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<https://doi.org/10.18297/etd/3880>

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BETWIXT & BETWEEN

By

Xuanyi Wang

B.F.A., Bowling Green State University, 2018

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Art and Design

Department of Art and Design

University of Louisville

Louisville, Kentucky

May 2022

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BETWIXT & BETWEEN

By

Xuanyi Wang

A Thesis Approved on

April 19, 2022

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To Grandma and Mom

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Professor Tiffany Calvert

Professor Ying Kit Chan

Professor John Gibson

Professor Rachel Singel

Professor Mark Priest

Professor Kevin Schroeder

ABSTRACT  
BETWIXT & BETWEEN

Xuanyi Wang

April 19, 2022

In this thesis, I will discuss the process of learning, borrowing, and exploring the fusion between styles that emerged from the exchange of Eastern and Western civilizations. I will also use the process of transformation and merging of motifs to evoke my thoughts on the identity of immigrants. In addition, the essay will also discuss the similarities between traditional Chinese and Western designs metaphorically. This thesis will also explain why I use IUDs for pattern creation and provide views on the body ownership of women in the East and West. I will also consider the evolution and reflection of the female figure in artmaking through body ownership. Finally, I will also use self-portraits that contrast feminist works from the East and West, to explain the series of self-portraits I have painted.



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## INTRODUCTION

I grew up in China and came to the United States to study oil painting as an adult. I have always, consciously, or unconsciously, looked for similarities to my homeland in American culture. Despite the differences in cultural traditions between the East and the West, I always find things that blend the two; including certain games we played in our childhood, certain foods, and everyday items, such as the patterns on clothing fabrics. I am constantly exploring these cultural similarities in my work. I have found that some American fabric patterns are highly similar to those of the East. The flower pattern on the cloth printed in America is identical to the Chinese national flower, Peony; the butterfly on the silk fabric printed in Italy, has a drawing method in common with the Chinese ink painting; and the robe produced in China in the traditional Hanfu<sup>1</sup> style is printed with a Western floral pattern. This intermingling of patterns from different countries inspired great interest and thought. It has made me think about the integration between cultures due to immigration trends.

One of the unique abilities of human beings is the ability to embrace our own culture, while accepting other regional cultures and diverse ways of living. Moreover, we always carry the cultural imprint of our families and the environment in which we grew up. Cultural phenomena in societies are constantly interacting and interpenetrating. When we are in a new environment, the culture and background of that environment will influence each of us implicitly. This influence is inevitable, a shift that we may not even be cognizant of. However, our ideologies have silently changed.

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<sup>1</sup> Hànfú is the traditional styles of clothing worn by the Han Chinese. Wikipedia.

Different cultures and historical backgrounds have shaped the similarities and differences in the form of women's thoughts in both Eastern and Western cultures. In Chinese Confucianism, " Our bodies – to every hair and bit of skin – are received by us from our parents, and we must not presume to injure or wound them.<sup>2</sup> "; this traditional concept greatly influenced my family and my upbringing. This influenced my early self-image and internal guideline, "As a woman, you have to listen to your parents, listen to your husband, and not have too much opinion." My rebellion against these ideas is reflected in my artworks. Why do I paint motifs in my work? How does body ownership influence my work? In my thesis, I will discuss these questions in-depth and how they have influenced the formal shifts inherent in my images.

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<sup>2</sup> Aris Teon, "Face, Filial Piety and Work Motivation in Chinese Culture," *The Greater China Journal*, March 4, 2017, 2022, <https://china-journal.org/2017/03/04/face-filial-piety-and-work-motivation-in-chinese-culture/>.

## I. THE CONVERGENCE OF EASTERN AND WESTERN DECORATIVE MOTIFS

In *The Language of Ornament*, it is stated that decoration did not evolve within absolute time or geographical categories but reflected cultural interactions and transformations through migration, trade, conquest, and the spread of religion. Inspired by traditional African motifs, an American designer created a new type of carpet made by Tibetan artisans and eventually sold in France<sup>3</sup>. Even today, some fabric designs have the visual elements of European styles and the artistic style of Asian countries. How did these decorative patterns with Eastern and Western art characteristics come into being? In my research, I found that three critical periods in history formed the intersection of Eastern and Western patterns.

### i. Silk Road

The Silk Road began as an economic strategy of China's Han Dynasty for the Western Regions of China and originated in 202-208 BC. Generally, there were at least three, namely the Grassland Silk Road, the Desert Oasis Silk Road, and the Maritime Silk Road. The so-called Silk Road refers to a dense network of trade connecting the East and West markets. Since the beginning of the Silk Road, China and the Western countries have used this trade network not only for material exchange but also for exchanging ideas and spirits through international contacts. Silk was one of China's most important export goods. In the 1930s, French archaeological teams discovered fragments of Eastern Han silk at the site of Palmyra in Syria, the eastern border of the Roman Empire. Roman merchants first

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<sup>3</sup> James Trilling, 2001, *The Language of Ornament*, p.104.

purchased Chinese plain silk from merchants of the Sabbath Empire, after which it was shipped to the center of the Near Eastern textile industry on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. The silk was rewoven and dyed according to the patterns favored by the Romans and eventually distributed throughout the Roman Empire<sup>4</sup>.

In the middle of the Ming Dynasty, Spanish and Portuguese merchants came to Chinese waters from the Pacific and Indian Oceans, opening up the Pacific and Indian Ocean trade routes between Europe and China. In the 17th and 18th centuries, the Netherlands and Britain also joined the silk trade with China<sup>5</sup>.

## ii. Chinoiserie

The expansion of the Silk Road by sea allowed Chinese goods to be sold all over the world, and by this time, silk was no longer just the main commodity for trade; in addition to silk, porcelain was also favored by Western countries. "European manufacturers took advantage of this craze by beginning to produce designs in imitation of the Chinese," says Anca Last, Associate Professor in History of Art and Design at the Pratt Institute. Such goods, which ranged from furniture to textiles to fine art, featured Chinese materials (or imitations) such as porcelain and lacquer, plus Chinese motifs like pagodas, dragons, and flora as imagined through the highly fantastical Western lens. "They were specifically made to match the European taste rather than respecting the Chinese originals," says Last<sup>6</sup>. The most typical example of Chinoiserie comes from 1700, when Louis XIV was dressed in Chinese costume during a grand ball in the gilded halls of Versailles, France, and sat in a

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<sup>4</sup> Lin Meicun, "The Cornish Brocade on The Silk Road," *Discovery of Civilizations of Central Asia*, June 15, 2007, Accessed 2022, [http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/narratives/discovery/11/index.html.zh#FigSource\\_1](http://dsr.nii.ac.jp/narratives/discovery/11/index.html.zh#FigSource_1).

<sup>5</sup> "What is the Silk Road and how many are there?" *China Internet News Center*; China Silk Museum, December 16, 2014, Accessed April 21, 2022, [https://www.ciis.org.cn/ydylyjzx/slbl/202007/t20200716\\_4128.html](https://www.ciis.org.cn/ydylyjzx/slbl/202007/t20200716_4128.html).

<sup>6</sup> Stefanie Waldek, "No, Chinoiserie Isn't Really Chinese." *House Beautiful*, November 2, 2021. Accessed 2022, <https://www.housebeautiful.com/design-inspiration/a34693915/history-of-chinoiserie/>.

Chinese palanquin. Louis XIV was dressed in Chinese costume and appeared in a Chinese palanquin. The Chinoiserie motifs were introduced into numerous different types of art,



including architecture, interior design, ceramic art, textiles and silks, fine art painting, decorative art, and a variety of crafts<sup>7</sup>.

(Picture: *The Chinese Garden*, 1742, oil on canvas, Musée des Beaux-Arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon.)

### iii. Republic of China

Printmaking, like embroidery and weaving, was a method used to increase the beauty of the cloth. Europe was exposed to Indian printed cloth in the 17th century. In 1785, Scotsman Bell invented the roller printing technique and put calico into industrial production. This was followed by the British Arts and Crafts Movement in 1861, launched by British designer William Morris, which marked a sudden advance in print design. 1925 saw the establishment of British textile printing and dyeing factories in Shanghai, China. During the Chinese Republican era, the most popular floral fabrics in Shanghai were produced by the British-owned Lun Chang Printing and Dyeing Factory. At the same time, this group of Shanghai designers brought Western designs into the production of Chinese floral fabrics<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> "Chinoiserie Pseudo-Chinese Style of Decoration and Design," *Encyclopedia of Art Education, Chinoiserie: History, Characteristics, Motifs*. Accessed April 21, 2022. <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/definitions/chinoiserie.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> Jin Dalu, "The Extraordinary and the Normal: Social Life in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution" (above), p. 214. "Big red and green flower cloth is the spiritual totem of the northeasterners, but it is actually an invention of the Shanghainese," *Sohu*, April 12, 2018, [https://www.sohu.com/a/228102506\\_546085](https://www.sohu.com/a/228102506_546085).

The work *Betwixt & Between* is a hand-sewn quilt created using traditional quilting techniques. I inherited my grandmother's needlework skills from her. I use Chinese Brocade, American and European floral fabrics, and my own naturally dyed fabrics in this piece. The dyes were made from food items that are a part of my life. As a traditionally female craft art form, quilting is a part of American culture and Chinese culture. I use this work as a metaphor for myself, a female immigrant from China; I am the product of different cultures but still uniquely myself.



#### iv. The Metaphor of Patterns



The silk trade generated an exchange and intermingling of eastern and western culture, ideas, styles, and visual motifs. The same intersection of pattern and culture is reflected in my work; I am not truly part of American culture and am slowly disconnecting from the current

Chinese culture. I have become an independent, in-between being.

The title of this painting is *From my dream; I had forgotten about all of this— myself*.  
This verse comes from Li Yu in the late Tang Dynasty. *Looking South to the River II*

*Outside the curtains: Sa Sa, the sound  
of rain. Spring is almost over. These silk blankets  
are too thin, the fifth watch too cold  
and in my dream, I had forgotten  
about all of this—myself, this exile.*

*Again, in pleasure.*

*I am starting to think—that when the sun  
is setting and you are resting alone, it's better not  
to look south to those streams and hills. Leaving  
them was easy—but going back last night  
was hard. The waters flowing away. The flowers  
breaking to the ground. Spring has also left.*

*That heaven, this earth<sup>9</sup>.*

In *The Birth of Tragedy*<sup>10</sup>, Nietzsche uses the symbols of Apollo, the god of the sun, and Dionysus, the god of wine, to illustrate the origin, nature, and function of art and the meaning of life. In Nietzsche's view, the ancient Greeks relied on the dreams of Apollo to find relief from the pain of reality in their bitter reality. Apollo symbolizes the spiritual instinct to provide the world and life with a beautiful appearance. But this is unreal, which is only a dream. Dreams beautify this world during our lives. In my works, my body and its patterns are in part what Nietzsche would call "Apollonian": they are beautiful but mere fantasy, empty of reality. The appearance of beauty is illusory, an impression that gives rise to a beautiful fantasy of the things around us. These beautiful dreams guide us to move

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<sup>9</sup> Li Yu, "Looking South to the River II," Translator by Ken Chen and Donna Chen Snow. *Tencent Cloud*, 2012, <http://bbs.yzs.com/thread-301074-1-1.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Birth of Tragedy*. New York: Vintage Books Knopf, div. of Random House, 1967.



forward in our lives. In this beautiful appearance, we are so intoxicated by the illusion created by our dreams that we forget all the pain and stress that we endure in real life. But we must wake up from dreams. Nietzsche thought that the spirit of Apollo could only let people stay on the surface of things without exploring the truth of the world and life. Therefore, when the beautiful veil of dream is lifted, we begin to face the unbearable real world directly. Will we fall into despair as a result? Or does our nature give us the desire to challenge the reality of life? From this emerges the spirit of Dionysus. Nietzsche considers the spirit of Dionysus, which is the disguised going to love life, a true affirmation of the value and meaning of the life essence. As the primary form of Dionysian, Intoxication is the joy of passion and the pain of existence, pain but happiness. This unspeakable pain hones one's will to live. The seeming chaos of the shifting patterns that appear on the figure's body in my work it is the external expression of my inner universe.

My work uses patterns and my own body to bridge intangible consciousness and tangible beauty. I try to combine my body with a patterned background in this body of work. The background patterns transform my body, and in this way, I show my inner thoughts and spirit. In addition, I also want to show an individual's ability to adapt to their surroundings. By fusing the human body with various ornamental patterns, I rethink my own identity, relate European culture to my own national culture, and examine the impact of environmental change on me. Although the changing patterns are tangible, they have also simplified images that condense the cultural ideas of each country. One could say that the pattern itself is an artistic symbol distilled by the spirit of the culture. Just like a wanderer, whether in China or America, I walk on the edge of the collision of divergent cultures and deeply feel the simultaneous existence of both. Chinese culture, American culture, and European culture imprints are all part of the composition of my soul. As I grow older and mature and experience different countries and peoples, I try to integrate myself into the ever-changing environments.



Color plays a pivotal role in human ideology and emotional imagination. In this work, I employ the complementary colors of violet and yellow as the work's overall tone. Complementary colors have the greatest color difference due to being the furthest apart on the color wheel, and the color contrast is dramatic. I used the sense of conflict created by the complementary

color contrast to show the sense of conflict and division within me due to the vast cultural differences between East and West. Everything we experience or seem to see is just a dream within a dream. The characters in the painting are not the "real" me but fiction. The butterfly looks more lifelike than the figure, but it is not; they are both just part of a painting, illusionary and unreal. Unlike the butterfly, the person's soul in the dream is real. She represents my process as an immigrant to a foreign nation, rejection, acceptance, integration, and unification. The background is a mixture of yellow and purple, representing the interweaving and fusion of the two cultures in my life, finally mixed as the basis of me. This work is inspired by Edgar Allan Poe's poem *A Dream within a Dream*.<sup>11</sup>

*You are not wrong, who deem  
That my days have been a dream.  
Yet if hope has flown away*

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<sup>11</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "A Dream within a Dream by Edgar Allan Poe." 1849, *Poetry Foundation*, Accessed April 21, 2022. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52829/a-dream-within-a-dream>.

*In a night, or in a day,  
In a vision, or in none,  
Is it therefore the less gone?  
All that we see or seem  
Is but a dream within a dream.*

v. Traditional Chinese motifs

China has its traditional auspicious motifs and motifs that incorporate the cultures of various countries. The content of these motifs is diverse, and they reflect politics, history, religious customs, and many other aspects of Chinese tradition. A good example is the traditional Chinese auspicious motif *Picture of Hundred Sons*. This work



originates from the ancient Chinese dynasty, the Zhou Dynasty, created around 1044 BC. In the legend, King Wen, the founding emperor of the Zhou Dynasty, had one hundred children. "In the One Hundred Children Playing painting, the children are all boys. The number one hundred is taken metaphorically to mean "innumerable." In Chinese culture, the more boys in the family, the more productive the family is and the better the family name and lineage can be continued<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> *Private Life*, Published by University of Washington, Accessed April 21, 2022, <https://depts.washington.edu/chinaciv/painting/tptgdoms.htm>.



In my work *As You Can See*, I use fabrics with One Hundred Children covering the female body. I also divide the emergence of female self-awareness guided by feminist thinking and the responsibility of women in society into two different acts. On the one hand, women are

educated by the traditional Eastern thought, and they must face all kinds of female responsibilities imposed by society to be dutiful children, be good wives and mothers, and even take care of their grandchildren when they are older. On the other hand, it shows women's self-awareness; women want to find their self-worth and realize their life pursuit and ideal. Without a body, there is no self. Therefore, in work, the two hands are pulling down the "hundred children" fabric, uncovering the body; it also symbolizes the pulling off of the various codes of behavior that society has put on women. Just as the pomegranate has been given multiple cultural meanings, the pomegranate is still a pomegranate. The growth cycle of the pomegranate forms a closed loop in this work. Because of its many internal seeds, the pomegranate has been given many meanings in both Eastern and Western cultures. Further, the pomegranate is a powerful symbol of fertility and female sexuality in Western culture. In Eastern culture, the pomegranate symbolizes fertility and good fortune<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Nora Kovats, "The Pomegranate: An Exploration of the Pomegranate's Meaning in History, Mythology & Symbolology." NORA KOVATS, January 24, 2021. <https://www.norakovats.com/blog/2020/3/10/the-pomegranate>.

## II. THE VISIBLE AND THE INVISIBLE

Before the founding of New China, having many children and grandchildren was considered the family's "good fortune." It was considered an important responsibility to pass on the family name to the next generation. Traditional Chinese society is centered on male power, and the eldest father is the decision-maker of the family or clan and has the power to control family property and arbitrate family disputes; men have a higher status than women, and women are only appendages of men. Women's behavior should be based on the "three obediences." Obeying the father before marriage, obeying the husband after marriage, and obeying the son after the husband's death as the code for women to follow. Because of this traditional family and clan concept, each family considers the boy born as the essential family successor. The primary social role of women is that of "mother."

### i. Female fertility and contraception in China

In the early years of the People's Republic of China, women were encouraged to have children, and in the early 1950s, the Chinese government banned illegal abortions and limited the conditions for sterilizations and abortions. Following the example of the Soviet Union, women who gave birth to five to ten children were given the titles "Glorious Mother" and "Heroic Mother," respectively. In this environment, China's population grew rapidly<sup>14</sup>.

To slow down population growth in the 1970s, each family was allowed to have only two children; and in September 1982, this was changed to a single child, as family planning was made a basic state policy of the country. Because family planning is coercive, it also

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<sup>14</sup> "The Twists and Turns of New China's Birth Control Policy Once Strictly Banned Abortion" Soho, *National Human History*, August 8, 2014, Accessed April 21, 2022, <https://history.sohu.com/20140808/n403266994.shtml>.

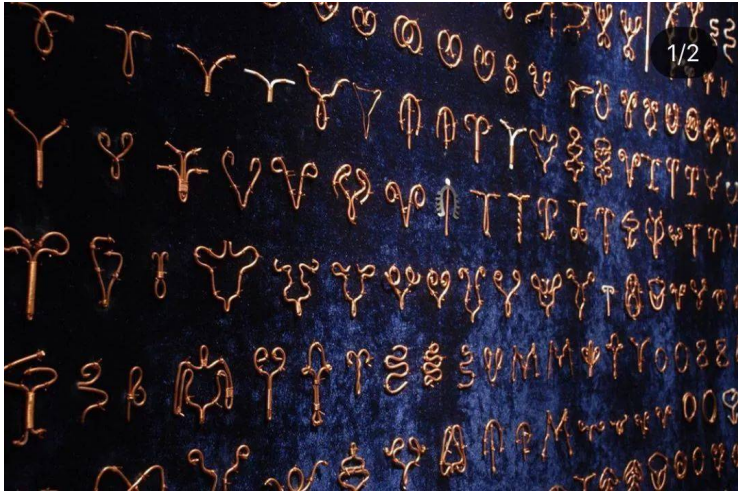
causes a great deal of suffering to women. During the family planning period, women were required to have an IUD put in place after the birth of their first child, and the Public Security Bureau licensing center made the use of an IUD mandatory. The Family Planning Department Certificate of Insertion was a requirement for a new child's hukou (identification) book<sup>15</sup>. China has effectively controlled the population growth, but this policy also has disadvantages. The aging of the Chinese society is becoming more serious, and the population is shrinking. In response to the declining birth rate and increased aging, in 2015, the country decided to implement the policy of allowing two children per couple; and in May 2021, China's population fertility policy was changed again, allowing Chinese families to have three children per couple. In addition, the State Council released the Outline for the Development of Chinese Women, which mentions the need to "improve women's reproductive health and reduce the number of non-medically necessary abortions."<sup>16</sup>

In the context of Planned Parenthood in China, the use of IUDs has deprived women of their right to free choice parenthood. Even though birth control policies are now history, today's Chinese women are free to have children, but do Chinese women now have control over their bodies? Whether it is the forced placement of IUDs in the 1980s, or the current relaxation of fertility policies and the "reduction of non-medically necessary abortions," there is a common denominator, the female body is not a personal possession in China. Whether it is pregnancy, contraception, or parenting, the decisions are not entirely up to the woman herself but are defined by social attitudes and national policies. The female body does not belong to her but is part of the whole.

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<sup>15</sup> "Haikou only child couples were difficult: IUD before issuing birth certificate" *Sina, Corporation, South China Sea Network - South China City News*, December 17, 2012, <http://news.sina.com.cn/c/2012-12-17/173225831637.shtml>.

<sup>16</sup> Wang, Yuemei, "China promises to reduce 'non-medically necessary' abortions, raising public concerns" *The New York Times*, September 28, 2021, <https://cn.nytimes.com/china/20210928/china-abortion-limits/>.



(Picture: Zhou Wenjing, IUD)

## ii. Female Fertility and Contraception in the United States

Compared to the Chinese women, whose bodies are politically controlled, American women are further along the path to body autonomy. In the early 20th century, Margaret Singer, a prominent American family planning advocate, and her predecessor, Emma Goldman, recognized that women could not be free unless they oversaw their bodies and controlled their fertility. The eighth demand of the Women's Bill of Rights proposed the elimination of all laws prohibiting abortion and the control of contraceptive knowledge and devices. The Women's National Organization first brought up abortion as a woman's right. Ultimately, the majority of delegates supported the call to eliminate abortion laws. In 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled to give American women the right to abortion<sup>17</sup>. However, in the months after the 2016 election, insurance claims for intrauterine devices across the United States rose by more than 21%, among women with commercial insurance. Cecile

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<sup>17</sup> Wang, Zheng, *The Rise of Women: The Feminist Movement in Contemporary America*, 1995, Contemporary China Publishing House.

Richards, then the president of Planned Parenthood, said that the organization had seen a 900% increase in demand for the devices<sup>18</sup>.

### iii. Body Ownership

My *The Visible and The Invisible* series is a series of woodblock prints. I developed a series of patterns according to the different historical shapes of IUDs. In contrast to IUDs promoting the lack of Chinese women's control over their bodies, in the west,



women choose to use IUDs to avoid unwanted pregnancies, thus promoting self-determination and body ownership. In China IUD use is seen by women as stigmatizing and a symbol of women's inability to control their bodies and reproductive rights. Throughout history, whether it is "heroic motherhood" or "family planning", women's bodies have been highly politicized, women have silently fought society's restrictions to achieve reproductive freedom. In Eastern and Western contexts, IUD use represents different choices in the struggle for body autonomy. The woodblock printmaking technique requires carving the board with tools, which is in itself a metaphor for the modification of women's bodies. The red is the same as the color as blood, and in the patterns, I abstracted the inner structure of the female body.

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<sup>18</sup> Maloy, Ashley Fetters. "They Rushed to Get IUDs before Trump Took Office. Five Years Later, Would They Do It Again?" *The Philadelphia Tribune*, February 10, 2022. [https://www.phillytrib.com/they-rushed-to-get-iuds-before-trump-took-office-five-years-later-would-they-do/article\\_63f45978-8d08-5789-8fdf-7f747361d628.html](https://www.phillytrib.com/they-rushed-to-get-iuds-before-trump-took-office-five-years-later-would-they-do/article_63f45978-8d08-5789-8fdf-7f747361d628.html).



### III. FEMALE BODY AND SELF-PORTRAIT

Linda Nochlin proposed:

*The fault lies not in the stars, our hormones, our menstrual cycles, or our empty internal spaces, but in our institutions and our education—education understood to include everything that happens to us from the moment we enter this world of meaningful symbols, signs and signals.*<sup>19</sup>

Because of women's historical role as caregivers for their families, it is difficult for most women to find the time to create art while. Women are usually the subject of the art created, not the artists themselves.

#### i. Female Body

Throughout the eastern and western art history, the female body has undergone an evolutionary process from romanticized to depictive. Human desire for physical beauty has evolved into idealized aesthetic psychology. In this aesthetic psychology, instinctive desire is united with aesthetic enjoyment. The evolution of the female body from an idealized form to a realistic representation, illustrates the fact men have set the standard for feminine beauty during various artistic periods. This standard has also subtly changed the psychology of women regarding self-image.

Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* was the first to launch a fierce critique and rethinking of gender essentialism. She proposed that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman"<sup>20</sup>. This viewpoint has led women artists to examine the social status and power of women in a male-dominated society, as well as the cultural positioning and depiction of women as

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<sup>19</sup> Nochlin, Linda. "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Women, Art, and Power and Other Essays*, 2018, 145–78. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429502996-7>.

<sup>20</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*. New York: A Division of Random House, 1974.

sexist. In a patriarchal society, the definition of a woman often reflects male power and its regulation of female behavior and thought. Beauvoir distinguished between biological sexuality and gender, arguing that physiology is not the determining factor, and that gender formation is deeply influenced by social culture and is not a natural phenomenon.

Judith Butler points out that Beauvoir's famous assertion that "woman is not born, but rather is formed gradually" still presupposes the existence of an identity external to the body; that there is a spiritual identity greater than the body. Beauvoir's theory of cultural construction explains the roots of gender difference, arguing that man becomes a subject while objectifying himself through the mirror image of others<sup>21</sup>.

Critical consideration of norms of female beauty and the artistic depiction of women, influences how feminist artists employ their bodies in creating art. The works of artists across the globe depict the body in different cultural and political contexts, dramatizing the recognition prevalent in contemporary feminist theory, that there is no such thing as the female body, only bodies marked by the differences in their historical situation, their geographical location, their social position, their race<sup>22</sup>. In China, discussing reproductive choice, contraception, or sex will often elicit feelings of shame or guilt in women. In the United States, women are again losing their reproductive autonomy in a male-dominated political tug-of-war. From personal experience to national policy, from private pain to the public bill, women's hard-won rights are being denied and usurped by political regulations and social opinion. Judith Butler describes the materialization of gender identity as a process in which outside moral forces act on women themselves. This process of social regulation produces a fictional form of the female body and identity that conforms to social morality and social structure, that is, the form that society expects of women. The female body form in social parameters is contrary to the spirit and uniqueness of women as

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, "Sex and Gender in Simone De Beauvoir's *Second Sex*." *Yale French Studies*, no. 72 (1986): 35. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930225>.

<sup>22</sup> Carolyn Korsmeyer and Peg Brand Weiser. "Feminist Aesthetics." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, March 12, 2021. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-aesthetics/>.

individuals. The governmental rules that restrict or promote childbirth and the traditional beliefs and gender determining norms that celebrate the birthing of many children, impede an individual's ability to decide on their own gender identity or embrace those unique qualities they perceive as being a "woman."

The traces of carving used in my series of woodblock prints, *The Visible and The Invisible*, illustrate the false form of the female body, carved by social consciousness and governmental rules. Suppose *The Visible and The Invisible* is the transformation of the female body by external forces. In my self-portraits, the female figures show the alteration of the physical form by internal spiritual forces.

## ii. Self-Portrait

In *The Labyrinth of the Self: The Artist's Self*, Gu Zheng mentions:

*In fact, our state in front of the mirror is always somewhat false, because we do not have a perspective from which we can observe ourselves from the outside, so at this time we are also incarnated as some uncertain and possibly other people, and we try to find a value position towards ourselves through this person. Person to find a value position towards ourselves, and this is when we are also trying to give life to and formally process ourselves through others.*<sup>23</sup>

The self-portrait is the painter's self-examination. The painter analyzes and re-conceives themselves and expresses what they consider to be the most natural and representative appearance and expressing spiritual characteristics. However, the self-portrait is not an entirely authentic self-presentation because, the artist is also the viewer of the work. The artist sees themselves as one who is watching "themselves" in the crowd.

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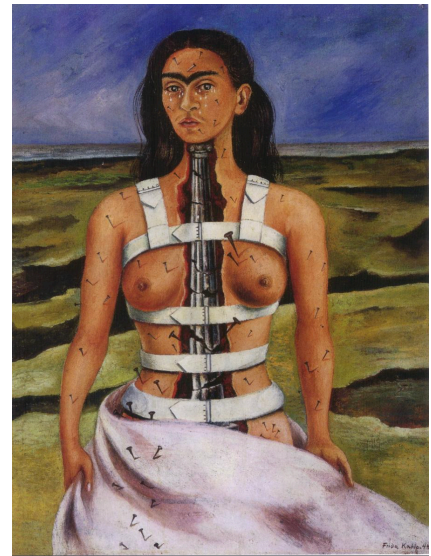
<sup>23</sup> Gu Zheng, *The Labyrinth of the Self: The Artist's self*, Shandong Pictorial Press, 2003, p. 7.



The work of Pan Yuliang, a Chinese artist of the Republican period, sufficiently explains the idea of objectifying oneself while becoming a subject. Pan Yuliang's self-portraits are still processed or reconstructed selves. What she tries to represent in the picture seems to be not just the "real self", but a Pan Yuliang that she wants to present to others as the natural or an "objectified" Pan Yuliang. The independent, confident, pure, and beautiful "real self", shrouded by external visual appearances and worldly prejudices is what Pan Yuliang seeks and what she hopes others will recognize and accept.

(Picture: Pan Yuliang Self-portraits)

In addition, the works of Frida Kahlo, a Mexican woman painter in the early 20th century, influenced the surrealism in my self-portraits. In *The Broken Column*, the mirror shows the duality of existence, making the self both the observer and the observed. This self-portrait embodies many elements in Kahlo's artwork, including the themes of isolation, a broken body, and intense suffering and pain. This painting also represents another one of Kahlo's themes, that of two bodies, one of which she is a complete and full-bodied woman, and another reflecting broken inside<sup>24</sup>.



My paintings are inspired by these two female artists, one from the east and one from the west. In my experience and Chinese culture, there is a profound conflict between ideals

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<sup>24</sup> *The Broken Column*, "Frida Kahlo - 100 Artworks - Painting." *WikiArt Visual Art Encyclopedia*, Feb 17, 2011, by xennex, Accessed April 21, 2022. <https://www.wikiart.org/en/frida-kahlo>.

and reality. On the one hand, there is the inescapable trauma from my family and my gender as a woman, on the other hand, there is my ultimate quest for the meaning of life. As a Chinese woman born at the end of the last century, I experienced both China's "reform and opening up" period. I grew up in an environment both of economic backwardness and rapid economic development. During this process, my feminist consciousness began to awaken. I began to rethink the values of women in the family, from the dependence of women on the family in a patriarchal society to the cultivation of an independent and autonomous feminine consciousness; from the discrimination of women's gender in society and the family, to having an independent female persona. I experienced women's dreams and the helplessness of those dreams colliding with reality. All the experiences, the ups and downs of my life, and the spiritual transformations have formed the unique visual character of my works.

The sentence "Rose is a rose is a rose is Gertrude Stein wrote a rose" in the 1913 poem "Sacred Emily." In that poem, the first "Rose" is a person's name. "A rose is a rose is a rose" is often interpreted as meaning "things are what they are."<sup>25</sup> The name given to me at birth was Jing Wang, due to issues with the Chinese written form of this name, I changed my name to Xuanyi Wang (a name my grandfather gave me). Prior to me officially changing my name to Xuanyi, when my mother became a Christian, she wanted to give me a Christian name, Rosamond. I choose to go by "Rose" when I am able. Given the history of my various names, the poem by Gertrude Stein resonated with me. No matter what I am called or what name I use, I remain myself.

In traditional thought, Chinese women's bodies are confined by society. Exposing the female body of is a social and cultural taboo. In my work, I push back against this taboo by displaying my physical form as well as my inner spirit. Body and spirit are one, and they are inseparable ingredients of myself. The self-portraiture provides me an intense

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<sup>25</sup> Gary Martin, "A Rose Is a Rose Is a Rose' - the Meaning and Origin of This Phrase." *Phrasefinder*. Accessed April 21, 2022. <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/a-rose-is-a-rose-is-a-rose.html>.



introspective experience and an access to my subjective life. I work with the self as the object, projecting a self-image onto a surface outside of the self. Objectifying the "I" into the "other". The depiction, distorting, fictionalizing, and transforming of the self, creates new visual experiences and psychological feelings for me. I constantly

choose myself as the object of artistic expression, "othering" myself for creation. At this point, these self-portraits cease to be mere self-portraits. These works, which reproduce the female self, allow me to transfer and sublimate the emotions in my life. This is a cathartic experience; the creative process is a self-healing process. Viewing these works are moments of contemplation, reflection, renewal, and self-affirmation, when the mirror image of art not only reflects and mirrors the reality of a woman's situation, but also an essential intermediary for my self-growth and continuous maturation as a woman.

## CONCLUSION

Each person's life is an extensive artistic act, and that person's life journey becomes a unique work. Everyone uses their own rich natural vitality to create art, appreciate art, and interpret life through art. I introduce my life into the sacred realm of artistic aesthetics and understand the reality and transcendence of through this artistic creation. Vitality determines the sensual condition of the human body in art and aesthetics, and how the human body enters the realm of art. By becoming the embodied form of spirit, the human sensual and physical condition equips them to create art and appreciate it. As art and life both originate from the body, we need to consider the impact of art and beauty on our lives by means of the body itself.

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APPENDIX: A LIST OF IMAGES FROM  
BETWIXT & BETWEEN



2021, Roots, Oil on Panel



2022, The Visible and The Invisible II, Woodblock



2022, The Visible and The Invisible II, Woodblock

## CURRICULUM VITAE

Wang, Xuanyi

Born Tianjin, China

Lives in Toledo, OH

### EDUCATION

2019-2022 MFA University of Louisville, Louisville, KY

2015-2018 BFA Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH

2013-2015 Owens Community College, Toledo, OH

2001-2005 Tianjin University, Tianjin, China

### AWARDS

2022 Best in Show, The Virtual Art Show Gallery, [heartsneedart.org/gallery](http://heartsneedart.org/gallery)

2021 Special Merit, Light Space & Time Online Art Gallery

2018 Medici Circle Cup Best of Show, BFA Show, Bowling Green State University, OH

2017 The Bev Fisher Award, Findlay Art League Fall Show, Findlay Art League, Findlay,  
OH

2017 Honorable Mention, Findlay Art League Fall Show, Findlay Art League, Findlay,  
OH

2017 Bowling Green Arts Council People's Choice Award, NOWOH Exhibition,  
Bowling Green, OH

2017 Toledo Federation of Arts Societies Award, NOWOH Exhibition, Bowling Green,  
OH

2017 Honorable Mention in Digital Imaging, Student Show, Bowling Green State  
University, OH

2017 Honorable Mention in Painting, Student Show, Bowling Green State University, OH

2015 First Place, Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH

2015 Third Place, Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH  
2015 Honorable Mention, Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH  
2014 Third Place, Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH

#### SCHOLARSHIP

2021 Graduate Teaching Assistantship, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY  
2020 Graduate Teaching Assistantship, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY  
2019 Research Assistantship, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY  
2017 James W. Strong 2D Tuition Scholarship, Bowling Green State University  
2017 Ringholz Art Supplies Award In 2D Studies, Bowling Green State University

#### EXHIBITIONS

##### SELECTED GROUP SHOWS

2022 BETWIXT & BETWEEN, MFA Thesis Exhibition, MFA Gallery, Louisville, KY  
2022 Asia in Motion, Cressman Center for Visual Arts, Louisville, KY  
2020 Closer: A Curated Digital Gallery Experience, Toledo, OH  
2019 'On Being' Travel Art Exhibitions  
- Robert Kidd Gallery, Birmingham, MI,  
- Artlink Contemporary Gallery, Fort Wayne, IN,  
- Artspace/Lima - Art Gallery, Lima, OH  
2017 Winner's Circle Exhibition, Four Corners Center, Bowling Green, OH

##### JURIED EXHIBITIONS

2022 2021 "I No Longer Fear Death, I Fear Not Living" Art Show, The Virtual Art Show  
Gallery, [heartsneedart.org/gallery](https://heartsneedart.org/gallery)  
2022 FIGURES Online Art Exhibition, Art-Fluent Online Gallery, [art-fluent.com](https://art-fluent.com)  
2021 OSL Juried Exhibition, Cressman Center for Visual Arts, Louisville, KY  
2021 FATE: Infrastructure 2021 Juried members (Virtual) Exhibition  
2021 10th Annual 'All Women' Online Art Exhibition, Light Space & Time Online Art  
Gallery

2020 Five Themes Project Exhibition “Weathered”, Manifest Gallery, Cincinnati, OH  
2018 BFA Juried Exhibition, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH  
2017 Freedom of Expression Exhibition, Cape Cod Museum of Art, Dennis, MA  
2017 NOWOH 2017, BGSU Fine Art Galleries, Bowling Green, OH  
2017 Findlay Art League Fall Show, Findlay Art League Gallery, Findlay, OH  
2017 Juried Student Show, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH  
2015 Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH  
2014 Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH

#### BENEFIT EXHIBITIONS

2018 TSA Undisclosed, Toledo School of Art, Toledo, OH  
2017 TSA Undisclosed, Toledo School of Art, Toledo, OH

#### WORK EXPERIENCE

2020-22 Teaching Assistant, 2D Design. University of Louisville, KY  
2018-19 Mural Painting Assistant, ProMedica Museum of Natural History, Toledo Zoo,  
Toledo, OH  
Mural Painting Assistant, Premedical Park Garage, Toledo, OH  
2010-11 Digital Art Instructor, Digital Art Studio, Tianjin Normal University, Tianjin,  
China  
2007-10 Book Editor, Tianjin Yang Liu Qing Painting Society Publishing House, Tianjin,  
China  
2005-07 Illustrator, Tianjin Diversified Cartoon Company, Tianjin, China

#### PUBLICATIONS

2022 Award Winning Artists Interview, *"I No Longer Fear Death, I Fear Not Living"*  
Virtual Art Show.  
2022 Artists Talk with LVA, *Asia in Motion Art Exhibition 2022*, January 19, 2022.

- 2020 Toledo Blade, *Art Supply Depo exhibition explores coronavirus*, May 21, 2020, p.16.
- 2019 Artists Talk with LVA, Open Studio Weekend *LVA's Artebella on The Radio*, October 24, 2019.
- 2019 *On Being*, Realism and BGSU School of Art Painting and Drawing Program, June 29, 2019
- 2018 Prairie Margins, Bowling Green State University. p. 41-44. Front Cover and Back Cover.
- 2016 Prairie Margins, Bowling Green State University. p. 43.
- 2010 Illustrations for Children Book, *The Children of Captain Grant*. China Publishing Group Corp.
- 2007-11 Serialized Comics, *Roams*, Sina Com.
- 2007 Illustrations for Children Book, *Variety Closet- Pretty Princess*. Diversified Cartoon Company. Hubei Children's Publishing House.
- 2006 Illustrations for Children Book, *Variety Closet-Fantasy Elves*. Diversified Cartoon Company. Hubei Children's Publishing House.
- 2006 Illustrations for Children Book, *Reading and Drawing*. Diversified Cartoon Company. Printing Industries Publishing House.
- 2006 Illustrations for Children Book, *Elf Princess (Coloring Book)*. Diversified Cartoon Company. Hubei Children's Publishing House.
- 2005 Illustrations for Children Book, *Elf Fairy (Coloring Book)*. Diversified Cartoon Company. Hubei Children's Publishing House.

#### JUROR

2017 Juried Student Show, Owens Community College, Toledo, OH

#### NOMINATION

2020-2021 Faculty Favorites Award Nomination, University of Louisville, KY