nazi, I was, and am, able to embrace my feelings of animism. I've come to understand it as a non-anthropocentric way of connecting to the

¹⁷⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/animism>

¹⁷⁸ John Hurley Flavell, Jean Piaget, *The Developmental Psychology of Jean Piaget* (New York: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1963), 265.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p.281.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., p.289.

world humbly and sympathetically. In this sense, animism-like thinking becomes a solution that stands between the polarities of professional/liberal, child/adult, word/image. It was always my inability to reconcile the tension between strongly held yet opposite beliefs and ideas which I struggled with so deeply. In expressing my thoughts on animism through painting, I am planting the seeds of harmony and understanding which may flourish harmlessly on canvas.

For some other artists' animism is also not just a cold word. It may stand for a more caring and less egocentric way of thinking, not limited to only living organisms. Borrowing the figure of found objects, animals or plants, they process and understand their emotions, empathy, and respect to humans and non-humans alike.

One example of an artist with thoughts of bringing life into objects is Salvador Dalí (Spanish surrealist, 1904 -1989). He said:

I proceeded to claim that by virtue of my personal magic I had acquired the ability to animate the inanimate. I would tear a leaf from a mass of these plants, I would substitute my leaf-insect for the leaf by a sleight-of-hand and, placing it on the dining-room table, I would begin to strike violently all around it with a rounded stone which I presented as the object endowed with magic virtue which was going to bring the leaf to life.¹⁸¹

This behaviour might seem odd, but I believe shows an underlying commitment to the ancient idea that life can be breathed into inanimate objects through “magical,” or supernatural means. This is an idea which crops up in so many of humankind's ancient stories, and in contemporary times still has not left us. While this explores animism from one angle, another approach is that of Carolee Schneemann.

Carolee Schneemann (1939-2019), a radical artist and feminist icon, saw her cats as companions and co-conspirators. She refused to call them cats or treat them as pets to be owned. In 1956, a cat named Kitch moved in with her and became a central presence and protagonist in her work. With Kitch, Schneemann made, “an autobiographical diary film that tenderly chronicles that cat’s daily life until her death.” After Kitch’s death, Schneemann lived with other cats named Cluny, Vesper, Treasure, and La Niña. In *infinity kisses (I)*, “Scheemann collaborated with Cluny to create a monumental grid of photographs.” Each

¹⁸¹ Salvador Dali, *The Secret Life of Salvador Dali*, trans. Haakon M. Chevalier (New York: Dover Publications, 1993), 159

morning, Scheemann captured their daily kiss with a point-and-shoot Olympus film camera, its automatic settings often blurring and overexposing the affectionate moment. In 1974, she wrote to her friend saying “the Cat is my medium”.¹⁸² The respect Scheeman showed for her co-inhabitants is something which perhaps many of us can understand. Animism is taking that and extending it to the world at large.

We also can examine the work of Paula Rego (1935-2022, influential Portuguese-British visual artist) to draw further connections between animism, Jungian archetypes, and contradictions. I feel deeply connected to Rego’s work and how she chose to adopt cabbage, rabbits, monkeys, and other non-human figures to the re-imagining of human emotions. In *Rabbit and Weeping Cabbage* (1982)(Fig. 35)¹⁸³, we meet a cabbage weeping with human facial expression¹⁸⁴, while the rabbit, apparently a more powerful character in the painting, wields an enormous knife to murder a carrot.



Fig. 35 Rabbit and Weeping Cabbage Paula Rego acrylic on paper (1982)

¹⁸² Carolee Schneemann, *Body Politics* (exhibition), Barbican centre, London Thu 8 Sep 2022—Sun 8 Jan 2023.

¹⁸³ For a detailed reading of this work, please see the “Examination of Selected Artworks” section of this report.

¹⁸⁴ Fiona Bradley, *Paula Rego. P R : Paula Rego*, (London: Tate Publishing, 2002),21.

Drawing or as she describes it, bashing away with the dry pigment of pastel is much harder physical work than brushing on paint.¹⁸⁵ Further, she seems to have come upon a connection to Jung's archetypes and the contradictions contained therein, telling the novelist Maggie Gee: "you're a man when you're painting. Part of me that's male comes into force (when painting)."¹⁸⁶

When Paula was five, she did something she knew was really naughty. She took a pair of scissors and snipped off the finger of her favourite baby doll, as methodically as a torture. The guilt was thrilling, the sensual pleasure pure joy, all the more so for the fleshy consistency of the rubber: "There's pleasure in hurting things."¹⁸⁷ She sees a connection between the emotional and physical satisfaction derived from this method and her use of pastel since the early 1990s. "I'd start painting the creatures on pieces of paper and then I cut them up. And the pleasure of the cutting was part of the point, the pleasure you get from destroying it. It was thrilling to do – bodily, sexually. Just like putting on pastel is."¹⁸⁸ Pleasure in subversion also manifests itself in her love of practical jokes. Her eldest daughter, the scriptwriter Cass Willing (married to the sculptor Ron Mueck) warns: Mum's very good at April Fools. She does it on a professional level.¹⁸⁹

The painting world of Paula is largely merged with her real life, just as her pastel pigment merged into her studio air. As described by her daughter Lila: "she sits with the pastels in her lap; she usually has a box of them and, you know, they go everywhere. Lila's role in this is so important because Mum sees herself as Lila. She doesn't see herself in any other of her models".¹⁹⁰ This ability to see oneself in another is a perfect example of my definition of animism. I believe this skill can be expanded to not just include empathy towards other people, or other living things, but the world at large, with animistic thinking being the key.

These examples of artists pursuing animism, each in their own way, might be said to show there is some deep connection between living things the meaning of which they, and I,

¹⁸⁵ John McEwen and Paula Rego, *Paula Rego: Behind the Scenes* (London: Phaidon, 2008), 10.

¹⁸⁶ Sanda Miller, "Fashioning Subversion: Clothes and Their Meaning in Paula Rego's Paintings," *Apollo* 163, no. 527 (2006): 20–27.

¹⁸⁷ Fiona Bradley, *Paula Rego*. P R: Paula Rego, (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), 21.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.10.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.14.

are attempting to extract. This connection was also noticed to some extent by Jung, who once called artists “collective man,”:

Art is a kind of innate drive that seizes a human being and makes him its instrument. The artist is not a person endowed with free will who seeks his own ends, but one who allows art to realise its purposes through him. As a human being he may have moods and a will and personal aims, but as an artist he is “man” in a higher sense—he is “collective man,” a vehicle and moulder of the unconscious psychic life of mankind.¹⁹¹

Building on this, an artist does not have to be limited to, “collective man,” but can indeed be, “collective nature,” or, in my terminology, animism. It is this animistic approach to the world which I am ultimately exploring through my work. By using CEMAI to extract pairs of contradictions, and specifically naming the ones which have repeatedly emerged in my practice, I have been able to use an animistic approach to explore the commonalities contained therein: **Liberal and professional**, which includes conceptual and technical aspects in two educational systems; **child and adult**, which is portrayed largely in one’s personal growth; **word and image**, concerning the interpretational methodology in art. These three pairs at first inspection seemed independent to me, but I was able to discover how they overlap in so many ways through CEMAI. For example, education stands for adulthood as it shapes children into more desirable social members in the future, and through this process, some qualities are inevitably suppressed or forgotten. Another might be how the contradiction between word and image is also manifested in the importance each plays within two distinct educational systems.

CEMAI was born out of my experiences with these contradictions, and by taking an open-minded approach towards the concepts in my personal CEMAI, I was able to fully accept and embrace animism. The CEMAI model is what served to contain the contradictions and keep track of my thoughts and growth as an artist. I believe this powerful tool, the Creative and Evaluative Model of Artistic Individuation, to be a new way of thinking about art, a tool which we can use to find meaning in art in addition to more traditional written and/or verbal analysis.

¹⁹¹ C.G. Jung, “Psychology and Literature,” in *Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, vol. 15: *Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature*, ed. Gerhard Adler and R.F.C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 101.

With contemporary art being largely undefined, and primarily concerned with the deconstruction of systems and boundaries, I believe that just such a flexible system of evaluation is demanded. Something as discursive as painting always runs the risk of being too general or too abstract. In critics or artists conversations, we often say that in painting, we do not have answers. We are still experimenting and figuring things out on canvas. However, as valid as those sayings are in studios, one cannot help but wonder what exactly are we experimenting and figuring out? And how are we figuring things out through continuously making paintings? There have always been trends and fads in art, and today is no different.

If the goal is always to deconstruct, then we must ask what is the endpoint? Is it the complete deconstruction and removal of all boundaries? Without boundaries and definitions, then is not all meaning lost? We have already come to the point where anything can have the label “Art” attached to it and be accepted as valid. Once this stage is reached, any boundary challenging and deconstructing is in the mind of the artist only, as there will not be institutional pushback. In order to make progress something new must be built. CEMAI is an attempt to offer a non-constraining way by which we can think about diverse types of art in a cohesive and systematic manner.

Although the profundity of painting may never be reduced to a simple chart (this is also the charm of painting), CEMAI as a tool offers a way to resolve conflict in art, be it internal struggle or a larger societal friction. It is born from and incorporates the lessons I learned from my mostly accidental and infrequent successes. I hope my analytical work can act as guidance to offer a position between conflicting ideas. Perhaps CEMAI can be a framework through which contemporary art can be viewed and discussed. Perhaps my animistic paintings can help us realise age-old mistakes and offer a healing path forward.

Appendix A: Examination of Selected Artworks

In the following writing, I wish to give a close reading of two paintings referenced in the previous chapters and how they might be perceived in different contexts. This is followed by a similar reading of one of my own recent series, which serves as an example of how I have learned from the ideas and systems in this report to build my working methodologies. When examining these works, we must keep in mind one of the key tenets of CEMAI: The endpoints are imaginary extremes, simulacra which can never be fully realised. They are meant to help take a single aspect of a complex set of ideas in order to examine it granularly. For example, it is impossible for a painting to ever be entirely technical with no conceptual basis, or fully childlike with no adultlike qualities. Such a thing could not exist, as no matter how far towards one it might be, there is always some gradient of the other present. Indeed, each set of endpoints may be thought of as a dyad, the unachievable purity of each providing insight into the space that lies between. To say a painting or piece of art embodies this or that CEMAI endpoint is not to say that *it is* only that endpoint, but that it may be useful to explore a specific work *as if* it were singularly aligned with this or that endpoint as a way to explore the idea more fully.

Tajik Bride by Shangyi Jin, 1983

Shangyi Jin's 1983 painting *Tajik Bride* may be as close as one can get to a painting which represents a single CEMAI endpoint and I have used it as an example of a work in which the "Professional" is emphasised. This can be seen in how Jin approached the painting, its original context, and by its and Jin's own influence on art in China. In the foreword to Jin's exhibition *Salute to Johannes Vermeer*, Pan Gongkai (潘公凯, b. 1947, Dean of CAFA 2001-present), writes, "In the 50's, 60's and 70's, Chinese artists, were almost entirely ignorant of the changes in the Western art world."¹⁹² Jin graduated from CAFA in 1953 and would not have the opportunity to experience anything but the social realism influenced by USSR art academies in his early art education in China. Not until the 1980s and 90s was he able to visit European museums and study in person the authentic works of the old masters. Considering the major differences in painting between the USSR and European old masters, it is not hard to imagine Jin's exuberance in discovering new techniques with which he could depict the world. This study of European old masters led directly to the development of neo-classicism in China, which Jin is considered one of the pioneers of, and *Tajik Bride* one of the major works demonstrating the style.

The influence of Jin's thinking and neoclassicist style remains strong in Chinese art institutions today, with technical realism being one of the major concerns of Chinese art education. For example, when sketching an apple, technical concerns such as light and shadow, shading, depth outlines and transitions, accuracy, how to mix paint, how efficient one is using the material to create volume, how "well" is the apple being painted, etc., are readily spoken about. These discussions are held daily and are the norm. Conceptual questions such as, "why paint this apple?" or, "who has grown this apple?" or "what is the apple's history?" or, "What does this apple signify?" are omitted. The reason for sketching apple is to learn how to sketch. It is simply a tool used to help students understand the basic principles of observational painting. Having mastered an apple, students move onto more complex subject matter such as a human model. From a conceptual standpoint, the drawing

¹⁹² Translated from Pan Gong Kai 潘公凯, foreword to *Salute to Johannes Vermeer 向维米尔致意*, CAFA museum, 12.6-3.7.2011: 尤其是五、六、七十年代, 由于中国对外的封闭, 可以说中国的艺术家们对于西方艺术领域当时所发生的变化几乎一无所知。

produced of the apple, and even the apple itself is essentially irrelevant. This kind of training will influence an artist, and only later does it become their choice to decide what zone to occupy on the axis of professional and liberal, or how to talk about art or think about art.

For someone like Jin who dedicates his life to perfecting skills and contributing to the development of neoclassicist oil painting in China, to talk about his work on a technical level is only natural. Even in considering conceptual art, Jin considers this technical basis necessary: “If you don’t have Realism as a foundation, you cannot pain abstraction or expressionism well,” continuing, “No matter how good your idea, without the proper technique you cannot realize it.”¹⁹³ How to master the techniques of the western old masters and employ them to depict Chinese subject matter is his life’s research. By choosing to appreciate his work on its technical merit, we are respecting its original context. In this respect, the Tajik subject is simply Jin’s apple.

Pan believes the spirit and features of neo classism are to, “...depict humanism and idealism in the beginning of the reform period and opening up of China.”¹⁹⁴ He goes on to state that in the hearts and minds of Chinese painters of the time this style would have represented time, peace, harmony, nobility, and other romantic features found in western classism. On a technical level, it would have represented preciseness, ripeness, the value of light, texture, and harmony in composition.¹⁹⁵

Tajik Bride, as a prototypical example of a Chinese neoclassic portrait painted with oil on canvas, has these qualities on display. The painting is smooth on the surface just as many old master’s works. The coif and the shoulder of the Tajik Lady form a triangle that elevates and stabilizes the composition. Contrasting strong light and shadow are created by side-lighting the subject, giving the young bride a mysterious and noble look, a sophisticated smile lingering on her lips. There is an essentiality to the red of her garb which brings out the strength of contrast between the colour and the black background. The brush strokes are small, gentle and careful, as if they were touching the skin of the model. But the charm and the intrigue brought by the model are perfectly transmitted from the artist through the canvas to the viewer. The painting is a symphony of softness and strength. In Jin’s own word, what makes this painting eye-catching is that it "offers a feeling of peace, harmony, nobility and

¹⁹³ <https://www.cafa.com.cn/en/news/details/8321212> accessed August 25, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

purity”.¹⁹⁶ Jin further states that the major advancement made in this work is the use of outlines, the delicate changing of which brings out depth and space. He goes so far as to call this discovery “ground-breaking.” However, Jin remains critical of his own technique used in this work: “There is still room of technical progress. Young painters today do better than this.” He continues saying he was, “not relaxed enough and therefore the brushwork was not smooth”.¹⁹⁷

While I do feel it is important to acknowledge an artist’s intent and purpose when examining a work, this is not to say that this is the only way to interpret Tajik Bride, or that we must only look at a work in the way the artist originally intended. Tajik Bride an example of technical skill, yet it is clear in the artists description of the origins as well as the historical influence on the work that there are major conceptual considerations, including what is the standard of beauty it is said to represent, why paint this specific portrait, who is the sitter and what are their thoughts on the work? Even the choice to paint Tajik Bride in a neo-classicist style is the result of spending conceptual time and effort. When Jin encountered a Tajik wedding during a Caifeng (采风) trip to the Tashikuergan area in the Xinjiang province, his eye was caught by the bride.^{198 199} According to Jin, he was, “intrigued by the bride, and wished to express her beauty and nobleness in a reserved manner, incorporating newly discovered techniques based on the light and shadow system of Western old masters’ oil paintings.”²⁰⁰

Although Jin has not said much about the topic, it seems Jin was especially intrigued by the bride and he felt compelled to create some quick sketches in order to capture his feelings during his Caifeng. Only later in the privacy of his Beijing studio would Jin return to these sketches when painting the Tajik Bride.²⁰¹ In this respect, while inspired by his

¹⁹⁶ Lin Qi, “Master Class in Oil Painting,” *China Daily*, April 16, 2019.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ China has a very diverse array of cultures and ethnicities, with The Tajik being one of 54 officially recognised minority groups in China.

¹⁹⁹ In China, it is considered the duty of painters to help bridge cultural divides, and in the tradition of Caifeng painters voyage out from the cities to visit a remote area to live and stay with the local people. The artist learns from and paints people, landscapes, and daily life from a culture and area that is less represented in metropolitan areas.

²⁰⁰ Yi Jingrong, ed., *Mei Shu Xin Shang* (美术欣赏, 2nd ed.), edited by Yi Jingrong, (Qinghua University Press, 2013), 165 : 根据靳尚谊自己的阐述, 《塔吉克新娘》是根据一幅写生进行创作的, 想表现新娘那种内在、含蓄、质朴、纯洁的情感; 同时, 通过对西方油画造型进行了深入的研究, 借鉴西方油画的技巧和艺术语言, 注意表现形体的体积感, 更多地利用侧光来加强形象的明暗对比…

²⁰¹ Ibid.

sketches and perhaps even strongly referencing a real individual, the Tajik bride is not any particular person from reality. Through Jin's painting, she has become the representation of an intriguing moment and the feelings it triggered. The painting is not an exhibition of nor passionate display of life drawing. Instead, it is full of careful design. The stable composition of the triangle and the delicate and soft strokes transmit a deep feeling of peace and harmony present during the process of Jin's painting. We can almost see him, in his studio, alone, immersed in this act of creation, flowing smoothly in its own time. He was not thinking about anything else, not the bills of tomorrow, not the chores of today, maybe not even the painting itself. He was immersed in the impression of the noble bride that was left in his heart and wanted to capture a moment of a feeling that cannot be translated to words. In this way, this painting has transcended practice, an attempt to perfect the techniques of a portrait.

Due to Jin's acute interest in the stylings of European old masters, and especially the volume, shadow and light in their paintings, the facial features of the young bride may have touched Jin deeply. With a tall nose bridge and deep-set eyes, Tajik women have very distinctive features which may have seemed exotic to Jin at the time, and certainly to the majority of Chinese people. These may be likened to the materials of oil painting itself, which are also distinctive and exotic in the paintings of the old masters. The bride's strong facial features bring out the contrasting shadow and light brilliantly and thus brings Jin closer to the old masters he so admires. Despite her features, the Tajik bride is also Chinese, with the special temperament of the East. Her beauty has a quiet, subtle quality and her skin glows with a certain reserved shyness. Consequently, the Tajik bride is a perfect connection to the techniques Jin was obsessed with, and Eastern, Chinese culture. To Jin, painting the Tajik bride in a "neo-classical" way is the only natural conclusion.

The combination of techniques and concepts in this painting come together to bring it to life. Although Jin acutely emphasises the professional techniques employed in this work's creation, it is clear that in the final piece Liberal and Professional are connected. Furthermore, the charm of the Tajik Bride also lies partially in the special temperament displayed arising from the remoteness she experienced in her upbringing. She seems pure, unburdened and detached from the modern hustle and bustle and ever-present complexity found in large cities. She is a representative of people exempted from the endless social ladder and the pressure in making a living amongst strangers. She is surrounded by nature, by her brothers, sisters, and friends. It is said that Tajik people are very welcoming to whoever that comes to their door. From my own experiences during a Caifeng trip amongst the Tajik, I

can attest to this saying. Being accustomed to the complexity found in big cities, Tajiks' honesty and disarming friendliness were almost surprising to me as a person living in a big city.

This is all to say that even in a painting which is presented by the artist himself primarily as a technical study and widely lauded for its Professional merit to the exclusion of other artistic qualities, still one may therein find great depth of meaning and conceptual, Liberal, elements both in the process of creation and the intrinsic aspects of the final painting. By the subtle nature of complexity inherent in art, and by extension human creativity in general, a work which is highly polarised to a single CEMAI endpoint nevertheless embodies beyond words aspects of the opposing endpoint. As any possible description of art is bounded by unavoidable finiteness, the only way to express such a complex mix of emotion, skill, and conceptual consideration is, in fact, art.

Rabbit and Weeping Cabbage by Paula Rego, 1982

Paula Rego's "Rabbit and Weeping Cabbage" is an example of a more Liberal work of art. This painting vividly captures the emotional state and thinking of Rego at the time. It tells her own narrative. In the main text, I have interpreted the narrative and content of this drawing, the feministic qualities in her works, and her special way of telling stories through visual representations. Rego, being trained in a traditional academic setting, describes favouring life drawings of models and her dislike in copying figures in the antique room during her time in art school. When speaking about one of the characteristic models she painted, intriguingly, she said: "I did a portrait of her. It wasn't an art. It is a portrait really."²⁰² Here we are seeing a connection between Rego's and my own Chinese art education, arguably due to their overlap in technical training. Rego distinguishing between her portrait and art resonates with the way we talked about art in my technical-driven Chinese art education, and can even be extended to Jin's Tajik bride, in that what we do in class and life drawing, are only the practice for technical skills and not normally considered "art".

However, we can appreciate Rego's painting on a technical level. As she has been trained in a traditional academic way we are able to spot the technical training that has been internalized in her and appreciate it as a technically interesting image. The strokes are sophisticated in a seemingly simple way and serve the purpose masterfully. We can feel the strong and complex emotions transmitted from this painting, which is to say she has succeeded in her technique. In the shadow, as a classic rule in realism colour techniques, she applied different shades of blue to represent the dimension and depth of space, the delicate colour on the rabbit's face, the chest of the rabbit and right arm and leg. The outline of the rabbit also demonstrates what Jin discovered in creating space through outlines. The line on the back of the rabbit starts strong, vanishes in the middle and appears again, indicating the changing body shape from the back to waist and hip. The fact that the outline of the arm is applied in black whereas the others are in shades of brown also supports the representation of space, as the strongest black brings the arm to the most forward layer of this painting. Taking

²⁰² Paula Rego - Girls never get pregnant at the Slade School of Fine Art (8/51) , <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YdmPnNp1ZkA&list=PLVV0r6CmEsFzU-0a0MJd4-eI6tixW5r4F&index=8>

this together with her background and acute interests in representing the lives of women, and storytelling, the narrative, feelings, and characters become more real and believable.

Although it might not have been her intention or a conscious effort to bring out the space and volume, it is the charm of technical training, that to some level, it shapes one so deeply as to influence even the simplest line one draws. These changes in colour and shades make this seemingly simple drawing fascinating, containing technical information that is intrinsic to an interpretation of the painting itself.

The rabbit here, as the most powerful figure, with the biggest scale and a sharp weapon in hand takes up over half of the space in the painting. It has a certain look of numbness on its face, with its dull eyes. However, this dullness is broken by the shock of the carrot which has slipped from its hand just before the rabbit initiates the slaughter. This should not happen, considering the power dynamic found therein. The carrot has no chance of surviving or escaping, being captured by such a powerful creature as the rabbit wielding a knife which is itself even bigger than the whole carrot. Yet somehow, the carrot managed to slip away from the rabbit's hand, extending its life for just another fleeting moment. Or maybe the rabbit saw something unexpected and dropped the carrot. The redness under the left hand of the rabbit suggests a bloody history of carrot murder by the rabbit. However, none of this is going to change the ultimate fate of the carrot. The weeping cabbage knows the carrot is destined to be killed and is desperately hopeless. It knows the fate of the carrot precurses its own fate, and the cabbage is next to be killed. But there is nothing it can do.

The power dynamic shown in this painting is something hardly ever noticed, and even less so brought to one's attention. That rabbits feed on vegetables is common sense and taken for granted. However, Rego has taken what might be just another mundane act of daily rabbit life and made it the focal point in her work. She redefined it giving them each a personality in order to perform this a vivid show in power dynamics we may usually take for granted. This work enlightens the audience of what is ignored and reminds people that the norm may hurting someone who also has feelings just the same as the one higher up on the power ladder.

This painting is a burst of emotions, and a very on-the-spot capture of the complex emotions of the artist. It is so eager to tell the story, express the feeling, and the last thing it tries to be, is to be real. However, on the emotional level, it is extremely real, vivid, and accurate. The power of the painting surpasses what words can describe. We can almost

picture Rego, grabbing her paint and brushes on the sites and diving right in the visual narrative. She may also feel for the carrot, the cabbage, and the rabbit with deep sympathy. Because after all, this power dynamic, hierarchy is not the fault of any of them, and not within their power to change. They were only driven by the power of nature.

In this way, with its seemingly careless, crude and even to some level aggressive lines and strokes. this painting speaks the most sophisticated emotional truth. Here, Rego's very personal techniques and direct, carefree strokes serve perfectly the purpose of bringing out her stories and strong emotions and add to it a sense of movement. It is as if we can see in static picture, the carrot is falling, and the rabbit's eyes widened and the tears drops from the cabbage, even the noise of its weeping. Here we see three unique characters, carrots the rebellious, cabbage the bystander and the follower of the social norm, and rabbit the villain. It is also extremely interesting to put a rabbit in the position of the villain, as they are normally considered cute and harmless, this contrast adds another layer of meaning to the whole narrative. For the hopelessness of the cabbages, the feeling of losing control from the rabbit and the temporary escaping feeling from the carrot, we all have something to relate to.

A World Beyond (series) by Jiarui Li, 2022

“Before I put a brush to canvas I question, ‘Is this mine? Is it all intrinsically of myself? Is it influenced by some idea or some photograph of an idea which I have acquired from some man?’”

---- Georgia O’Keeffe

O’Keeffe’s words closely reflect my own ideas and struggle when balancing ideas in painting. As a transcultural artist influenced deeply by two distinct systems of art education, I have had an internal battle of contradictions being fought inside my mind. The canvas is where I can hope to find a resolution. In my most recent series, A World Beyond, I feel as if I have finally been able to accept the differences between the two and make use of them. To do so, I merged what I had learned from each system.

There are two skills from my Chinese education which I have drew upon. Firstly, traditional painting techniques were emphasised during my education in China, and thus I have an ability to paint in a realistic, lifelike, representative way. This skill is one of the major reasons that I was passionate about painting from an early age. Having this technique ingrained in me allows me to express myself and tell my story through images without struggle.(see pamphlet) Secondly, the Chinese system placed value judgements, giving specific definitions to what is “good art”, and the “quality” of art. While I recognise the subjectivity inherent in such ideas, these continue to be important concepts in my practice. When I was growing up, they were existed in my mind as infallible. Indeed, they were presented as such, defined by the authority inherent within the system itself. Now, as independent artist, I find value in the concept of “good” and “quality”, and often choose to use this framework to set my own standards of good art and quality art and abide by it these self-imposed rules.

My experiences with art education in the UK was quite different, and offered me the opportunity to look at my artwork in a whole new light. This helped me realise that the education I had had up to this point were only one possibility among many. In the UK, I was given a very understanding and tolerant environment to experiment with and rebuild my practice methodologies, thought processes, and communication methods. I had always internally acknowledged the necessity in recognising and understanding artistic references in

my own work however, I felt pressured having to explain and interpret my work and it felt like quite the burden. In the “World Beyond” series of works, I was for the first time since leaving China, able to separate the conceptualisation, physical painting, and interpretational processes from one another. Thus, the process of painting once again became enjoyable and surprising but without losing any of the critical analysis and thinking behind the works.

Thus, I consider the series A World beyond my most up-to-date and successful series, with the others as important steps in the process leading up to it. In the following writing, I wish to take a closer look at the series as and take this as an example to demonstrate how specifically I attempt to reconcile the counterpoints, the process of my practice on the material level like the palette, composition, brush strokes and its relation to technical training, and the conceptual end such as source material of imagery, choices in creation, the symbolisation in the compositional spaces, and a greater contextualisation in relation to art history and contemporary art practice.

However, before articulating these concepts in words I would like to make a strong disclaimer that this is itself a process of conceptualising the physical artistic process. It highlights the inherent contradiction between verbal expression and visual representation. Examining my paintings closely and attempting to convey them through words cannot be a technical endeavour, but rather a highly conceptual one. Words are, arguably an automatic conceptual vehicle, however, how I choose to paint may have some indication, consciously or not, conceptually, or in terms of the whole balance of composition, or fulfilling a balance in feeling. When making detailed and more refined characters, and having them living on the same canvas, I cooperated my learned knowledge and practice in realistic painting. This also automatically creates a hierarchy on image, that is highly conceptual and meaningful to look back at it when the painting is done. The practice of painting involves numerous silent efforts that are difficult - if not impossible - to translate into words. It encompasses elements such as muscle memory, thought patterns, and intuitive feelings that guide me in determining what is right, how to paint, and when to stop. To provide an analogy from tennis, the concept of a forehand differs from executing an efficient forehand stroke. One may understand all the concepts in the forehand, however without practising, the concepts themselves will not be able to return balls in matches. Further, a person armed only with conceptual understanding, no matter how complete, will also fail the task at hand. Only practice, aka technical training, would allow one to succeed. While I strive to communicate the material and technical aspects as comprehensively as possible, and in this report, words are the most efficient tool we have,

it is crucial to acknowledge that words are already diverging from the core of the technical and material realms, which exist independently of verbal descriptions. Although I am about to give a closer look at my paintings, I believe the most real and honest answer I could give would be just as Edward Hopper said: "The whole answer is there on the canvas."²⁰³

In the World Beyond series, I selected painting as my medium due to my inherent affinity for it. It is through painting that I found myself drawn to the realm of art and sought to develop my skills as a means of self-expression. In a series of paintings preceding these, I ventured into working with fluorescent colours, expanding my understanding of colour within a broader spectrum. This understanding allowed me to accomplish my objective of establishing pronounced colour contrasts that evoke a sense of power and intensity. To create the desired colour tone, I intentionally selected hues which may not conventionally harmonise when placed together. The initial layer of my paintings often exhibits abstract and imbalanced characteristics. However, I derive great satisfaction from imposing order upon this base layer of chaos and reconciling inherent contradictions. For instance, in the artwork titled "A World Beyond No.1," I began by applying a layer of salmon-coloured paint, followed by a prominent circle of turquoise. From there, my imagination took over, prompting me to introduce a layer of bright green that possesses an almost fluorescent quality within this colour combination. It was during this process that the figure of a lady naturally manifested in my mind, leading me to search for the ideal depiction to complement the overall composition.

Regarding the depiction of figures, I allocated varying degrees of detail to ensure a cohesive narrative and visual equilibrium. It took many years of practice to develop the confidence in order to impose upon the characters a certain level of detail, but in this painting I feel I have achieved this. Determining the most appropriate visual representation for the painting at hand is a conceptual skill which requires my physical skills to depict the subjects in meticulous detail. The artistic exploration of creation and the process of writing this report have further substantiated my artistic choices.

Additionally, I consciously allowed brushstrokes to traverse freely in certain areas, thereby engendering unexpected intricacies within the visual composition. These can be

²⁰³ Avis Berman, "Hopper: The Supreme American Realist of the 20th-Century," July 2007, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/hopper-156346356/>.

portrayed in the painting such as the grass in the A World Beyond, no.1, the stage where the lemur stands in the A World Beyond, no.6, and the landscape in A World Beyond, no.3.

Many female characters in this series are borrowed from covers of fashion magazines like Vogue. This stems from my complex feelings and interest towards fashion. On one hand, fashion represents a widely accepted hierarchy of beauty. Although this definition has evolved to become more inclusive and diverse, the approval of being featured on a Vogue cover, for example, still holds significant value. Additionally, the intense capitalism, relentless pursuit of fame and wealth, prevalent in the industry create a constant state of anxiety and concerns. On the other hand, I find myself drawn to the melancholic, ethereal and dream-like imagery fashion portrays, even though it may be unreal and accompanied by a degree of pretentiousness.

It is important for me to create figures that I believe. I believe them to be real, have their own narrative, their own struggle and worries. This also extends to the space I build in paintings. The realness of painting as a whole is to the “soul” level, it is a kind of truth on the emotional level, which to me, is more real than the reality. The characters among are real characters but also the selective details that are representative to the realness in the created world. As Marion Milner said:

“I wanted painting to be both a means towards and a record of true imaginative perception of significance. And to do this it was necessary to select those details of appearances which emphasised the nature of the ‘soul’ of what I was looking at, a ‘soul’ which was both really there, but which also was something that I had given to it from my own memory and feeling, since otherwise I would not have been able to see what was really there.”²⁰⁴

On the CEMAI diagram of “The World Beyond” series, I situate myself roughly in a region roughly centred in the middle of the liberal and the professional as I feel I have utilised equally my technical and conceptual strengths. The title itself suggests a multi-layered universe; that there is always a world beyond. In painting this series, I merged many

²⁰⁴ Marion Milner, “The Role “The role of the medium”, *On Not Being Able to Paint*, 2nd ed. London: Heinemann Educational, 1957, e-book.

different worlds together, and played with different scales. The upper layer often holds the larger characters who are observing the characters below, such as the lady in blue skin posing in the front in *A World Beyond*. No. 1, watching the people in the lower layer of golf land. However, this does not work the other way around. The people on the golf land are already smugly enjoying their privileged life in their own world. Finally, this whole scene is below a layer of llamas who are watching everything nonchalantly. One popular interpretation of such depictions of structure and unequal vision may be to draw parallels to social class, transcultural experiences, and so on. However, I wish to emphasise that I do not intend to suggest anything so specific. They portray only my feelings experienced in day-to-day life and represent my emotional truth. To me, these different universes are as real as the one we inhabit, and figures in them real inasmuch as we are. I have deep empathy and feel for each and every one of them. This feeling of connection to the characters is one of the reasons I paint.

As for the connections to art history, I do not worry too much about giving my painting a name of style or genre. Some have said my paintings have some visual relevance with impressionism and expressionism. I must admit that it is true my technical training introduced me to a system of handling light and colour which is common in impressionism, and I am biased towards expressing with bold strokes that echo expressionist visual themes. However, the impressionists and expressionists had their own unique arguments during their time that does not apply to today's world. Therefore, despite the possible visual references in my paintings, they are very different practices to contemporary painting.

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