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Transmogrify

By Yehsiming Jue

Teeth are unique to the individual just like fingerprints. I paint human sets of teeth and their stages of mutations to explore the connections between our own naturally occurring inner mutations and our science-encuded rebuilding of these structures from stem cells. These duplicated and mirrored forms originate from teeth stem cells and their ability to regenerate our teeth. I also use teeth in my work because they represent us as a whole yet erase the boundary line of gender; while they still follow a naturally occurring, common process. So we can all relate to teeth, yet they are very personal identifiers.

With the advancements of research on the regenerative properties of the stem cells, science is discovering the next evolutionary step. For the equally opposite reason, research on teeth also intrigues me. Our teeth mutate the most during our childhood, when new teeth are being formed and our old ones pushed out. This normally happens at an influential stage of life, when memories are usually forgotten but are impactful on choices made throughout adulthood.

In the process of creating my work I see my own personal mutations happening in the work's materials and techniques. I use reference images that I find online at medium resolution and keep their pixilated imperfections. Within these pixilated portions of the image I see these mutated forms. All my paintings begin with a highly detailed drawing of the form and then after everything is laid out, I begin painting. In this stage, the form begins to break out of its boundaries and truly transform.

My work also looks at the microscopic level of the transformations, in contrast to more solidified final structures of the teeth. After looking at microscopic forms the work becomes more abstract and free flowing, while my earlier work is more representational and set in place. I use subjective coloring for aesthetic reasons emulating the false coloring of SEM (scanning electron microscope) images to draw the viewer in to see objects or shapes that might otherwise be lost. I also use an artificial shine in my painting and a glossy resin finish. My fascination with shine has carried over to a more fetishistic attraction that the teeth similarly carry.

I manipulate my images to change their appearance toward strange or grotesque connotations. But by making a connection between aesthetics and the incredible human body with all its balance, harmony and perfect rhythm; the seemingly strange might not seem so grotesque. Through transmogrification, whether it be our own naturally occurring process or a more scientific approach, one must maintain their individuality while still recognizing they are part of a whole, not too different than him or her self. In our imperfections true beauty can be found if only through the eyes of the right beholder.