

Planet China

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International Women's Day 2023

After years of the Covid pandemic on the occasion of International Women's Day 2023, there is an air of greater freedom, and life for some has almost returned to normal. On this day it is important to share the success stories of women who have led and led to the development and contribute to the emancipation of other women who still live in need of freedom and to be recognized. War and earthquakes have once again overwhelmed the lives of those who were recovering after these long years of pandemic. Remembering the women who carry on the debate by feeding it with different and better perspectives is essential. It is also important to restore hope in places where it always seems difficult to take your life back into your own hands. Celebrating who built the road, who is walking it, and who makes it safe in such a way as to encourage future generations not to be frightened, and not demoralised but always have faith and move forward is important to understand how far they have come. Stopping, celebrating, and looking back is also important at this time to remember that we are in a privileged position at this point in the history of humanity, despite everything, it is true that there are still many things that are wrong and that we can improve the situation. But women are now where they never went. And they can still achieve infinite goals. This is why it is important to always remain determined, whatever happens, to concentrate on one's desires, without ever being afraid to challenge oneself and face new goals. Determined and adventurous. We want to thank the women who shared their stories showing the importance of following personal goals and having courage. Demonstrating how it is important for women also to support other women in dialogue and understanding.





*This free ebook
includes interviews
with artists,
writers, entrepre-
neurs & thinkers*

**China
underground**

China-underground.com and CinaOggi.it are two web magazines curated by Matteo Damiani and Dominique Musorrafti dedicated to Chinese culture. Since 2002, China-underground has organized cultural events, festivals, and created documentaries, photo reports, and magazines.

Interviews

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This issue is a collection of selected interviews with inspiring women that worked hard to reach their path and dreams. All these women are connected with China from all over the world. They moved around the world to reach their goals. International Women's Day is a day for commemorates the movement for women's rights. A day for remembering the past days in which women were not allowed to be themselves, to think, to talk, to study, to vote, etc. In some countries of the world, these problems still exist, for this reason, it is important to have examples, a source of inspiration to help other women to follow their desires, never stop fighting for what they believe. Engage to achieve goals in any field. Women can be everything they want to be.

Celebrating Women Who Push Boundaries





XIANG JING



RED HONGYI



LI XINMO



PEGGY CHAN



ALLISON
FONG



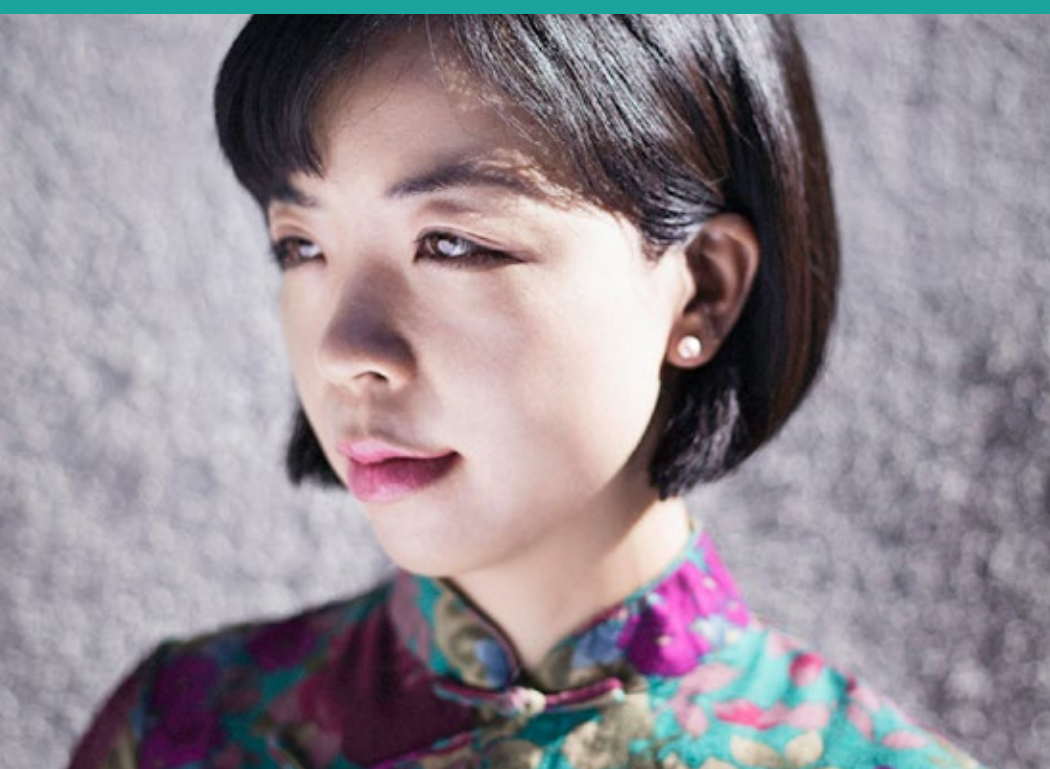
NANCY LIN



DENISE HO



SUYI XU



AMY LUO



YIRAN JIA



YI LUO



YANG LIU



JING YUE

*Photos courtesy of Xiang Jing
Special thanks to Dong*

XIANG JING

The Sculptress that Captures and
Shapes her Investigation of the
‘Internality’ of Human Nature



Xiang Jing is a sculptress, who graduated from the Department of Sculpture of China Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) in Beijing. Her graduating works won first prize in the “Graduation Show of Central Academy of Fine Arts 1995” and she also won the Okamatsu Family Fund. These sculptures were collected by the school because of the beauty and interest that were shown in them. She taught at Shanghai Normal University from 1997 to 2009. She moved back to her hometown Beijing in 2009. Xiang Jing’s work practice is problem-oriented. Within the gradually marginalized realist sculpting language framework, Xiang Jing has made idiosyncratic and influential contemporary experiments. Xiang Jing looks after the existential truth of life through her continued investigation of the “internality” of human nature in her work. Xiang’s artistic language is nourished by the influence of literature structure, and she moves from narratives to abstract figurative that embody metaphors on humanity’s crisis as a result of contemporaneity. As a result, she has made further progress on the path of realist sculpture. Her artwork appears often in discourse on “contemporaneity vs. traditional medium”, “the female identity and the universal human nature”, “to observe and to be observed”, “internal desire”, “figurative art towards abstraction”, etc. Xiang Jing has held solo exhibitions at numerous institutions and establishments, and her artworks are also exhibited at various museums in countries from all over the world. Now works and lives in Beijing.



XiangJingStu

What is the main reason that motivated and inspired you to get into art? What does art represent for you? Who influenced you and what is your artistic philosophy?

It seems like I was born to be a creator, as I have shown a clear love for art from a young age. In the open-minded 1980s, I was admitted to China's best art high school - the Fine Arts School Affiliated with China Central Academy of Fine Arts. Later, I majored in sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, and on the eve of graduation, I created my first batch of works and held my first exhibition, thus embarking on the road of art. Finding art as a medium is like finding an outlet that allows me to better express my inner thoughts. Art has always been an ideal form of expression for me. I of-

ten say that creating is to give shape to consciousness. Sometimes, I feel like it creates another world for me, another dimension parallel to the real world, where I can find a way to describe things and some degree of order amidst the chaos of reality. Many times, books and music have influenced me more than art. Although my works are very realistic, I am not particularly interested in replicating the real world. I do not believe in an objective world, as everything originates from subjective perception and the exploration of the essence of existence. Art can create a perspective that tries not to follow worldly cliches, and instead presents the facts of our existence, no matter how cruel or weak life may be, in its proper form. I am somewhat of an existentialist.

How long did it take you to learn? What fascinates you most about the various steps in the process of realizing sculptures? What feelings did you experience when you finished your first creation?

The process of sculpting involves a particularly large number of steps, so the process is tormented. What probably attracts me the most is that sculpture is a three-dimensional entity, and I often hope to create a scale between people and “humans”, because “Through no one’s eyes but my own” (this is the name of one of my exhibitions), we need to personally stand in front of the work to experience and recognize that projected “self”. I don’t remember the scene when I completed my first work, but when creating the first batch of works, I had a feeling of “releasing myself from my body” - so indeed, for a long time, I have had a feeling of the body being a container and not the true self. There was a period of creation that was also based on this “dichotomy of spirit and flesh” perspective, and of course, “the body” ultimately became my theme.

Through No One’s Eyes But My Own (2)



As a sculptress, you have a direct relationship with the matter. Can you tell us about your connection with the materials? How important is the sense of touch?

I am a person who is sensitive to problems, not materials haha. I am not a sculptor in the traditional sense of perceiving and expressing with my hands and touch. I have always been interested in metaphysical problems, but the three-dimensional form of sculpture can more vividly express the relationship between the individual and the external world, so I still need to rely on “matter” to work and structure my issues. Tactility, I think in a more important way, allows us to confront the “solid” and understand the form of our existence and the issues that

this entails. We need “body” to exist, “material”, “language”, “medium” to express, but for a long time, these were not my propositions, but “vehicles”.

What were the ideas behind your early artworks? What did you hope the viewers to feel or think about them? Do you still have the same wishes when creating new art?

My early works were all about growth and identity recognition. I hoped that viewers could find their own projections in them. Without art, I probably wouldn't have been able to grow as well or see my growth so clearly. Now, I probably don't need to face these issues in this way anymore.

Keep in Silence (2003-2005)





The Center of Quietude, Fiberglass, painted, 171x50x30cm,2007

Xianc

Is there any of your artwork that you are particularly connected to? Can you share with us the story behind it?

No artwork is completely unrelated to its creator, right? However, I've never been very interested in making those kinds of autobiographical-like statements, where the self is only revealed or concealed within the work. Nevertheless, all the information probably relates to the artist. For example, I am often asked

“S” (2012-2016)

Most of her sculptures are based on women showing a nature without filters and realness of women. Xiang Jing conveys the humility and emptiness of the everyday



why I always create female figures. Although I do not intentionally set out to do so, isn't it because, as a woman, I am more sensitive to female issues? Using female figures to express and structure issues related to humanity seems more accurate, nuanced, and capable of conveying that complexity. Moreover, I sometimes answer stubbornly that since I don't have models for sculpture, I can't create vivid male figures, but with women, there are countless possibilities.

Can you tell us how do you see the current situation for women in the art fields in China? How much has changed since your beginning? What about difficulties and opportunities? Does gender still matter? Do the changes in the art represent also the changes for women's rights in society?

This is the question that I am asked the most when participating in women's forums, but for me, it is also very difficult to explain. In a sense, compared to many other Asian countries, Chinese women have many opportunities. However, Chinese culture is deeply rooted in a patriarchal society, and stereotypes and

biases against women can be seen everywhere. When I was in school and just starting out in the industry, women were a rarity, and the feeling that "women are chosen" constantly appeared outside of creative work. Of course, this also created many opportunities, such as the surprise created by the strong contrast between my work and myself, which did gain me respect from my peers, but it was a difficult process. I belong to a generation that has benefited from the dividends of the times, and during a relatively open period of Chinese culture, I have been favored by fate. Today's China has undergone tremendous changes compared to the past, and my life feels like a ride on a roller coaster. Art has also undergone great changes with the dramatic shifts of the times. In China, gender issues have never been the most urgent problem to solve, and it is often entangled in many complex issues. Gender issues have never been an isolated issue. In art schools, female students have gone from being a rarity to now making up the majority, and in the art industry, the proportion of women is clearly increasing. The survival forms and creativity of young artists are becoming more diverse, which is defi-



XiangJing9

nately progress. Gender issues are still important because those prejudices and discriminations still exist, and the problem has become even more complex. However, the majority of those in power are still male, and people can still openly discuss and belittle a woman's appearance. From a social perspective, the view of women's social status is not progressing, and there is even a growing call to encourage women to return to their homes. The underlying causes of these issues are indeed very complex, and it is difficult to explain simply. I can only say that my upbringing in China was a bit unique, and I needed to step out of the knowledge in books and see more of the extremely complex social reality, as well as the very cruel problems that are evident within it.

*Your Body, Fiberglass, painted,
270x160x150cm, 2005*

*The artist is genuinely
interested in human
beings' "psychological
truths" and seeks the
existential truth of
human life*

Most of your sculptures feature women. You used your “female gaze” to highlight female bodies. What were the audience reactions when you first started making nude sculptures? How has the relationship between body and nudity changed during the years?

The female narrative is, in my opinion, an important way to achieve a more diverse world. I am willing to offer a so-called “female” perspective - if such a thing really exists. When a woman looks at the body of another woman, it is more about care and projection and I hope my work can achieve this kind of “gaze”, without the value judgments of a patriarchal world, and let “them” appear “different”. I’m not sure if I’ve succeeded, but when female viewers tell me they are deeply moved by my work, I feel very happy. There have also been occasions when a male viewer saw one of my giant female body works and blurted out, “Xiang Jing, why are you so vulgar now!” He did use that word, and I was surprised, not sure where the vulgarity was. I think at least the work reveals a certain honesty and something that male viewers may have never experienced before, shocking the “gaze” of men.

Over the years there has been a focus on body shaming and the effect it has on people. Women, but also some men, have been judged and criticized since ancient times due to their physical appearance. Your women’s sculptures show that beauty comes in different shapes. What can you tell us about it, and the social pressure placed on women to fit into a stereotype? From your perspective, does the situation have slowly changed or there is still much to do?

As I said previously the social pressure is constant, but I maintain the belief that women are not fully trusted with regard to their sense of social responsibility. This creates opportunities for women to be ignored and overlooked, which may be necessary for survival. However, it is a complex decision to challenge societal values and norms from a female perspective, even when one is aware of what they are doing. This is particularly true in Chinese culture where the matter is not straightforward.



The River Flows East, Fiberglass, painted, Dimensions variable after installation, 2014-2016

Art contributes to overcoming cultural differences. In the age of social media, what advantages or limitations? Do you think world cultural differences have leveled off? Do the new generations overcome prejudices? Do social rules still clash with ideals?

I can only see that for a long time, especially since the beginning of the epi-

demic, I've only seen the world sinking into chaos. Consensus is becoming increasingly difficult to achieve and differences are becoming more acute. The beautiful slogan "One World, One Dream" seems very unrealistic. Of course, the changes leading up to this began with the Internet era. Rather than breaking down barriers, technology has allowed algorithms to trap individuals in an "echo cham-



ber” of information, creating a “shell world”. We may have to pause for a while in this differentiated world, and perhaps this is also a good opportunity to solve part of the problem. I’m not a techno-optimist, nor do I think that being younger automatically represents newness and progress. All I can say is that we must face a world that is constantly changing and conflicting. Certain rules are just a beautiful fantasy, very fragile in reality. I don’t believe that art today can necessarily overcome cultural differences, but it might produce more cultural orphans and wanderers. If art can still express the pain, difficulties, injustice, and innocence of ordinary humanity in this world of differences and consumerism, and speak the language of its own culture, its own stories, then it is already a very “ideal” thing.

Li Xinmo

Photos courtesy of
Li Xinmo

Artist,
Critic,
Feminist,
Theorist &
Researcher



“The Death of the Xinkai River” Photograph from the Performance 2008

Li Xinmo is a feminist artist, art critic, and teacher. She graduated from the Department of Chinese Painting, received her master's degree from Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, and now resides in Beijing, where she teaches at the School of Modern Art at Beijing Geely University. She is mainly devoted to feminist theory and contemporary art criticism research. She targets the patriarchal society and the invisible violence from the community. In addition, in her artwork, she wants to demonstrate a woman's power is equal to a man's power. Li Xinmo has practised performance and body art to protest against political strain and women's rights in China. Her creation involves a series of issues such as gender, ethnicity, environment, and national politics. Her artworks are based on a variety of media, especially performance, photography, and painting. In her various pieces of art, we can find concern for those people who are at the bottom of society, such as Chinese peasants and navvies. She is also an activism ecofeminism of the new generation, she is well known for being against pollution. Her works have been exhibited in major art galleries and museums Toronto Photo Biennial, the Prague Art Biennial, the National Museums of World Culture Gothenburg in Sweden, and the Bonn Women's Museum in Germany. Many other art museums and galleries in Louvre, France, Italy, America, Canada, and Columbia have exhibited and collected her works. Her work has been documented in academic articles including the "National Fine Arts", "Oriental Art for Everyone" and other art professional publications.

"WO YE SHI" Performance and Theatre 2021, Photo: Roland Von der Emden



“Vagina Memories” Photograph
60x100cm 2008



Can you tell us about your beginning in the art field? What inspired and motivated you to pursue a career as an artist? What was your breakout experience?

I studied painting and calligraphy in my childhood, and when I went to college I studied art education and design, but I found that I preferred pure art. I went to the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts to further my



studies in the Department of Chinese Painting, where I studied Chinese painting, after which I studied calligraphy. In 2005 I enrolled as a graduate student in the Department of Chinese Painting at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts, where I studied modern ink painting. In 2006, I started working as a teaching assistant at the Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts Modern Art, so I was exposed to contemporary art, and the idea of contemporary art and the way it is expressed attracted me, so I turned to contemporary art creation. In parallel with my artistic work, I began to study contemporary art theory. I was very inspired by feminism and feminist art. The early feminist art struck me and I began to create feminist works. I went back to the depths of my memory and re-examined my life from a feminist perspective, and I realized that all the misfortunes I had suffered were due to the extremely patriarchal society I was living in. In the process I began to reflect on myself and on Chinese society, and I saw all the realities of women's situation, including sexual assault, domestic violence, trafficking in women, female infanticide, and the gender discrimination that is so prevalent. I expanded from myself to focus on the fate of more women, and I created a series of strong feminist works. I also found it very difficult to be successful as a female artist because in China the curators and critics are basically men and they have the right to speak and choose. And they reject rebellious feminist work. I posted my work and articles online, which caused a big stir, and I received more and more invitations



"A Farewell Ritual" Performance 2008

to exhibitions and magazine offers. This is how I began my own path of feminist art and criticism.

Who have you looked up to as a person and an artist? Is there a memory, an event, an image, or a thought that you are particularly fond of because it condenses, and illuminates your artistic philosophy?

Many great women have influenced me. Woolf was my favorite author, and her *A Room of One's Own* showed me what it meant to be a woman's independence. And Beauvoir, whose *The Second Sex* opened the door to feminism for me. Her 'Women are not born, but formed' was a huge shock to me as a student. I was also empowered by Arendt and Sontag's critical spirit and the sharpness of their ideas. In terms of art, I remember Frieda Kahlo's works and her life stories very well. When I first saw her work, I was fascinated by the self-portraits she painted. I learnt from her how to express personal experiences as well as pain in a visual language. I was also greatly influenced by Bourgeois, Niki de Saint Phalle's artistry and life path. I was also influenced by the work of Kiki Smith, Judy Chicago and others, as well as the work of Schneeman and Abramovic with the body, all of which inspired my art. Later on I did performance art and was influenced by them. Throughout my journey in art and life, those wonderful women thinkers and artists have always led me

and drawn me closer to them and onward in my artistic journey.

You are a multidisciplinary artist who works with photography, painting, installation, performance, and video art. What is your preferred medium of choice? Which of these art techniques best represents you as an artist? How does your approach change when you work with a different medium?

My artistic expression is more diverse. Performance art makes up a major part of my artwork. I am also often referred to as a performance artist. Performance art is the use of the body as a medium to relate to space and to interact with the audience. Performance art has a live nature and can be more direct in its expression. For painting, I try to avoid the traditional modes of painting and do some special explorations. One of my representative series of paintings are paintings made with menstrual blood, more recently, paintings made with digital technology. I also work with photography and installation. Each medium has its own unique way of language and unique characteristics, there are works that lend themselves to photography, I will pick up a camera, if a work needs to be represented in an installation, I will conceive of an installation. Photography is more static and depends mainly on the effect of the shot. Whereas I prefer an integrated form of expression. For example, I often combine

installation and performance. Combine performance with painting, combine photography with writing. I also combine photography and installation to form a three-dimensional space so that a richer symbolism can be expressed. When I create performance works, I prefer to create them according to the characteristics of the space, using that performance space as part of the performance, forming a field in which I create. Performance art appeals to me because it is a more integrated art form, combining space, performance, music, etc., and is expressed in the presence of the body. I always get a more intense physical and spiritual experience when I perform a performance.

Physical violence is the result of a path that passes through silence and psychological violence. How important is it to break the wall of silence? What triggered you to denounce acts of social abuse, cultural submission, and inequality with your artworks? What were the main difficulties at the beginning in questioning the male gaze by creating a female narrative?

Women are largely voiceless and silent, their expression is not allowed and they are stigmatised. Women who have experienced sexual and domestic violence choose to remain silent because it is very difficult to get help and support for what they say, and they are likely to be hurt twice. This is what makes the real situation of many women unknown, and this

“WO YE SHI” Performance and Theatre 2021, Photo: Roland Von der Emden





"I Want to Breathe" Photograph 60X40cm 2006

leads to more women being subjected to violence. This is why I have always felt that it is very important for women to speak out and express themselves, so that they can bring about discussion and awareness in society, as well as change in the law and raise women's self-awareness. This is the importance of breaking the silence. One of the reasons why I have moved towards feminism and made feminist art is because of my experiences. I experienced domestic violence, I saw the violence my mother experienced; I experienced sexual harassment, I experienced relationships that were not equal, and my experience of being a single mother all affected me deeply. It was feminist thought that made me reflect on my life experiences and my destiny as a group of women. Feminist thought has helped me to become strong and critical. Through my personal efforts I hope to help women in distress, to let them know that what happens to them is not their own misfortune, but a social issue in general, that every woman is in an institution of oppression. Through art I hope to reveal the true situation of women and give a female voice. I knew when I started making feminist art that it would be impossible to rely on male critics and curators, nor would it be possible to rely on traditional media. It was around 2008 when the internet in China was rapidly developing, so I chose the internet as my platform to publish my works as well as to publish articles. Both my works and my words were rejected, disbelieved, criticised and stig-

“WO YE SHI” Performance and Theatre 2021, Photo: Roland Von der Emden



matized because of my strong and vocal feminist views. I have faced opposition not only from men, but also from women. Up until now I have been rejected by the mainstream art world and have been on the margins. It took a lot of inner strength to get to where I am now.

You use art practices to investigate your memories, dreams, and subconsciousness, as well as to respond critically to gender and environmental issues in human society. In your performance “The Death of the Xinkai River” and “A Farewell Ritual” you mix the symbols of life and death. Nature and woman cover and they identify in the same role. Can you tell us more about this topic?

My art consists of two directions, one is to look inwards and know myself, creating work based on personal experiences and experiences. I believe that art is first and foremost about being honest with myself and translating memories that have influenced me and cannot be forgotten into visual language. I use art to reflect on everything I have experienced as a woman. From the biological cycle to marriage and childbirth, the process projects all sorts of gender issues. “The individual is political.” Every individual is a part of society, and the fate of each individual necessarily carries the context of the time and society in which he lives. My personal experience as a woman is at the same

time the common experience of most women. The other direction is outward, looking at and expressing historical culture, social justice, natural ecology and gender politics. “The Death of the Xinkai River” is one of my earliest performance artworks. This work combines water pollution with the fate of women. In a patriarchal culture, women and nature are simultaneously excluded from men and human society as the Other. Thirty years of modernization in China have led to a dramatic deterioration of the ecological environment, with water pollution being a particularly serious problem, while the situation of women has not changed substantially, and sexual violence against women is a common occurrence. I went into the polluted river covered with cyanobacteria and combined the death of women with the death of the river, a tribute to a river and a representation of the fate of women. This work is also a reinterpretation and response to Shakespeare’s play Ophelia. “A Farewell Ritual” is another of my works that combines the female body with contaminated water, this time by immersing myself in a glass tank filled with contaminated water. The exhibition hall was filled with the strong stench of decaying water plants. These works of mine can be understood from an eco-feminist perspective. The idea of eco-feminism has also had a great influence on me.

You are the founding artist of Bald Girls. You have highlighted the invisible violence, suffering, and pain that so many women have buried deep in their hearts. The tragedies experienced by women are universal. Many who shared their own stories were pilloried and criticized. How can we build a culture which challenges all preconceptions about women and that offers a spirit of independence and freedom?

I've been telling my experiences in an artistic way, and I'm telling a lot of women's stories at the same time. My idea is, first of all, to bring to light the parts that are hidden, hidden in the darkness, hidden by culture and society. In a male-dominated society, women are viewed and misinterpreted, but the true experience and state of women is not known. Women are silent, the other half of the silence. Feminist art is about women speaking for themselves, telling their own stories and experiences, and seeing the world through their own eyes, asking questions and offering their opinions and criticisms. But a patriarchal society is unwilling

to accept women's eyes, women's thinking and women's criticism. So society as a whole resists and resents women's rights. In China, I am on the margins, and it is difficult for my work and my feminist ideas to be accepted. In 2012, I took part in Bald Girls, an exhibition in which I showed my works that I had previously been unable to show in public spaces, to raise some female voices. Since then, Bald Girls has exhibited around the world, engaging in dialogue with women artists from different countries. Words are very important and art is powerful. Feminist art allows women to express themselves in their own way. How do we change society? I think the most important thing is to change the consciousness of people. And it is precisely the consciousness of people that art can act on. When people start to become aware of gender inequality, that is the beginning of changing gender issues. In addition to art, there is literary expression, sociological research, philosophical discussion, and the improvement of laws to gradually build a more equitable society.



What is the value and meaning of the female body and subjectivity in practices against gender stereotypes? How can art convey a new future? How much do media and social networks influence social and cultural battles nowadays?

In a patriarchal society, the female body is an object to be viewed and used, as a vehicle for reproduction and desire. Women are not considered to be independent individuals with subjectivity, but must be dependent on men in order to exist. In traditional Chinese society and culture, women have always been subordinate, their meaning being to reproduce and raise offspring, to serve men and to satisfy their desires and needs, while the female self and female desires have been ignored.

Women have lost their physical autonomy as well as their spiritual subjectivity. Many feminist artworks are related to the body, and female artists try to present a real female body, not one that is viewed as an object of desire. The female cycle, the female birth, abortion, female desire, sexual violence, etc., are the most real experiences of women, but they have been obscured. It is therefore an important part of feminist art to show and express these obscured experiences. For example, Yoko Ono's performance 'Cut' and Scheunemann's 'Inner Poetry Scroll' both use the body to express women's experiences and resistance. Feminist artists use the body as a medium to create works that actually change people's perceptions of the female body. Art is sensitive

and ahead of its time. The voices of women through art are increasingly being heard by the world and their presence is being seen. We are seeing a gradual change in society where women are becoming more powerful, where women are becoming a presence that cannot be ignored, and where women are becoming more independent. And all the efforts we are making now will have an impact on the young women of the future. We live in an age of the internet and new media, where old orders and ideas are being replaced by new ways of producing, new ways of interacting, new social models. The internet is accelerating the process of democratization, the inherent roles of gender are changing, multiculturalism, equality and social justice are becoming the consensus of humanity, and on this basis the emancipation of women is inevitable and unstoppable. The internet has provided a platform for women's voices to be heard. It has amplified and accelerated the spread of women's voices, and has enabled women to form links, and from links to become communities, influencing, supporting and collaborating with each other. On social media, women share their lives, experiences and ideas, and women collaborate and form communities, all of which subconsciously influence and empower women's psyches.

Can you share with us any meaningful story related to your artwork from backstage that you have carried in your heart over the years?

I remember when I did my first work 'I Want to Breathe' in 2016, one of my students and I went to a very remote place and saw the migrant workers who had silicosis and were seriously ill but had no money for medical treatment or compensation, I listened to them talk about their ordeal and felt deeply powerless. I remember an old father who was alone, picking water, his son died of silicosis and the new house he built for his son's wedding was left unfinished and stopped there, I took a picture of him and to this day I cannot forget his face full of vicissitudes and his eyes full of sorrow. In 2017, I did another work, "A Person's Complaint", in which a female employee was fired from her company for no reason, and when she went to the leader to try to find out why, she was taken to the Public Security Bureau by the policemen and beaten and kicked her vagina. This led to her having depression for ten years. I made a documentary film of her. She took the documentary and forced her leader to do compensation for it. In 2021, I worked on the art project "WO YE SHI," which is related to sexual assault, One day I received a letter from a woman who wanted to take part in this art project. In the letter she told her life story of how she had been sexually abused by her own father when she

“WO YE SHI” Performance and Theatre 2021 , Photo: Roland Von der Emden





“A Farewell Ritual” Performance 2008

was two years old, which had continued until she was fourteen. She left home to go to school and studied art. After she had her first boyfriend, her psychosis began to flare up, she underwent psychotherapy and she went on to have a child with a lama, who was a child with cerebral palsy. I remember how heavy my heart was when I read her letter and saw her paintings; it was as if I was engulfed in a great darkness and felt extraordinarily cold. I also cannot forget the day I met her, with her daughter with cerebral palsy sitting beside her. She later followed my project to the exhibition. She also shared her experience of undergoing spiritual healing at the workshop I did. She seemed very happy and in a much better state of

Li Xinmo began painting and calligraphy at a young age. She studied traditional Chinese ink painting and calligraphy for several years because she wanted to specialise in those arts

mind that day. Some days ago she suddenly told me that she had uterine cancer and she said that this was her fate. She said she wanted to do the exhibition with me.

What is the one piece of advice you wish you'd received as a young artist? What is one piece of advice you're glad you ignored? What advice would you give to women who want to achieve their goals and are facing the prejudices of patriarchy?

When I was younger, I wanted to hear more encouragement. I wanted to be cognitively inspired, not just professionally, but also in terms of reading. I am always more of a follower of my inner calling and generally don't listen too much to other people's advice, unless it's from someone I admire. I like to read and when I felt confused, I have read books to find the answer. I'm glad I didn't follow my mother's advice : a girl should just have a stable job and get married, don't have too high aspirations and don't read too many books. And then there was not following the advice of my first boyfriend: give up art.

I would say to women:

- 1. Read more feminist books, know what feminist thought is and the mechanisms by which gender is established in society.***
- 2. Read more books on philosophy to understand the development of the human mind.***
- 3. Read books on sociology to understand how society works as well as to understand social justice.***
- 4. Be financially independent, mentally independent, and be an individual who lives and thinks independently.***
- 5. Don't live in the eyes of others, don't conform to the demands and rules that society generally places on women, listen to your heart and move towards your ideal goal.***
- 6. Be the determined maverick that you are.***

Allison Fong

Biological Oceanographer,
Polar Ecologist & Scientific Educator



Original photos courtesy of Allison Fong

Photo © Lianna Nixon

Allison Fong is a polar ecologist and microbial oceanographer who specializes in the roles of microbes in biogeochemistry and marine ecology. She served on the Board of Directors of the Association of the Sciences of Limnology and Oceanography (ASLO) from 2011 to 2014 during her graduate studies at the University of Hawaii Manoa. She works for ASLO as a member of the Education and Outreach Committee, where she directs the ASLO Storyteller Series. From 2016 to 2018, she was a member of the International Arctic Science Committee's (IASC) Marine Working Group. She is currently a researcher at the Alfred-Wegener Institute (Germany) and the MOSAiC Project's Ecosystem Team Co-coordinator (Multidisciplinary drifting Observatory for the Study of Arctic Climate). During her career, she has sailed offshore on research vessels for more than 500 days and spent more than 9 months in the central Arctic leading Team ECO to collect the heartbeat of Arctic life. She has studied microbes in waters off the coast of Rapa Nui as well as microbes encased in remote Arctic sea ice. Allison has dedicated her career to service and community involvement. She regularly engages with a wide range of audiences through talks, from high school maths students to undergraduates, and was invited to give a virtual talk at the California Academy of Sciences Night School event. Allison was featured on ABC News Voices Series: Women and Climate Change (April 2021). She was also featured in GEO Magazine (December 2020) and CBS News (November 2020) discussing her passion, the value of science, and the importance of taking action to combat climate change.

What inspired and motivated you to go into the field of science? What made you excited to become a biological oceanographer and sea ice ecologist?

I have been fortunate enough to have always lived close to the ocean, never more than 30 minutes away. Growing up in Rhode Island, I was only 15 minutes away from a salty shoreline. I was just 10 minutes away from the sea when I went to Hawaii for graduate school. My proximity to the ocean had a significant influence on my career choices. As a child, my family would go to the beach for leisure, and I became attached to the idea of living near the ocean. I was also curious about science and how things work, especially in the environment. So, when it came time to decide what to pursue, marine science was my natural choice. I began studying marine biology in college, but I realized that I was interested in how different components of systems work together and interact, which led me to oceanography. I focused on biological oceanography, specifically studying microorganisms and their carbon and nitrogen transformations. After completing my PhD, I took a position at the Alfred Wegener Institute, where I could study microorganisms in different environments, such as the Arctic. What I meant to say is that I'm in-

terested in studying microorganisms in the ocean and their roles in carbon and nitrogen transformations. This can be done in any ocean environment, not just the subtropics of the Pacific Ocean. I find it fascinating to study these same questions in completely different environments, such as the Arctic. Sea ice is a unique and remarkable habitat in the world's oceans. It is composed of liquid water that freezes and separates the atmosphere from the rest of the ocean, and it changes over time, along with the organisms that live and associate with it. This cycle begins and ends every year, making it a captivating area of study. I consider myself fortunate that my career and passion for being near the sea have coincided. I've always been curious about the natural world, and studying the ocean is an excellent way to explore it. The ocean is vast, yet we can be very close to it, resulting in a constant back-and-forth between feeling connected to it as humans, while also perceiving it as something alien.

What were the main challenges at the beginning of your professional career?

Identifying as a woman and a scientist is essential, and we are grateful for the women who paved the way for gender equality in science. While progress has been made,

there is still work to be done. But there are still systemic biases in every field against women. In ocean sciences, that's getting better every day with some of the challenges. Regardless of one's identity, finishing university does not necessarily prepare individuals with enough knowledge on how to succeed, graduate school and become equals in their profession. It can be really tough. In the American system, students are required to complete coursework to develop their fundamental knowledge base while simultaneously proving to their supervisors and committee that they possess unique, innovative ideas that can advance their field. Simultaneously, you must possess extensive knowledge of existing information and utilize that knowledge to propose new ideas that can contribute to the field's progress. I think that challenge is both exciting, and also very hard. Students start questioning, "Do I really know enough?" "Do I have sufficient knowledge about this topic to propose new ideas?" "Will I come across as unintelligent in front of my peers?" This is because perhaps they think other students know something that they do not. It can be quite challenging at the start of one's career. I think another thing is that sometimes people, especially in my field, in the work that I do, don't necessarily recognize how physically and psychologically demanding it's going to be. During my time in the field, I spent many months away from shore with lim-

Photo © Lianna Nixon



ited communication. It was an isolating experience, even though I had a community to work with. Being on a ship meant that you always are in a work environment, and occasionally, you may find some quiet time to have for yourself. However, at the end of the day, we are on a floating platform designed for work, unlike an office where people work for eight or ten hours and leave to unwind and see their loved ones. On a ship, the workload can be psychologically taxing, and there are no clear boundaries between work and personal life. The intensity of work on a ship is extremely demanding. Many individuals, particularly those early in their career, may not fully understand the importance of addressing this challenge. It's crucial to consider whether you are comfortable living and working in such a way, as you cannot easily detach from the task at hand. Another early challenge is learning to cope with the uncertainty and failure that comes with conducting experiments. It's something that is not often discussed, but in reality, scientific breakthroughs are often preceded by numerous failed attempts and years of trial and error. While we tend to focus on the successes, it's important to acknowledge and embrace the inevitable failures that are part of the scientific process. There's a lot of demanding, redundant, and te-

dious work that you have to face. You need to decide whether you're going to persist in your pursuit of knowledge or give up. It's something that isn't often discussed - the need to become accustomed to experiments not succeeding. However, it depends on how you approach it. Even if things don't work out, there's always something to be learned that can help you try again with new insights, potentially increasing your chances of success. When students feel discouraged because their experiment didn't go as planned, I ask them, "What did you find?" Even if it didn't go as expected, something still happened. And what happened is new information. There is always a way of looking at it. Is not really about failure. So much as this is unexpected.

What are your main responsibilities now as a scientist?

In the last seven years, my main responsibility has been in scientific research coordination. I'm the MOSAiC ecosystems coordinator. MOSAiC is a multidisciplinary project on studying Arctic climate. My team is the ecosystem team. We're one of five teams and I have been responsible for facilitating and coordinating the different aspects of ecosystem science and making sure that each person's projects could be accomplished and I col-

lect scientific samples from myself. We investigate a wide range of subjects, from viruses inhabiting ocean and sea ice to fish, encompassing all components of the food chain. Moreover, we examine how the ecosystem manages the carbon cycle. This is significant in relation to climate. Surprisingly, much of my work in the last seven or eight years has been about the people who work in science and making sure that we, as a team, can do the best, most effective science together in the context of MOSAiC. I spend a lot of time with people, which is not what I expected. Being a scientist myself, I find it beneficial to collaborate with other scientists as it allows me to better comprehend their thought processes. I understand why, they might be a little bit shy about certain things. So that's always a benefit.

Did you discover something that surprised you? What is the most interesting thing you have discovered through your research? Have you ever seen anything that's changed your perspective?

There are several things. I think that one of the best things about being a scientist is actually being surprised. There are very few things that are surprising, but in my field of work, because it's so hard to get to the polar regions,

when you're there, you're just soaking it all in with all of your senses. I found that it was really interesting, that our ideas of when the ocean is productive are actually very limited in terms of what the reality is. What we observed is that things are growing sooner than we expected. And that has huge implications for the Arctic food web. But it also has huge implications for how we understand the role of ecosystem functions controlling carbon, and climate and the Arctic. And that was shocking, because most people think, in the polar night, when there are no lights, the sunlight is gone, that the organisms that need sunlight are basically dormant, that they're quiet, that they're not doing anything. What we found is that, even with the smallest amount of light, returning in the springtime to the high Arctic, those organisms are ready to utilise it, single photons, they're ready with all of their photosynthetic machinery to turn on and start producing oxygen and utilising carbon dioxide. That is this paradigm shift in how we think about when things begin to grow. That's really cool and surprising. My colleagues are working on that right now. Another aspect to consider is the presence of certain upper ocean features that we observe during the summertime. These features create a stratification of the water which can have

an impact on the way organisms thrive in the ecosystem. Like they exist in different portions, and they can grow maybe more efficiently in those environments than if they were completely mixed. Viewing that with your own eyes, and getting to make some measurements, changed how we think about the evolution of things in the ocean, in the sense of evolution of properties of organisms in the ocean over a season. Not evolution as genetic evolution, but as community evolution. You may think about the sea and the ocean being completely homogenous and well mixed, although we may make calculations based on organisms, the truth is that they exist within the structure of the ocean, which is constantly evolving in both time and space.

As it changes, you may or may not see it, because when you're there for a week or two, you get a snapshot. And then you try from that snapshot to create the full movie. But you can't really do that because there might be all these different things happening that you didn't get in your snapshot. I think that the beauty of MOSAiC is that we were there for the movie. We were there to see scene to scene back to back how things were changing in time and space. And it's just when you're not dealing with snapshots, but you're dealing with this continuous movie that's playing before you. It gives you a whole new view on how the world works. So in general, that was really eye opening.

Photo © Lianna Nixon



What are the challenges facing sea ice conservation nowadays? Can you tell us something about it?

The interesting thing about sea ice that's different from glacier ice or on Greenland and Antarctica. Ice sheets are what will contribute to sea level change, because that's snow and ice that's deposited on a terrestrial surface, that then melts and adds water to the ocean. So sea ice is made from seawater. Its melting doesn't change sea level. Having a significant amount of ice at the North Pole and the South Pole affects the functioning of our climate: the greater the amount of ice present, the colder the air that can be maintained at the poles. That helps stabilise the rest of the atmospheric processes in the mid-latitudes, at least in the northern hemisphere, where most of the human population lives. That's the place where we grow food. Trying to think about sea ice conservation it's multifaceted. One there is the issue of ice in general, and the loss of sea ice year to year is predominantly caused by global warming. We know that there are large human factors that are contributing to the warming of the earth, our industrial way of life, the burning of fossil fuels, that's the way in which we're warming the planet. And that has implications for the amount of sea ice that can grow each year. Why does sea ice melt faster? To conserve ice, from that standpoint, means that we really need to take stock of systematically changing the way in which we interact with our environment, switching away from fossil fuels, becoming more sustainable in everything that we do, from food production, to transportation to industry, becoming less extractive with our ways of life. That's one thing as I said, sea ice is a habitat for organisms. There are organisms that we know that depend on sea ice. In the media, you often see images of polar bears in sea ice habitat hunting for their food. The direct connection is that a reduction in sea ice leads to a decrease in the habitat available for polar bears and seals. On the other hand, sea ice is all these little photosynthesizing cells. These are like the rain forests of the sea. They're just like trees in the rainforest, they photosynthesize, they use CO₂, they create oxygen. If we don't have sea ice, those communities no longer have a habitat to do that work. So how do you deal with that? We have to make sure that that habitat exists. And if that habitat of sea ice is being lost, because of warming, then we're back to those systemic issues of how do we change the human interaction in the way of life of this industrial life with what's needed. There are things that as individu-



als we can be conscientious of. We can be more aware where the food comes from, how we move in the world, whether we're using outsourcing, do we need to drive? Can we use transport? Should we cycle? also the materials that we use ... It seems overwhelming as an individual that what choices you make, actually have an impact. But they kind of do, like your behaviours are not just your behaviour. They're also viewed by your family, by your partner. If you're a teacher, they're viewed by your students, if you're a professor or mentor, those are viewed by the people that you train. Ultimately, we also have a voice in the world and how we think that things should be done. Becoming active in civics in government and becoming a voice for doing things differently, that can be really powerful. I think, ice conservation and conservation in general means not just actively making choices personally, about how you live, but also recognizing that there's power in your voice, and what you can do with that, how you can communicate what you think it is important and valuable to take stock of. The further I get in my career, the more I recognize how important it is that as a scientist, society looks at us for answers. You make these measurements, you have this data, you've come to this conclusion. Now, what are you going to do about it? When we're trained as scientists, we're just trying to ask the questions, make the observations, make the measurements and

produce the data. We're very rarely asked, the step after that, what we do about it? That's not usually something that we're trained to solve. But I think my generation of scientists is definitely being asked: What do we do about it? Now that you have all of this data that tells us that we're doing this to the world? What do we do about it? And I think that's the challenge is finding a way to communicate and understand. "Okay, we have lots of data. Data is important, and we need it. But how do we transform that data into something that's actionable? How do we transform it into something that we can apply to our lives? How do we reach people in a way that makes them feel and think and know that those actions matter? "

What I was thinking is that we have this data, but despite the scientific evidence, climate change denial is still very common. What do you think prevents some people from acknowledging global warming is real?

I know exactly what you're talking about. I live in the United States, and we have our fair amount of climate deniers, warming deniers at all levels of society, even running the country. That's shocking. There's a few things that I think. I'm here and I'm talking from the perspective of a person who knows

that is extremely privileged, I grew up in America, in a middle class environment, I had access to education, and resources for my learning. So that's the best disclaimer. But my thought is, and I always ask, are we doing a good job of educating our people, our children, those who are responsible for making decisions for voting for all of these things? Are we doing a good job of educating them about their role in our world, in an environment and how we interact with our world? What implications that has? So one is the education for critical thinking, and critical decision making. And my argument would be that we're not doing a good job, we're definitely not doing a good job of that in the United States. I can't speak for other places. What I'm saying is not that we need to generate and educate more scientists. What we need to do is take a much wider perspective, and educate the whole population to be more aware and conscientious of how facts and information works. That's one way I think that we need to dispel misinformation is to get people to learn in ways of how they differentiate between things that are based on data and facts versus things that are just opinions. The other thing is that we need people who come from a critical thinking background, and it doesn't have to be scientist, but to have that type of knowledge,



who feel that they have a role that they can play in government, that they feel that they could, actually invoke change at the levels where policy is driven. And I think, having people in positions of power to do that, whether you're working at your local neighbourhood, community, city level, or all the way up to your country's parliament level. It's needed at all levels, that type of leadership, that type of rational thinking, rational debate is necessary in all of the forums where we're talking about, not just environmental justice, but we're talking about social justice. These things are all connected, and the fact that we don't see them historically, that the welfare of our communities is directly tied to the welfare and well being of our environment in which we live. This dissonance, this disconnection is part of the reason why I think people deny it, because they think it's not their problem. "Oh, the water that comes out of my faucet is clean. So it's fine. It's not my problem if the water you're drinking is not healthy", even though the reason it's toxic is because of a mine that was upstream mining heavy metals for four decades, so that all of us could have cell phones. So that's the other thing people deny, because it's not happening to them. A lot of Americans can deny it, be-

cause we're not the ones who are suffering from great amounts of flooding and the loss of home and the loss of livelihood and the loss of life. But as soon as you see these extreme events where people are dying, because they're under 12 feet of snow, and there's avalanches, and there's a loss of roads, and people are freezing to death. And there's power outages, now you hear: "Oh, Americans, you are suffering from climate change." Since these are not inter annual variability changes, these are changes that are caused by our impact as humans on the earth, and how it's changing weather. And that's something that is a reality that is hitting more people. This reality has been happening to more than half the world's population for decades. This is just a very lopsided view from a development person, like a developed world's person. I think climate denial is partially about education. It's also partially about how we communicate about these things. People do not want more bad news. Unfortunately, the stories that we have in the news about our climate and our environment, and the future is pretty abysmal. It's not pretty bad. It's very bad. People who live a life of like 60 to 70 years are thinking: "Oh, that's not my problem, I'm going to be here for 20 or 30, or 40 more years, and what they're talking about sea level rise in 100 years, and that's not going to affect me". So the stories that we tell about climate, and about our environment, and our relation to our environment, and the role that we play, has to appeal to the human spirit of what it means to be connected. I think a lot of our climate stories are not about how we're connected and how we need to reconnect with those things. It's always about what destruction that we have caused, what impending doom there is, and how we, as a little single human being, can really do nothing to stop it. Changing the perspective and appealing to people as human beings, about climate, about environment, about sustainability, that needs to happen, because we're not reaching people in the ways that we're telling stories, we're not engaging in the beauty and the curiosity of how our world works, of what we can do, of why we should be still fascinated by how amazing it is people are fascinated with space. And I ask them, like, Why? Why do you like space? There's like nothing there. There's no living things there. There are no rainforests, there's no ocean that we know of right now. And so far, we haven't found anything living. It's interesting that people are fascinated about space. We put billions, if not trillions, at least in the United States. I wonder, if we had just a fraction of that money going



Photo by (C) James Eades, Unsplash

towards earth sciences towards ocean exploration and things like that, what an amazing amount of discoveries we could make? Because it's just this really strange juxtaposition that you can get people excited about something that is full of nothing. And yet we have a hard time getting people excited about where they live. So I feel that's about the narrative. That has a lot to do with how we talk about science, talk about our environment, and about our relation to the environment. Those are the few things that I think we can do in terms of climate deniers. It's an uphill battle. Don't get me wrong. I'm not against space. But, compared like, when you look at the budget, it's outrageous. Compared to Earth Sciences. People think it's a solution that will live on Mars, or the moon or something. That's not a solution, if you think of Earth as having all of the resources, and trying to replicate that on a rock somewhere else. That's gonna be hard.

What is the best lesson you have learned from the ocean?

I think from a philosophical standpoint, the best lesson I've learned from the ocean is you can never be certain about what you think, you know. You always, even when you think you know what you know, always have to be tinged with a bit of recognition that there is always going to be things you don't know. And I feel like that's a lesson from the ocean because it's so vast. And it's so under explored, that everything we know about it. I mean, that's why oceanography is exciting to me is that we are in a position where we can be making new discoveries every day. Because what we think we know about the ocean as we learn more, and we spend more time studying it, looking at it, making measurements, it surprises us, it's changing the way we view it. So I think it's about being open and curious about the world. And the ocean is a great teacher of that. And your curiosity can be infinite.

Photos courtesy of Red Hongyi

RED Hongyi

The Artist who Paints
without a Paintbrush



Photo © Isaac Collard

Red Hong Yi is a Chinese-Malaysian contemporary artist and architect who reinterprets everyday materials and objects to create art and mixed media installations. She attended Trinity College (University of Melbourne) and graduated in 2010 with a Bachelor of Planning and Design and a Master of Architecture from the University of Melbourne before moving to Shanghai to work for the Australian architecture firm HASSELL. Her works have been shown at H Queens in Hong Kong, the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco, the World Economic Forum in Davos, and Alaska's Anchorage Museum. JP Morgan Chase Bank and actor Jackie Chan are among her collectors. She has been sought after by clients all over the world, and she has been invited to speak at international conferences. She was named of the top 12 'Brilliant Malaysians' and 'Brilliant Artist Award' by Esquire Magazine, awarded Perspective's 40 Under 40 award as a creative who will shape the design world in the years to come, and one of the 19 "Future Chasers" by Australia Unlimited as future decision-makers of courage, imagination and will. Trinity College honoured her with the inaugural Foundation Studies Alumna of the Year Award in May 2019 for her contributions to the visual arts. Her work has appeared in publications such as the Wall Street Journal, TIME, and the New York Times. She was named one of the "11 art world entrepreneurs you should know" by Sotheby's Institute. Tatler Magazine named her one of Asia's most powerful voices for 2020. TIME magazine's April 2021 issue, titled "Climate is Everything," was created by Red by rendering a world map made of 50,000 green-tipped matchsticks.





Photo © David Yeow

Can you tell us more about your beginning? Did you always want to be an artist? Who influenced you as an artist and as a person?

I think there has to be my mom and dad. I guess it's because when I was a kid, they taught me how to draw. They taught me how to sketch and as I got better at that, they encouraged me a lot. And my mom in particular was the one who exposed me to Picasso, Monet, and Van Gogh. My grandmother bought printed copies of all these artwork, in the local market. So, as a kid in Malaysia, I admired these pieces. But it wasn't until my 20s that I got to see them in person. So that was the start of my interest in art. Yeah, I think I always wanted to be an artist, as a kid. But as I got older, I thought, when I was about

15, I was pretty sure it wasn't going to happen. Because it just seems not possible. And my impression of being an artist, at that time was of people who draw portraits on the road site. So that was not what I wanted to do. And I didn't know anyone who was doing it full time, except my teachers who are teaching art. So, I didn't have a person to whom I could talk about it. So I thought, Okay, I'm gonna do architecture or study, I don't know, medicine or something like that. It wasn't really enough in the back of my mind when I went to university.

When did you start to think it could be a career?

I started when I was actually in China, in Shanghai. So after I studied



Photo © David Yeow

architecture, I moved to Shanghai. I got to meet my relatives there. I met them before when I was a kid, when they visited my family in Malaysia. But when I went to China, I actually got to live with them and meet them. So I met my grand uncle, who used to be an artist, and he used to draw propaganda posters during the Mao revolution. He was the first, I think, a full-time artist that I met. Of course, he was already retired when I met him. So I got to talk about it. He lived through a very different time. I got to bond with him. I was very inspired. And during my free time, during the weekends, I started to make art because I was so inspired by my surroundings. I just wanted to not forget how I was feeling but I didn't go into it wanting to make

it into a career. I just did it for fun. And then I put it online and share it with my friends. And then eventually I started to have a bit of a following. From there, I started to have commission requests. That was the moment I realised: "Hey, maybe I can, you know, take some projects on the side." So it started happening from there, really really gradually and slowly.

Where do your spirits and ability to take something common and ordinary and give it another light come from? Because you make art without brushes, without limits with flower petals, seeds, fruits, vegetables, and tea bags ...

I think it came from two things. My

background in architecture gave me a curiosity and an interest in exploring materials and building things with different textures and objects. The other thing is when I moved to China, things were so affordable, you could just buy them so easily. You can source it anywhere and it's so cheap. I was earning money for the first time in my life, having an actual salary. And then with that salary, I could buy materials that were affordable to me. So, I just found it really fun to buy all sorts of things and just try them.

Can you tell us more about these art projects made with coffee and capsules, soccer balls, tea bags, etc?

Yeah, so those were my very first personal project, and I gave them to myself because I thought: "Oh, I am new to China. If I live here, after a year, everything is gonna look normal to me." But in the beginning, it's not so normal, like everything that I see is crazy. So my project was to do portraits of famous Chinese people who appeared in the media, from different industries, and I wanted to use different materials. So Yao Ming, with a basketball, Jay Chou with coffee cups, and it all had to relate to the person that I was drawing, in some ways. So all of them have a connection. I started to read their

Wikipedia profiles for an object that connected with them. That was how I did it.

How long did it take each project considering also the planning aspect?

Not long, because I was working full time. So I would do it on the weekends. Like the Yao Ming one, it was literally just three hours. But of course, I failed a couple of times, like I had no plan at the start, I would put the paper on the ground, and then the wind would blow and the paper would blow off that kind of thing. And then I couldn't even film it. The second one was Jay Chou. It was like the coffee cups day and I had a very bad camera. So although I finished the piece, when I looked at the camera, it was just badly taken. So one part of it was making art. The other one was documenting it. I tried to balance both. But I did it during the weekends when I was not working. So it took maybe two weekends sometimes.

What about your Time cover on climate change, where you lit your artwork made of 50,000 matchsticks on fire? How long did it take to complete the project?

That was an incredible opportunity. After building up a bit of a portfolio. I contacted the cre-



ative director and showed him my portfolio, and he responded, but I didn't know he was following my work for like, a couple of years. And about two, or three years later, he contacted me and asked if I was interested in doing something for the cover. And that was a huge honour to do that for such a big magazine. So I'm grateful they allowed me to do that. For this project, they gave me a deadline of one month, which was actually for Time is very long, the turnaround time is one week. But for me, it was really short. And it happened when the lockdown was happening, and it was lifted and all that. So we had to source the concept. We had to source the materials. I had a really big team helping me out, and I had to coordinate the videographers

and photographers.

Do you have a story from the backstage of this project?

Yeah! Many, quite a bit, I think. I told everyone, we only have one attempt to do this. So we did a small-scale experiment. But on that day, I finished the artwork already and we were about it, burning it the next day. The photographers and videographers were very stressed out because they had to stand by and shoot it.

From your perspective, how much has the relationship between nature and artists changed?

I think when I started, the whole topic of climate change and the



Photo © David Yeow

environment wasn't as strong as today. So when I started out doing it, I just made art because I liked it. But over the years, I'm really thankful for a lot of conversations around climate and environments. It's made everyone a lot more aware of what they use and how the messages that they send out. So today in my studio, when we go for lunch, for example, we try to reduce plastic usage, and even when we package our artwork, we try to reduce it as well. And even in the materials that we choose. If I get back in my mind, when I start it wasn't as strong. So I think that the conversation is important. The messages that we send to each other, make an impact over the years. Throughout time, it just became something that everyone is

aware of. Ten years ago, it wasn't really much of a topic. So I think it's a good thing to have it in the back of our minds.

You had worked on 'I Am Not A Virus' an art project that features portraits of hate crime assault victims. Can you share the feelings that moved you to create this project? What was your reaction when you heard about the rise in anti-Asian hate crime during Covid 19 and lockdown? What do you hope people will understand?

I think the issue of race is everywhere. Sometimes I think, I even ask myself, Am I stereotyping a certain race? Am I being insensitive? Like, I have to watch myself as well, because I do not want to



live in that kind of society. I want everyone to have equal standing to accept everyone because, in the end, we are all humans, that should be loved and respected, and accepted. So I think when the whole COVID-19 thing broke out, and there was a lot of racism happening, in certain countries, I was about to travel back to the US because I was spending some time there. A lot of my friends said “No, no, don’t come over, it’s really bad. You might get hit on the streets and all that kind of thing.” So I felt like “Wow!” It can be racism, it can be fear, I just felt like I wanted to voice out, and then talk about that. Let’s separate the virus and races: it is a separate thing. So, I came up with that artwork. And I put some newspaper clippings in it as well. That’s the behind-the-scenes of that artwork. I hope that we will really accept each other for just being humans. That’s it. Not judge each other by our skin colour. I think the more we understand each other, the more we could be friends. I think bias comes from a lot of misunderstanding and fear. And sometimes as children, we’re taught a certain thing and we really think it that way. But as you grow older, and when you meet more people and you really become their friends, you get in the end that we all want the same things. And it’s beautiful to get to know each other’s cultures. I think the media and art play a big part in shaping people’s perceptions.

How did the idea for your project “MemeBank” come to life? Can you tell us more about the concept and how did you develop it?

It’s probably one of my favourite projects since it’s funny. I think I want to include more humour in the art. Because sometimes my art is serious, and everyone gets really serious. But meme bank was just like a joke. So it was about, in lockdown, I started to question “Why is my coffee getting more and more expensive?” “Why is my food getting more and more expensive?” “What’s happening to my money?” that kind of thing. And then I started dating a guy, now my husband, who is in the banking industry. I asked him “Can you explain to me what the banks do?” And he explained the banking system and money and printing money, that our currency is going down, because the government’s printing a lot of money. And I thought “Oh, really, they’re printing a lot of money!” I took it literally, I said “What if I printed my own money?” “And if I overprinted it too, would the value go down?” And all that kind of thing. So I told my team “Hey, we’re gonna call ourselves a bank for the next six months to print out money.” Because our projects were stopped for a while during

the lockdown. I was like, let's not care about those projects. We print out money from now on. So it's really a question of critique of money and value and what's out there and why banks are keeping our money and printing money and all that kind of thing. I think there's a funny side. I think there's a deeper meaning behind it as well. It's up to you. It's up to people, if they want to take it seriously or not.

What is the biggest challenge of being an artist during the social media era? What are the limits and the benefits?

I think the best thing that I stumbled upon recently is a podcast called "Beyond the studio", I highly recommend it for any artist who wants to know, behind the scenes, how it works, because it's so challenging, you have to balance not just making your art, but also your financing and promoting it. Make sure that your expenses are not too crazy. And you constantly can still create and be creative. So I think the hard part, the most challenging part, is to be creative. But at the same time, you also need the wisdom and financial expertise to balance it out so that you can still continue financially to do this thing that you love doing as an artist. Essentially, you're selling something that you're making from nothing, right? Whereas if you provide a service such as being a surgeon and surgically cutting up someone who's sick, you're providing something that is a solution to a problem. When you're creating art or something that is in your mind that you are interested in and trying to sell it to somebody, this can be challenging sometimes, but I love doing it. Finding the market to keep it going can be a challenge.

A lot of your artworks are made with sustainable materials, what is your perspective on waste and up-cycling? Can you tell us more about your collaboration with brands that are aware of these themes?

I am more than happy to share, I do collaborate with brands because I find it easy to work with them. But of course, I'm very selective about which brands I choose to work with. It has to be brands that firstly, I like. Secondly, also, I want to work with brands that are doing good as well. So if it's a brand that is not respectful of the environment, I wouldn't do that. I do work with brands because it keeps my company or my studio financially stable right now. I do try to balance out branded projects and personal projects because I think they're important. But I think today, artists have the option to work with brands. I know, some artists or some galleries think it's

not pure, but I think it helps me continue to be able to make my own art as well.

If we wish for gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow, what do you think is the hardest part of making this topic alive?

That's a huge topic! I think it's amazing to see more and more women, in the arts, that I can look up to. As a kid, even when it comes to film directors and artists and all that it's usually male models, but now more females are coming up. So I'm glad that my future generations are going to see women coming up. And I also think that for me, as a woman, I want to be an example to other women like young girls today. So I have to also tell myself that "Hey, if there's an opportunity here, I will step in as a female or as an Asian" for example, to speak up for a certain community. So I think my reminder to myself is "It's a gap that I can fill if it's a leadership position that I can take." I shouldn't shy away from it. Because sometimes I feel quite shy or I don't want to take up the leadership role because it is too much. But as women, we should try to rise as well. So I hope that's encouraging.

Photo © David Yeow



Peggy Chan

On a mission in promoting sustainable food and to raise awareness of the benefits of plant-based cuisine

Photos courtesy of Peggy Chan



Peggy Chan is the executive director of Zero Foodprint Asia and chef-consultant of Grassroots Initiatives. She was trained in Le Cordon Bleu Ottawa and has worked in L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon Hong Kong and Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, among other places. Peggy Chan established Grassroots Pantry in 2012 as a training ground for young F&B professionals ready and willing to challenge traditional food service operations. The award-winning plant-based restaurant became Hong Kong's first carbon-neutral business. She has been singled out by the United Nations Sustainable (SDG) Programme, the Basque Culinary World Prize 2019, the prestigious Global Wellness Summit, and other authoritative organisations for her commitment to sustainability in F&B, subsequently, she earned the HK Awards for Environmental Excellence in the Service Industry. An authority on food sustainability in Asia and a CISL* CPD certified net-zero strategist, Peggy developed the Grassroots Initiatives Consultancy to help accelerate and implement responsible F&B business practices; to veer the industries from degenerative to regenerative. She is the key driver of Hong Kong's green-eating movement that believes the future of plant-based cuisine would be normalisation. She is an increasingly vocal activist for issues related to her work as a chef and entrepreneur. Aside from avoiding processed ingredients and sourcing locally and regionally, the trailblazing chef pushes her menus forward by incorporating a variety of raw food techniques and ensuring that each creation is nutrient-rich.



How and when did you understand you wanted to be a Chef? Have you always had this clear in your mind? What motivated you?

I've always enjoyed cooking as a child as my mother was (and still is) an amazing cook. I often prepped alongside her and would tag along many of the cooking classes she attended before I even turned 13. However, I never thought that becoming a chef would be possible for a woman, nor had I known any professional women chefs I could look up to. I had only known my mom to be a great cook for the purpose of entertaining as a housewife. I think I was about 18 years old when I realised that it was a possible career choice. At the time I was in my first year of university studying fine arts, but quickly realised that dorm life and the constant come and go of people with different dreams and skills weren't really for me. As a rebellious teenager, I needed some more structure and consistency in my life. That's when my guidance counsellor back then nudged me towards trying out professional culinary. And to this day, I find surrounding myself with people who have similar passions, ambitions, and drive is what inspires me and helps me develop most.

Can you share with us some of your childhood food memories? Who has been your biggest influence or font of inspiration, and why?

My helpers who took care of me most as a toddler introduced me to balut, pancit, and suman. My dad who was born out of poverty in China in the 1950s taught us never to waste a single granule of rice. For this reason, any chance we had when visiting different provinces in China, he would make us try exotic ingredients such as pigs' brain, beating snakes' hearts, and stir-fried bee larvae so that we're reminded to always stay grateful for what we have. Growing up in Montreal, one of the most culturally diverse cities in Canada, we were very fortunate to be exposed to different cultures at an early age. Authentic Lebanese, Vietnamese, Jewish, Italian, Thai and French cuisines prepared by immigrants who all learned to live harmoniously cultivated my appreciation for diversity and inclusivity. My biggest influence has to be Alice Waters who opened Chez Panisse 50 years ago. Farm-to-table cuisine and Edible schoolyard was still new in the vast space of gastronomic history back in the early 2000s, and I was instantly hooked when I learned that a woman can cook professionally, run a business, educate and create a difference in the world; all at the same time.



Zero Foodprint Asia is managed and licensed by Grassroots Initiatives and is part of a global non-profit working to address systemic issues in the industrial food system. The mission is to raise funds via restaurants and food businesses to grant farmers who want to transition away from the current extractive food system towards more regenerative farming practices; helping to protect soil, produce more nutritious food, and help solve climate change by sequestering carbon from the atmosphere.

What do you love most about your job? What are the greatest rewards?

I've never just been a chef-chef. I don't think I would enjoy dish creation or managing a kitchen if I didn't also try to create meaning with my advocacy for animal welfare and environmental causes. Cooking solely plant-based seems to allow me to do all of the above. Even when I was working for others, I always integrated hobbies that kept me working to better myself or humanity - yoga, meditation, learning how to incorporate and prepare whole foods, health, and nutrition, and of course food policy, and food systems sustainability. When I started Grassroots Pantry, I never once thought, "oh I'm going to be famous by pioneering this new cuisine

or lifestyle.” That wasn’t the reason why I opened a restaurant. The community piece and the potential for impact was my main driver, but it doesn’t take away my passion for culinary and hospitality either. As the Dalai Lama says, the most sustainable way to extend compassion is the practice of selfish selflessness, because one must learn to take care of your own personal needs first in order to truly help others in the long run. In my case, I got to do everything I loved, despite how difficult things got, ultimately, compassion was what kept me going. So I guess the greatest reward is being able to do everything that I love, making a difference while earning a living for it. Not a lot of people get to realise their passions, let alone being able to do what they want.

How and when did you start to get interested in healthy food?

Pretty much right as soon as I finished culinary school at 20. I stopped eating red meat when I was 16 for animal welfare, spiritual, and health reasons. But I also wasn’t healthy, mentally. When I decided to clean my life up and started doing yoga, meditation, and eating less junk, consuming more whole foods just came with the lifestyle. Where everyone my age would have been eating Domino’s Pizza or pub food, I’d be getting my bulk grains and organic veggies from the hippie stores and farmers’ market, feeding myself with grain bowls and kelp

miso soup. Over time, I felt better physically, and mentally. The time that I had put in to work on myself, inside out, to turn my depression into compassion for others is really what gave me the strength to do what I did with Grassroots in my later years.

How has Covid19 affected and influenced your project? What were the biggest challenges during the pandemic?

Closing Nectar after just 6 months of operating was painful, as at the time, it really felt that I was finally able to slow down from gp’s 7-days 14 hr trade business model. After running GP for 7 years, Nectar was a way for me to slow down, and elevate biodiverse, nutrient-dense plant-based cuisine. On top of that I had plans to start pollen lab - what would have been a sustainability culinary institution as well as a consultancy on the side, as more and more hospitality companies were coming to me for F&B sustainability advice and menu design. I always say that what happened in HK in late 2019 was a precursor to what was to come with the pandemic, and as much as we had tried everything we could to stay afloat in late 2019, I ultimately made the decision to close down the restaurant, by happenstance, one month before the first Covid case landed in HK. For that, I will be forever grateful to whoever that was looking out for us. As we were incredibly lucky to not have



to go through the challenges that many in the industry ended up having to deal with.

A sustainable business can only truly be sustainable if the business' revenue carries itself through, and is able to pay for all of its monthly overheads. The truth is, that is rarely how HK restaurants work. Cash flow runs out, and owners end up having to call up capital in order to extend their lifeline. I absolutely would not have wanted my restaurant to go down that way, to rely on handouts.

Grassroots Initiatives is a social enterprise with experience assisting food service and hospitality companies in developing sustainability strategies, implementing best practices, and establishing measurable KPIs. The team has combined 50-plus years of operational, management, and C-suite experience in the hospitality industry, allowing GI to create tailored solutions specific to their client's needs. GI consultancy is equipped to deliver tangible results for all layers of the business, from menu research and development to conducting sustainable operations training; setting in-house carbon emissions reduction targets to assisting teams in measuring and reporting ongoing impact.



You are the founder, executive director of Grassroots Initiatives and Zero Foodprint Asia, what is the philosophy behind them?

GI is our consultancy where we work with hospitality and restaurant operators to tackle changes directly in their business, integrate best practices and monitor the improvements on the management and operational level. With Covid sparked a new wave of sustainable food concepts that new founders wanted to integrate into their brands. Operators and founders reached out to us for menu development and training work, as industry chefs weren't (and many still aren't) capable of creating innovative, zero-waste, low-carbon, well-balanced, and tasty plant-based dishes. There's a lot to be done here. Finally, the consultancy is now also heavily focused on Food Sustainability M&E for our clients, which I would say the industry still wasn't ready for in the last 3 years. I believe it's time that the success of a restaurant isn't purely based on revenue or how many awards it wins, but on whether sustainability targets are actually met. ZFPA on the other hand tackles systemic problems across the wider food and agricultural sector. Because without systems change, there is no true sustainability. For example would be: food waste treatment. Training chefs to reduce food waste, collect data on how much food waste they chuck out, or learn to create dishes using scraps isn't going to solve the

food waste issue on its own. It requires systemic solutions, logistics and facilities set in place as well as policies to enforce waste reduction right at the source.

Another example: we know sourcing organic is better than conventional, but it's not affordable and readily available. However, chefs design menus based on food cost 'budget' - so nothing ends up being changed to help more farms actually become organic. (known fact, despite the organic label having been around for ~60 years, only less than 2% of arable land in the world are certified organic). Which is why ZFPA works to engage, educate and utilises a crowdfunding model to encourage food and hospitality to participate in creating a renewable food system. Just 1% added to every bill, in aggregate, can help to fund the transition on thousands of acres of farms from conventional to regenerative. In the last 3 years, ZFP US has raised USD1.2 million, supporting 65 farming projects in California and Colorado in this transition, with as much GHG benefit as not burning over 17 million liters of gas. We lead the Asia arm and are responsible for cultivating a network of chefs and food business leaders around the importance of financing soil restoration, while we work to push the envelope on the science and guidance around soil health which is only just starting to develop in Asia. For more info, visit [here](#).



How much has Zero Foodprint Asia grown since it started? What are the milestones you have achieved so far, and what benefits people can get from being more conscious?

The growth has been slow due to Covid interruptions, and other ongoing crises (climate disasters, war, price increases), and that already takes up most of people's short attention span. But to date, we have funded 10 projects with approximately 80 restaurant partners and supporters on board. Moreover, we have grown tremendously as operators of this non-profit. We understand that ZFPA's cause is not the easiest to explain. Is it about supporting local farming, is it about climate change? What I can say is we need to do everything all at the

same time to truly meet the gravity of the crisis, so ZFPA's model taps into solving problems from the root up, quite literally. It's actually a very simple way for diners and restaurants to contribute. The restaurants help crowdfund 1% from every bill, essentially paid for by the diners. More restaurants come on board to pledge, more diners dine at ZFPA partner restaurants, more business they generate means more funds that can help support farmers to adopt regen ag. More regen farms = more biodiversity = happier farmer = healthier soil = healthier crops = healthier society. It's not a surprise why subsidies currently going into industrial ag is also what's driving more need for healthcare. At the end of the day, health is wealth. Healthier soil is wealth. Equipping

farmers with the tools and knowledge to keep us nutritiously fed is wealth. Being self-sufficient and resilient is wealth. So if you want to be a conscious consumer, invest in your farmers that care deeply about the health of our ecosystems.

How much are people nowadays concerned about health, food, and the environment?

Concerned but also helpless.

Do you believe that there is a growing awareness that everyone can help the environment by making simple food changes?

For the past 10-15 years I would've said yes. But small changes alone aren't enough. People want ease and convenience. If 1% is taken from what they're already paying (on a meal) to fund regenerative projects in the region, it just seems like a no brainer doesn't it?

What are the most difficult obstacles to overcome when introducing plant-based cuisine? Are habits and lifestyles difficult to re-educate, despite the knowledge of beneficial improvements for health and the planet?

10-15 years ago, it was 'but where would I get my protein from?'

Today, it is 'but is this protein good for me and the environment?'

There is always a reason for why adopting a pb diet is difficult and

mostly it stems from culture. If you tap into ppl's cultures and make food taste good, everybody can become a conscious consumer. What you don't want is to appropriate what a 'conscious' 'sustainable' diet means for everyone. How I do that in the kitchen is to make chefs familiarise themselves with the reference of the dish, incorporate their way of cooking it, and substitute the meat with a plant ingredient.

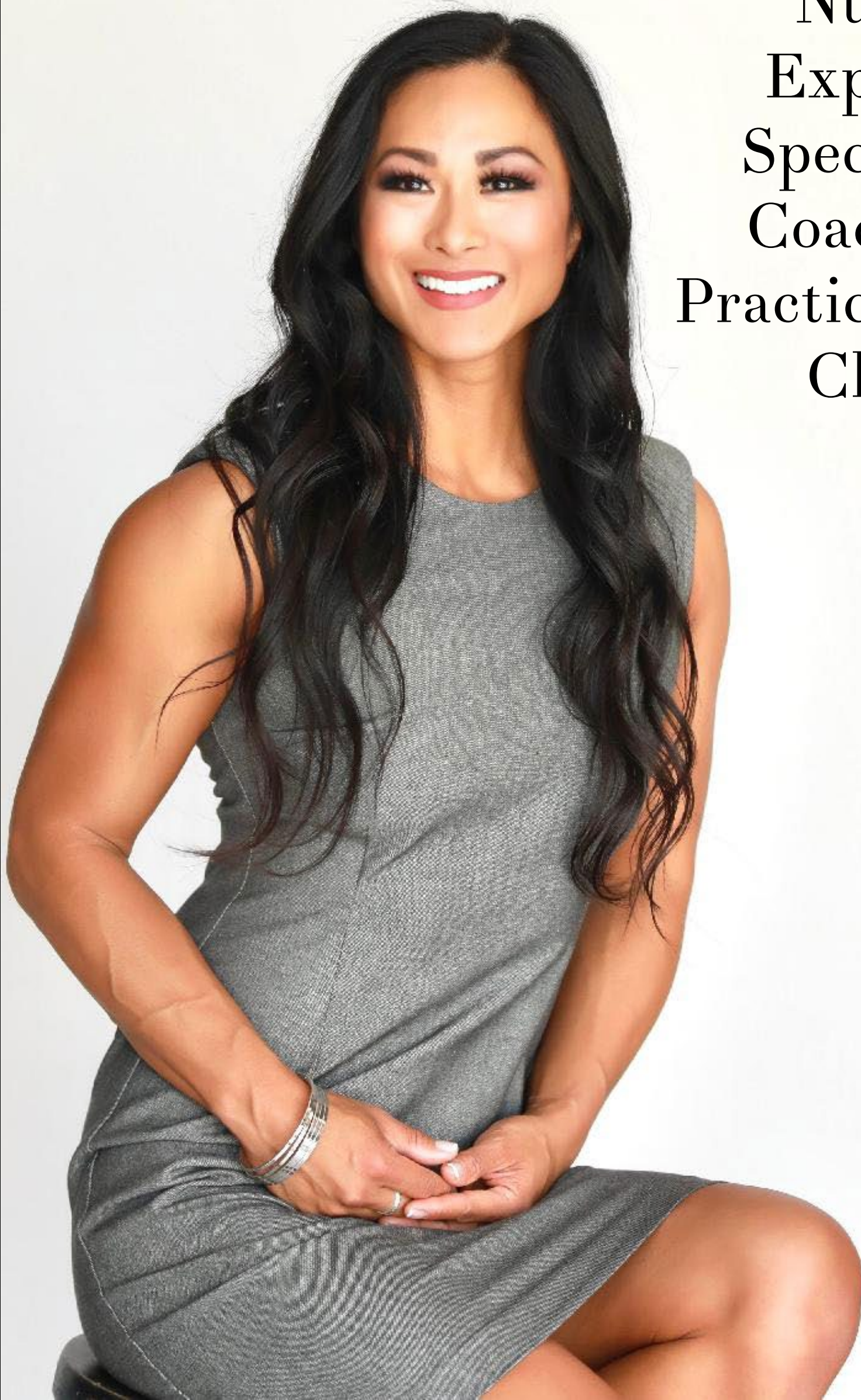
Has your life changed since you started to be environmentally conscious? What advice would you give to people to arouse this awareness? What advice do you think was important to you, and could make a difference for others too?

I don't remember life when I wasn't environmentally conscious. I am part of the environment, the environment is what makes me. But I also understand not everybody feels the same. Be in tune and spend more time out in nature. If there is one thing I hope everyone has learned, individualism can no longer exist in this post-Covid era. Cherish what you can do and what we can achieve when we come together.

Photo courtesy of Nancy Lin

Nancy Lin

Nutrition
Expert who
Specializes in
Coaching for
Practical Lifestyle
Changes



Dr. Nancy Lin, to corporations, community groups, senior centers, and elementary and high schools. She is extremely passionate about promoting the benefits of maintaining a mindfulness/mental wellness practice. Her YouTube channel's content focuses on providing short, digestible lifestyle videos to boost immune, physical, and psychological health. Dr. Nancy is also an avid runner and athlete, and has completed over 30 distance races, including 25 marathons in California. She is the lead health coach in her own body transformation programs. Dr. Nancy teaches virtual classes

One of her mission is to help people live a full and fulfilled life at any age, this can be reachable by practicing good lifestyle habits.



What are the reasons that persuaded you to choose a career in nutrition?

I really believe we are what we eat and consume, but we also are how we live. I have been in allopathic and conventional medicine since the age of 14, and I have seen first-hand how important what we consume is. Nutrition fuels our bodies, and becomes a part of how we function, sync, and move. It is something also controllable that is why I love nutrition so much. And we all also eat So that's why I enjoy my job in nutrition sciences so much.

What are the main challenges in your profession? What aspect of your job brings you the most satisfaction?

I believe one of the challenges in my profession is that the majority of people are operating and living off of their awareness, available resources, cultural and traditions of their environments and education when it comes to nutrition and body/mind healthcare. Depending on where you are living, and the many different varieties of marketing, people are fed misinformation about what is healthy, and most times our current lifestyle perpetuates what is convenient. Re-learning and rewiring our current lifestyle habits is perhaps one of the most satisfying as-



pects of my job. Because each and every person is so individual and unique, I truly enjoy the ability to curate and serve each one of my patients so I can help navigate him or her to their desired health and wellness goal(s).

What is the most common false myth that should be debunked in the nutritional field?

For me, I believe that most people think that I like to make, and cook different dishes, and provide recipes ... like a cooking show. People ask me for my cookbooks. My favorite part of my job is teaching people how to reverse, chronic ailments, and keep us from feeling “stuck, sick and tired.” Other common false myths include any-

thing most marketing, food and big Pharma companies try to hard sell consumers that are not science backed, but rather just feeds misinformation to sell their products.

Many people turn to a nutrition professional only after discovering they have a specific disease. How can we rather prevent the onset of these conditions thanks to nutrition?

That is true. A lot of my clients come to me only after they have tried so many other “specialists” and have seen that potions, pills and lotions have failed to give them quick relief. Prevention is rather the longer route. It takes patience, and the belief that it will happen. It also is a lifestyle, not a Band-Aid to slap on.



Supplements and complements: are they really effective for achieving optimal nutritional values?

I have sat on many nutraceutical boards, and formulated over a dozen products. I can safely and confidently say that because of the low accountability and oversight on supplements and nutraceuticals, especially in America, what you see on the label is not what you are getting, necessarily. If you are looking for effective formulas and products, you must go with a brand that you trust, that has transparency, and it's sourcing and efficacy, and one that is science fact with clinical studies to prove it.

Can you tell us if and how eating habits are changing? Do you think food awareness has changed during the pandemic?

I believe eating habits has become much more catastrophic across most countries. This is evident in the rise and gastrointestinal issues, immune issues, and mental health issues. The majority of the feel good hormone, serotonin, it's produced in the gut, and about 60% of our immune system is also produced there. Gut problems are at an epidemic high and correlates positively to the rise in mental health issues and immune compromise bodies as well. Food

awareness has definitely changed due to the way the world has had to adapt to the mercurial aftermath of Covid. From the way, people shop for their food, to the way it is transported and sourced from the farms, the element of fear has played a role in just how we "consume", "trust" and "enjoy" our meals.

What are the main problems related to nutrition education? How difficult is it to make people understand that eating healthy is a choice for health that makes people feel good and not a punishment?

One of the main problems related to nutrition, education is that there just isn't enough of it. Medical doctors are not required to take more than one class of nutrition. Because food is in and around the way we live, celebrate, socialize, emotionally process, and fuel our every day, and each person is so different, it's hard to generalize and prescribe the "cure all" protocol that will heal and optimize healthy nutrition for everyone.

How much does healthy eating also affect emotional and mental health?

Like I said, before, we are what we consume, and live. Most societies use food in emotional

milestones and everything in-between, so it is hard to disassociate the mental with the physical well-being of nutrition and consumption. This is why often, we end up turning to food when we are emotionally driven, and it is hard to break that habit and cycle.

Human health and well-being are intimately linked to the state of the environment. Can you share with us your opinion on this topic?

In my book, breaking the bad with Dr. Nancy Lin, I talk about the five pillars of health that make up our total wellness. The environmental pillar is extremely important, just like the nutritional pillar is (and the three other pillars, physical, mental/emotional and spiritual). The environmental pillar illustrates how we are the combination of our environment, including our social circles, the products we use on a daily basis, and, living environment. If someone, for example, eats extremely clean and healthy, exercises every day, meditate, and practice his yoga, but lives in a home that is filled with black mold, and housemates that smoke perpetually, that person will experience adverse health effects, despite all the good efforts he, or she has put in to be healthy. We must be able to analyze our environment and remove/disassociate

*Dr. Nancy
Lin takes an
honest
approach to
wellness via
her 5 Pillars
of Living and
also help to
easily
implements
fundamental
lifestyle
practices
that anyone
can adopt.*

*She also
shares her
expert voice
about her
passion for
fitness, how
she trains,
and tips on
maintaining
your health
and
wellness.*

the toxic products and people that are not pushing us to be our best. That is the environmental pillar.

In the Blue Areas of the world where people live the longest lives, the benefits of healthy eating and daily physical activity are also listed. Do you think that even those who don't live in Blue Areas could obtain significant benefits by improving their eating and motor habits? What would you recommend?

In my book, I also talk about the blue zones. I discuss the common habits and traits that these blue zones has, so people who do not live in these blue zones can adopt the habits and level up their life. I do believe that, even if you do not live in these blue zones, Good habits will fortify health and wellness from the inside out. I would recommend people to look into, and practice my Medi- American Diet, which is a level up from the popular Mediterranean diet that is discussed in the blue zones. Check out my book to learn more!

My book is available here:

<https://5pillarsofliving.com/product/breaking-the-bad/>



Fashion Stylist and Consultant, Founder of Handknit Label,
Knotti, and Restyling Accessory Kitdo

Photo courtesy of Denise Ho

Denise Ho

Denise Ho is one of Hong Kong's most respected stylists and fashion consultants, who took her passion for fashion to new heights. She has worked in the fashion industry for many years, from founding her own knitwear brand, Knotti to directing new concept collections for The R Collective. She evolved her work in fashion to become more sustainable – environmentally and socially, concerned about textile waste and believing in the importance of encouraging a circular economy for the next generation. As creative director for The R Collective, she was involved in upcycling luxury excess materials and trying to figure out the most sustainable way to create a collection using these rescued materials. This includes working with sustainable fashion designers from the Redress Design Awards, designing out waste by using sustainable design techniques like upcycling, striving for zero-waste design, deconstruction, etc. She is also the founder of Kitdo, a brand new environmentally friendly accessory, that can help people restyle garments in many different ways. For the last few years, Denise Ho has been reinventing her craft as a fashion stylist and also as a sustainability enthusiast. Throughout her career, Denise Ho worked with countless celebrities, including James Franco, Luke Evans, and Michelle Yeoh. She has styled iconic fashion campaigns and editorials for a vast range of publications.

You are a fashion stylist and consultant. Can you share with us where your passion comes from? How did you see the world in your childhood?

That's such a great question because no one has asked me about my childhood before lol. I was actually in touch with fashion at a very young age because of my mother, who was a buyer for Jean Paul Gaultier and she was responsible for bringing the brand to Hong Kong. By the time I was 7 years old, my mom had already taught me what fashion is, showing me the beautiful fabrics/craftsmanship/finishings and I was obsessed with it. I know a lot of young kids say they love fashion because it's a fantasy or an escape; but to me, it's due to the fact I have a deep appreciation for beauty. When I see a beautiful piece of clothing, regardless if it's in a magazine or in real life, my heart skips a beat and it still does to this day.

Who has influenced you as a person and as a creative?

There are so many but the first one that came to my mind will be Sarah Richardson. I didn't have any experience in styling but she took me on and taught me everything I needed to know about styling. For example, how to really push boundaries, be good with people

Knotti, Denise Ho's knitwear label, is a sustainable brand that uses only biodegradable yarn and employs home knitters, allowing them to work comfortably from home with flexible hours. The fashion label specialises in combining traditional hand-knitted crafts with a modern twist. She decided to start Knotti because she wanted to create something that was thoughtfully crafted, and embody the values of slow fashion. The main goal is to create the ultimate "timeless" knitwear that is stylish yet versatile enough as a closet staple. Each piece is unique, with a traceable story that reconnects the consumer with the producer. Each piece is produced locally and takes around 3 weeks to complete. Knotti only uses biodegradable yarn from a company in Gostwyck, Australia, that produces exceptionally high quality fiber on the most environmentally and ecologically responsible farms. They also spin and dye their own yarn to ensure that high standards are met throughout the manufacturing process.



KNOTTI

HOMEMADE APPAREL



and work as a team. This was back in 2002 when stylists weren't as common as it is now so that was definitely a special time for me.

Another one will be by a Buddhist teacher whom I met through my mom. He really showed me the importance of service, and how to live life with a purpose. He also showed me how to stay mentally healthy and clear-headed with meditation and I really benefited from that.

Can you share with us when you understand the importance of sustainability in fashion industries?

Two key events triggered my passion in understanding fashion sustainability. First, reflecting on my first-ever brand, a kids fashion line, I now realise the amount of waste you created through samples that we had to get rid off each season. Secondly, during my time as creative director at Redress, I had first-hand experience of wit-

nessing the mountain of clothing waste at a HK packing facility. The combination of both really urged me to do something about it.

You have founded Knotti and Kitdo. How do these projects come to life? What motivated you?

I started Knotti back in 2015, it was a project combining giving back to local communities and my initial effort into sustainability/slow-fashion. I, along with my assistant, began to learn knitting from experienced individuals (and YouTube videos). Once we had accumulated enough skills and knowledge, we taught and employed other ladies, who otherwise may not have skills to be hired, to give them a chance to better their lives. The collection we created was small, but it was picked up by luxury retailers such as Lane Crawford. While I enjoyed all aspects of Knotti, it was unfortunately not a scalable business, which led me to my next passion project. Soon after Knotti, I consulted for sustainable labels, dove

Kitdo, a restyling accessory used to “re-envision pieces to create newness in clothes’ offers solutions to restyle and reinvent existing wardrobe pieces. This tool is Denise Ho’ ultimate vision of sustainable fashion. The new accessory hopes to reduce waste and fast fashion by encouraging users to restyle pieces in their closets instead of “compulsively buying “ new items. Kitdo can add a playful new spin on old wardrobe staples by looping, double looping, bonding, and cinching, thanks to strong magnets to bond clothes’ tissues together, creating new shapes and textures without making holes in the fabric. Since the fashion industry generates 92 million tons of textile waste each year and the average person only wears 10 to 20 percent of their wardrobe, it is important to speak to consumers about the importance of restyling. Kitdo redefines the concept of newness by thinking outside the box. Kitdo is a versatile accessory that can bring people to value every piece of clothing with a long-term vision that can make a positive impact in their life, and on the environment. Kitdo can give buyers the same fix as buying new, without compromising the planet. It is a unique product that has already won 3 international design awards.

deep into research, and realised we are currently wearing only 10-20% of our wardrobe with some pieces of clothing only being worn 7 times before being discarded, which results in a massive waste problem. With so much waste still being generated every year, I wonder what our world will be like if everyone restyles more instead of buying more. My idea of a beautiful piece of accessory that would both replace all the safety pins we use on sets and give consumers confidence in restyling was born. Kitdo, winner of 3 international design awards, is a unique restyling product that I am very proud of.

Climate change and pollution are huge issues, and new sustainability is a top priority, primarily in the fashion industry. What role can Kitdo play for people that have to choose between ethics and good taste?

According to an article by BBC.com, continuing to actively wear a garment for just 9 months longer could diminish its environmental impact by 20-30%. This highlights the importance of restyling, and we need more people who want to be a part of the restyling community. Restyling is a fairly new concept to the general public, and I feel most people get a little intimidated by it, thinking it's

difficult to do. I believe Kitdo is a great gateway tool to ease consumers into the lifestyle of restyling. There is no right or wrong way to use it and it's really up to the user on how creative they want to go, that sense of freedom is how you develop a personal style. And guess what, your personal style is the best style.

Could you walk us through the Kitdo design process, from concept to final product? What were the biggest challenges?

The concept is to introduce a piece of product that can ease consumers into the world of restyling. With the concept in mind, I shaped different moulds with playdoh and magnets and started using them as prototypes. When the design matured, I finally showed my manufacturer the prototype. The challenging part is when you start sampling and doing production, which can be costly because we are just pouring money into R&D without knowing whether it will work or not. In addition, I have no experience in accessory production so I was quite lucky that my manufacturer was willing to work with me. Until today, I still haven't fully figured out how to reduce cost because Kitdo is so complicated to make but I know one day I will.



What improvements have you observed in the fashion industry, and what more should be done?

As consumers become more environmentally conscious, major players in the industry are shifting away from the wasteful practices of the past and embracing sustainable fashion technology to help bring major improvements. There have been a lot of exciting happenings in eco-friendly technology in fashion, from virtual sampling, digital dressing to edible materials which is very exciting. I do feel there is a lack of focus on post-consumer which is equally important. We need to invest more in educating consumers to stop discarding their clothes and develop a habit of extending the life of the clothes we already have.

“Less is more” scares some people. A minimalist lifestyle sometimes has become more complicated, because some people try to fit various standards to be part of and be accepted by different groups. How can people incorporate sustainability practices in daily life to be more aware, without giving up on socialising?

I am by no means advocating for 100% refrain from buying new. But I believe everything you do or believe in, you have to find the balance. You can't just go to one ex-

treme or another. For example, even though I am restyling clothes/shopping second-hand, I am allowing myself to buy a new pair of shoes once in a while. Also, everyone is different when it comes to what makes you happy, if less is more means having less but a collection of quality things that bring value to the bigger picture then why not. Sometimes we don't think that even kids are exposed to trends and to the abundance of fashion.

Since you've also worked as a children's clothing designer in the past, what do you think is the key to helping them to learn the importance of a sustainable wardrobe?

It is difficult to not buy new things for children as they grow and change so fast. But it is never too early to teach them the importance of treasuring everything we are lucky to own and not be wasteful. In this material world, we often forget that once we buy something, it becomes our responsibility to keep them well and not see them as disposable objects. All these small lessons planted in our kids can one day steer them to value the clothes in their wardrobe and all of their belongings.

Denise Ho is convinced of the importance of being open to restyling because once people get into the habit of restyling their clothes, they won't abandon them as much

Consumers that believe in sustainable fashion and are looking for solutions are conscious of the problem of “Greenwashing”. How can they spot it? What is your opinion about this topic?

First of all, I commend all brands that are taking steps forward in sustainable fashion. I am certainly not here to define what is right or wrong as there may be many unseen factors that outsiders do not realise. With that said, I think it is up to the consumers to be curious, to want to learn more about the statements being published. At the end of the day, if we ask more questions, that will uncover the truth for all to see.



Photos courtesy of Amy Luo

Amy Luo



The Photographer who Illuminate
People's Mental Landscapes

Amy Luo is a commercial and studio photographer, who obtained her Master's degree in European Film Studies at the University of Edinburgh and went on to further her research at the Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne. She has worked on feature film projects, documentaries, and news reports both in China and abroad since graduating. She received the Rita.K.Hillman Award of Excellence from the International Centre of Photography (ICP) in New York in 2015. Her work has since been exhibited and published internationally. It has also been cited with a number of awards including being placed as a finalist for Fine Art photography in the first edition of the Magnum Photography Awards in 2016. She works as a freelance photographer and filmmaker in both New York City and Shenzhen. She started out a number of public photography projects from 2018 to 2021 with the goal of depicting the lives of rural migrant workers in China, a largely marginalised community. Her photos have a great cinematic impact, reflecting the individuality of each subject and her personal narrative style and work. She hopes to document the plight of migrant workers in China and to call into question how these individuals have been handled. Her projects have attracted considerable interest and community interactions in China and abroad, and have been featured in a number of television programs, including an NHK World documentary in 2019.

How did you get into photography and when did you decide to choose it as a profession?

I left China when I was 20, after studying literature in Beijing. I studied TV production and cinema in Europe and returned to my country regularly working in film production and journalism. I chose photography as my main profession after I studied photography at the International Center of Photography in New York in 2015. Since then, I have continued to use photography as a way to verify my existence and to see myself, my identity, my relationships, and my evolution.

The photographer places her subjects within each set, transporting viewers into a different dimension so intricately detailed

Untitled. Part of “Secrete Scriptures” series





Untitled. Part of “Till We Meet Again” series

Who has had the greatest influence or source of inspiration on you as a person and as a creative?

I have spent several years investigating the manifold intersections of images and identity and gender, but my grasp of photography's transformative power was formed while I was studying at the ICP. My tutor Frank Franca, who also loves European cinema, encouraged my interest in fashioning narratives within a single frame. My tableaux are often described as cinematic, reflecting one of the strongest influences in my personal work. I also took a workshop with Rick Sands, Gregory Crewdson's director of photography, which was greatly inspiring. What many portrait photographers focus on is the person, and some of

them tend to ignore the scene. Rick has the whole scene in mind and lights it like a film set.

What is your favourite aspect of your job? What are the most rewarding and satisfying aspects?

I am mostly drawn to marginal communities: in my previous projects, for instance, I photographed Chinese sex workers in Flushing, Queens, China's migrant workers, trans communities in China and fishermen who are battered by their circumstances, among others. Because of the violence and misrepresentation that these groups face every day, the need for imagery that is marked by complexity and compassion remains urgent. I feel an acute responsibility to do my part in con-

veying their experience and recognizing our shared humanity.

Photography as an extension of the eye, and memory, to stop time, but also as a time machine. What do you want to tell and hope to communicate with your images? What is your artistic philosophy?

Ambiguity fascinates me. Some of my work is subjective, reflecting my interpretation of my subjects. Sometimes my portraits of other people are as much about myself and my own search for my roots. I am always thrilled to find new ways to weld fictitious narratives in my work that are still very much rooted in reality. I often look to use the combination of reality and fiction to create an interesting dynamic in my projects. Influenced by many European filmmakers, I am interested in cutting loose conventional visual frames and re-inventing visual language.

Do you prefer to work on photos or spontaneous shoots?

I like to work both ways and sometimes they can be combined. For example, in my earlier fine-art series, “Dreams,” the set was staged but what happened in front of my camera was spontaneous-- I asked people to re-enact their dreams. I would light a location, then observe my subjects from a distance, firing my camera using a remote trigger as they acted out a scene from memo-

ry. I was interested in knowing how I could use photography to describe people’s inner, mental landscapes.

Your portfolio is full of intense and deep portrayals. What was the project that excited you most? Is there any of your work that you are particularly connected to you or that marked a significant moment in your personal life?

“20-07 198th St, Flushing” is one of my video installation projects. It started as a documentation of a massage parlour in Flushing, Queens, where a group of illegal Chinese immigrants work there daily. My project investigated the way in which these women inhabited this enclosed and shared space, which seems simultaneously public and private, mental and physical. As you can imagine, filming was challenging but exciting. It is a greatly inspiring and rewarding experience.

Can you share with us a meaningful story from the backstage of your photo shoot or project?

I see my fine-art series “Till We Meet Again” and “Secret Scriptures,” which I shot in 2018 in Tibet, as a kind of “collaboration” with my late grandfather. Each of my images has an association with a line or poem in the journal he kept during his own travels in Tibet. My grandfather was a poet and a literature teacher long fascinated by Zen Buddhism and Taoist philosophy. When



Chodron. This image depicts 13-year-old Chodron, who is considered to be an oracle and a reincarnated deity by the residents of her small village on the edge of Ngari Prefecture to the west of Tibet, an area largely devoid of human presence as a result of its high altitude and climatic extremes.

he was in his 40s, he suddenly left his family, went to Tibet, and spent four years there as a pilgrim and “wandering monk.” I was close to him when I was a small child, growing up in a village in southern China. But after my parents and I moved to a city, I had contact with him only on holidays. My family never talked about his time in Tibet, and I never got a chance to ask. After he died, I returned to his home for the funeral. I found a booklet of poems and observations he made of people and places he had seen then. I then decided to do a project in Tibet to honour his memory. I spent seven weeks travelling in Tibet, meeting people, and coping with my grief. Whenever I saw a scene that reminded me of my grandfather’s writings, I asked permission to make a photo. It was a wonderful experience, like recreating what he described by using real life characters and locations.

You have been working in photography and art for a long time. What role do you believe gender plays in contemporary photography? Is gender still relevant? Are women slowly influencing art and photography?

Gender has always been central to conversations about equality, and the power and influence that women hold on the world stage is irrefutable. It’s astounding to measure the progress we’ve made over the past, say, fifty years. But the struggle endures. Photography’s emergence as an essential medium in alternative practices, particularly conceptual art, corresponds with the growth of the women’s liberation movement in the U.S. and Europe in the 1960s. Women artists interested in documenting themselves and their lived experience aligned easily with feminism. Photography offered flexible and limitless opportunities. At a time of great uncertainty and promise, I believe that gender is still very much relevant. There are as many photographic approaches in photography as there are gender expressions. It is great to see that artists of all genders around the world are defining ideas of gender identity on their own terms. While not all artists address feminist politics explicitly—they are each, in their own ways, concerned with how women are envisioned by art, culture, and memory. Their work underscores how photography has shaped feminism as much as how feminism has

Xihongshi, a member of a trans community in Shenzhen, China



Xiaoting Chen, Huazhou County, Guangdong Province, China. Twenty-seven-year-old Xiaoting Chen works as a history teacher in one of the primary schools in rural Huazhou county in China's Guangdong province. Chen lost one of her eyes to a tumor when she was a child, but has kept her spirit up. She now dedicates herself to teaching students who are left behind by their parents. In China, an estimated 61 million children are left behind by their migrant parents who work in cities. The absence of parents and challenges of rural life often leave these children particularly vulnerable. Chen's story went viral in China's social media.



shaped photography. As the fight for gender equality continues, and as we've opened up our definitions of men, women, and folks in between, we're moving toward a horizon where people are free from the gender binary.

What is the biggest challenge of being a photographer during the social media era? What are the limits and the benefits?

Social media is a great source of inspiration and ideas for photographers and artists. It is also a perfect way to get people engaged in your projects and get your work noticed. Moreover, the rise of "social photography," pioneered by Flickr in 2005, has opened fascinating new possibilities for cultural research.

But the photo-universe created by hundreds of millions of people can also make it harder for photography to instruct, interpret, and clarify opinion and information. I also think about the shifting and fluid nature of gender roles and identity in how we present ourselves online. The possibilities for constructing a visual, physical, and theoretical identity are overwhelming at the moment. Social media also allows us a level of control in our presentation of self that isn't always possible in real life. But even as the Internet has opened new opportunities to project images of self-exploration and to connect with others, we still have to be vigilant.

A 16-year-old sexual assault victim in her own room, 2015, Boston.



*Photos and Graphic Design
courtesy of Yang Liu*

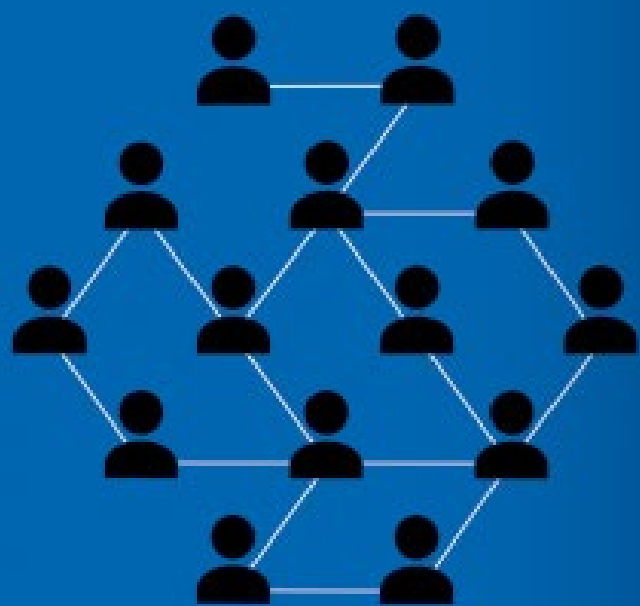
The Mind
that Creates
a Unique
Blend and
Balance of
Art and
Design

Yang Liu

Yang Liu is a multi-award winning designer based in Berlin. She started to work in the design fields in Singapore, London, Berlin, and New York after graduating from the University of Arts Berlin. She established her own design studio in 2004, which she still runs today. She works in creating concepts and development of Logo systems, Corporate Identities, Information Design, Exhibition Design, Wayfinding System Design, Cross Cultural Design, Content Visualization, Printed Media, and Book Design for institutions and companies around the world are among the work fields. She has taught at numerous universities in Germany and abroad, in addition to lectures at international conferences. She was appointed professor at Berlin's BTK University of Applied Sciences in 2010. Her works have won numerous awards in international competitions and can be found in museums and collections worldwide. Many intercultural trainers and language programs have included her design artwork in their lessons or company training because it helps people get closer to each other's cultures, laugh about themselves, and understand and be more tolerant of others. Yang Liu draws inspiration from her own experiences and observations to create images that operate at the intersection of art, design, and always communicate hard-hitting and humorous messages.

Circle of friends

Freundeskreis · Cercle d'amis · Círculo de amigos



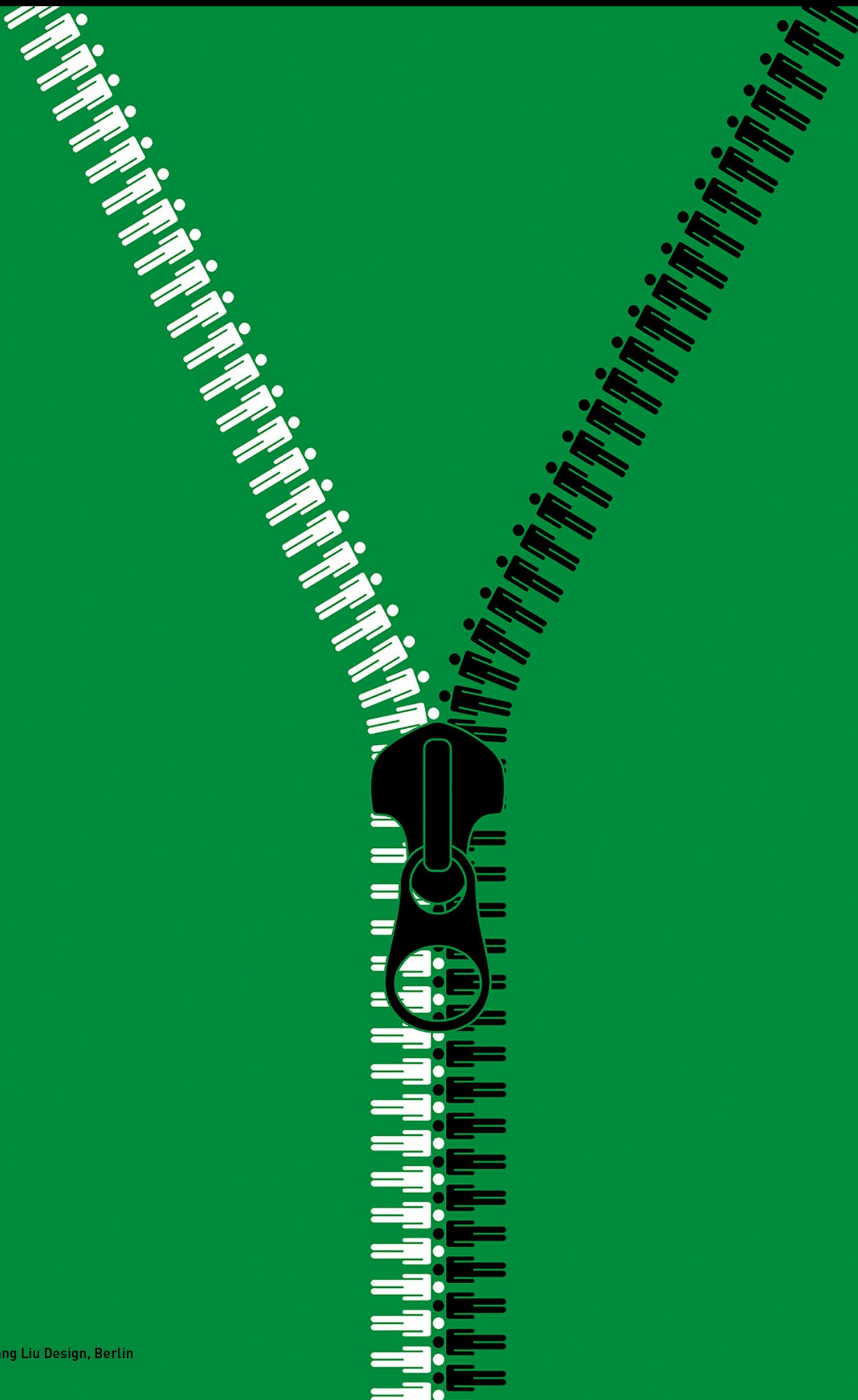
Why did you choose graphic design as a professional career? What do you like more than this profession? What does it mean for you to be a graphic designer?

Maybe my choice of communication design is rather due to the fact that I wanted to go to the university as early as possible. I started to apply for a university spot when I was 14 years, and I was accepted at the age of 16. The subject communication design was one, which mostly had no application age limits. And for me it was very important to have a profession, I can have the maximum freedom on place and time of working. This choice surely was also influenced by my family. My mother was one of the first fashion designers in China in the 80's, she had her own fashion show, maybe one of the first at that time. My father is a scientist and has registered many patents in his life and his ideas and skills of very unique problem solving has also fascinated me. All those



Today Meets Yesterday

Yang Liu's pictogram book series *Meet* is a personal project about differences in life in various aspects and contexts. In all of her books, she reports from her fresh perspective genuinely and humorously various small and large variances in life. Her pictogram book series began with the internationally popular title "East meets West", differences between Chinese and Western cultures, which went viral. The series was followed by "Man meets Woman", "Today meets yesterday", "Big meets Little" and "Europe meets USA". They are a visual exploration of the ever-changing interplay discrepancies between how people see themselves, are perceived by others, communicate, and work. The books have a simple, approachable graphic design and are a thought-provoking tool for sparking conversations.





East Meets West

circumstances together made me choose communication design, where I can combine my visual and problem solving interests plus the flexibility in this profession to work globally.

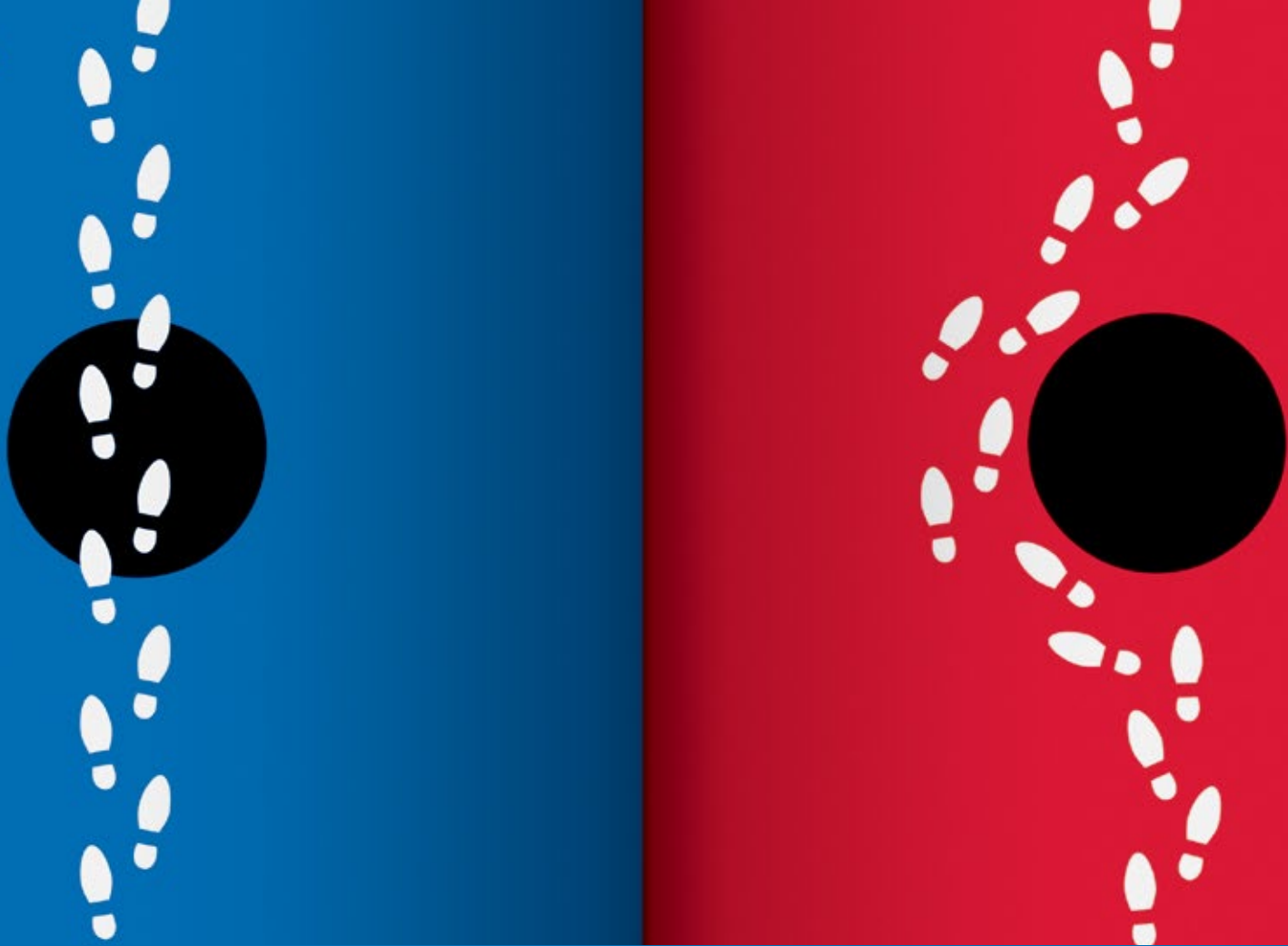
Who has influenced you both personally and professionally? Who are your sources of inspiration?

As mentioned before, my upbringing was one of the influences, also my later mentor Holger Matthies, who is a poster artist, both his view on design and him as a person also did influence me. Of course also my later work mentors Tom Geismer and Ivan Chermayeff, with whom I worked in New York did have influenced me in many ways. And most important influence were all my experiences in living in different countries made me into the person I am today. Later I extended my travels more intensively. The ability to appreciate different customs and cultures is a very important part of my

creations and also of my life. My other sources of inspiration are different genres of art, such as fine art, music, theatre, performing arts, ect.

How have the design fields changed from the time of your beginnings? What were the challenges of that time, and what are those of now? What does it mean to be a graphic designer in Germany?

The profession has changed very much over the decades. When I started to study graphic design it just changed to be communication design. Today the profession has changed due to the multiple communication channels to be a much more complex one in terms of understanding of form, frequency and channels of communication. There is also a big difference on the location in Germany, it is very different to be in Berlin or in other cities. I can only report from the perspective of working in Berlin. I experienced a very diverse design landscape here



East Meets West

and there is less commercial pressure on designers, therefore more freedom and time in creativity and also on design research, which I personally benefit a lot from. In cities like New York and London, where I worked and lived before, I can experience a more active creative network. Of course in Berlin there are many design related events and gatherings, maybe just slightly less intensive. Therefore the freedom in Berlin gives you the possibility to do projects that are less possible elsewhere.

How can you balance your perceptiveness and ideas with customer requests while keeping your personality?

Customers actually only request with very percist ideas, if they do not feel themselves to be understood or lack of trust is usually the background of conflicts between designers and clients. I rarely have these problems, as I take a lot of

time in talking to clients at the beginning before I even start to work. I always want to carefully listen to their concerns and make sure I did understand everything and worked towards resolving their problems. If the communication worked well at the beginning, clients usually rarely give further requests on the later design. In the design itself I have usually my full freedom to create under the frame of finding visual solutions towards the clients requirement. Once the clients have the feeling that you do work towards the same goal, you are working under fully different conditions. I do see trust as a very important foundation between clients and designers in every project. So far I have very good experience with clients in this aspect.

Beyond what can be the needs and requests of a customer, what is the creative process that leads you to the choice of a specific colour palette?

When talking to clients, I never think solely about form or colours as a separate subject, rather which form and colour might support the best problem solving result. In that context, a colour choice is never made due to any one's desire or personal like or dislikes, all the choices were made due to support the problem solving process. Sometimes, as the clients' working fields are diverse, we need to do a long research to understand his subject and problems. The question is always, why do I choose this or that colour, it needs to have a reason, that is supporting the content. So far clients always could follow the colour choices which have been made under this background.

Which of your works do you feel closest to your graphic design conception?

Actually most may be even all of my works do fully follow my graphic concept. I do take each project very seriously, no matter in its form or size, for me it is very important to give 200% in each project, I do not want to leave any work behind, before starting others. Of course there may be one or two projects in my life that I'm not 100% happy with, but these are rather the exceptions. I still remember the first time I saw

your project's "East meets West" series. How do you condense the message while maintaining nuance? The east meets west project is based on personal experiences, after I moved from China to Germany, the book itself was created in New York as a kind of a summary. I do see pictograms as my language of communication, they are vocabularies for me to communicate my experiences or point of view. As someone who moves around often, you do often meet the situation of miscommunication. I hope that pictograms can overcome this problem and support my communications or will help others through my books. After "East meets West", there are four other follow up books published in this series.

Graphics nowadays play a very important role in communication. How has the approach to design during the Social Media era changed? Do you think the cultural differences between East and West are still the same or have they changed since you made this project?

Communication design has changed very much by social media. A very important change is the participation of audiences to interact with in an idea or a campaign. One point that hasn't changed is that unusual ideas are still needed also in the social media era. Of course many things that are related to daily habits or related towards media do have changed. But the deep cultur-



One for all, all for one

Argument



Argument



10 Minutes
later



10 Minutes
later



Little Child Adult Argument

al rooted values and understandings haven't changed even after so many years. That actually fascinated me also, how deep those cultural values are in everyone of us.

The theme for International Women's Day 2023 is „DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality” How do you see the role of Artificial Intelligence in graphic design?

In my book “Man meets Woman”, which was the follow up of “East meets West” many daily details of the topic gender equality were presented with many pages. Innovation and technology as a support of gender equality is a great perspective. AI is a very interesting area and it can be a great support to creating more equality in many fields. I did 3 workshops with my students towards this topic. Towards the profession of graphic design, many technical parts of our profession will surely be replaced by AI in the future. I

Ministry for Foreign Affairs Germany, State Museums of Dresden, Pepsi Co, Goethe Institute, Citröen, L'Oreal Hong Kong, Volkswagen Group, Lufthansa Group, Swarovski are some of the many clients of Yang Liu

see that actually as a big benefit. As designers in the future, would have more time for collecting important experiences for ideation and sharing their unique experiences, imaginations and outlooks through their visual languages, which can then, with support of AI, be completed and communicated to a wider audience.

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*Photos courtesy of Suyi Xu & Fou Gallery
Special thanks to Echo He*

Suyi Xu

Meditations on the Connection between
Emotions and Architecture



*Suyi Xu at Studio in Brooklyn, August 2022 ©Suyi Xu,
Photograph by Xi Zhou, courtesy of Fou Gallery*



Suyi Xu: All that is Solid Melts into Air installation view, photo by Zhou Xi ©Suyi Xu, Courtesy of Fou Gallery

Suyi Xu is a painter living and working in Brooklyn, New York. She received her B.A. in Art History and Visual Arts from Barnard College in New York and her M.F.A. in the Fine Arts Department of School of Visual Arts (New York) in 2022. Xu's paintings are meditations on space, interiors, and architecture that evolve into color field meditations. She paints through speculation and inward thinking rather than direct observation by incorporating historical references and idiosyncratic symbolic elements. The painter observes the nature of light and shadow and entrusts colour contrasts with the role of investigating and modelling everything, underlining with these the drama of reality. In her artworks, the strokes of colour evoke the accumulation over time, in its state of transitory but permanent moment. Furthermore, in her paintings, architecture has a bodily presence. Xu has participated in several exhibitions in commercial galleries and non-profit organizations in the U.S. and Europe, including group shows at New Collectors Gallery (London, 2021), Boomer Gallery (London, 2021) and A.I.R. Gallery (New York, 2021). Her first solo exhibition in New York was *All that is Solid Melts into Air* (Fou Gallery, New York, 2022).

Could you please tell us a little bit about yourself? How did you become interested in painting? Who have you looked up to as a person and an artist?

My art education was a mismatch of things. I was submerged in the language of historical painting but see through the eyes of a formalist. The most influential class in college was on Postmodernism. My work embraces these influences—the idealism of historical tradition, the formal consciousness of the pictorial plane, and the pastiche of contemporaneity. I do not have a certain artist that could be a staple for who I am now. There are a lot of past spirits that live inside of me. Everything I made is both a homage and a critique of the ones that came before. Occasionally I get excited by a contemporary painter and it drove me into the studio instantly.

When did you get started? What were the most difficult challenges?

I came to painting late in college, and started to take painting seriously during grad school. Painting is one of the rare things that comes naturally. The experience of painting itself is easy compared to everything else one has to deal with to be an artist.

In Suyi Xu's paintings punctual and intense attention to grasping the visible data and not trying to create idealisation or transfiguration of reality was highlighted. Her painting has an intimate adherence to the reality she interprets, without imposing her vision, since her creative energies are inclined to reveal the eternal that adapts: she realistically paints light, but directs it where she wants, on particulars or details.

What does being a painter mean to you?

Below is a list of persona I found in painters from experience and observation. A mystic. A cynic. A scientist. A poet. An exhibitionist. A hermit. A hedonist. A stoic. An egotist. A humanist.

How long does it take you to complete one of your paintings, from concept to finished canvas?

It varies from days to months. Every painting carries the memory and knowledge from the one before. I often start a new painting just to resolve the problems from the last one, instead of fixing them directly. Gradually my work become a algorithmic loop that present different solutions



Suyi Xu, *A Woman under the Influence*, 2021.
Oil on canvas, 72x48 inches ©Suyi Xu,
Photograph by Xi Zhou, courtesy of Fou Gallery



*Xu Suyi at Studio (New York),
photograph by Meiko Gao.*

to a recursive visual problem. The boundaries between concept and completion are often blurred. The initial idea could be simmering for months before I execute them in paint.

What, in your painting, best focuses your artistic personality? What messages would you like to be read? What impression do you try to arouse in those who look at your paintings?

Every picture has an internal distance from the audience. Some comes to you, some you have to go out of your way to meet it. Right

Her paintings lead the viewers in a recursive algorithm.

The repetitions evoke the cycles and loops of life, where there are elements of vulnerability, humanity, and universality. It creates new perspectives and energy by uniting disjointed realities in spaces, architectures, and interiors that deny time.



Suyi Xu, *Fidelio*, 2021. Oil on canvas, 64x48 inches ©Suyi Xu,
Photograph by Xi Zhou, courtesy of Fou Gallery



now I'm playing with this idea of distance. I have always believed in the power of absence over presence, like T.S. Eliot's darkened room (prepared for all the things said and left unsaid). I could never dictate the impression aroused in the viewers. I hope, when people stand in front of my painting, they can feel the density of my decisions and the passage of time summed up in one moment.

*Suyi Xu: All that is Solid Melts into Air
installation view, photo by Zhou Xi
©Suyi Xu, Courtesy of Fou Gallery*

*“My subjects are responses to the spiritual crisis of contemporary existence, and my method a visceral engagement with the painting medium driven by the idea of a sacred intent.”
- Suyi Xu*

Some of the elements that enrich your paintings recall profound aspects of emotional reality set in precise architectural environments. Can you tell us how this combination was born and the idea behind it?

I paint architectures because they are more forgiving than people. The geometric form lends itself onto the canvas. They are also deceptively neutral and reserved, giving me more freedom to project myself onto them. Virginia Woolf observed in her diary that one can not write directly about the soul. “Look at, it vanished.” But look elsewhere—“the ceiling, the walkers in the park, the cheaper beats in the zoom, and the soul slips in.” The soul also slips in the afternoon, when I look at the ascending staircase, the arch of a hallway, and the grey area at a white wall struck by the sun.

What relationship do you have with the colors you use?

I am very attracted to Duchamp’s idea of “infrathin.” I understand it as a sensitivity to the most minute shades of difference. My colors operate within the language of infrathin. When I first started painting my instinct was to smooth every color to achieve an impeccable flat surface. I was criticized for over-blending colors by paint-

ing teachers. “You’re killing the paint.” It took me several false experiments to return to my voice. Now I’m not only killing the paint, but also drowning it, fainting it, thinning it into non-existence. The difference between color transitions are so sneakily faint that you almost need to hold your breath to see it. That’s how I feel when I paint it.

How much has New York changed since you first arrived? How has life changed for Asians since the pandemic’s outbreak? Did this affect your way of creating and working?

Among the cities I’ve lived in, no other place inspires the sentimentalization of experience more so than New York. The threats to day-to-day existence is glorified in the “spirit and “toughness” of the city. The persistent tension of race and class is veiled by the romanticism of narrative-making. Since the pandemic outbreak, waves of violence have been committed against people that look like me. To be in new york, one has to dissociate, compress pain. If all these things have warped my sense of being a human, I make up in the studio, where I practice paying attention, being present, giving shapes to thoughts and forms to feelings. My way of working and creating is my way of resistance.

Yiran Jia

Creating Gateways into Other Worlds

Photos and illustrations courtesy of Yiran Jia





Yiran Jia is an illustrator, based in New Jersey, whose marvelously peculiar creations offer gateways into mysterious worlds inspired by horror and science fiction. She graduated from Savannah College of Art and Design in 2020 with an MFA in illustration and a background in graphic design. During her studies, she learned traditional techniques such as scratchboard, dip pen, and wood engraving. This path led her to become a freelance illustrator who combines the precision of graphic design with the craftsmanship she learned through illustration. She has focused her efforts since graduating on editorial illustrations and gallery work. Printmaking has heavily influenced her style and technique. Her works are always inspired by nature, science, fantasy, and science fiction. Yiran considers herself a formalist. She loves playing around with strong and dynamic compositions to achieve an uncanny and spooky effect in her works. She ponders form and techniques far more seriously than meaning. She has been collaborating with Studio RX on different medical advertising projects after graduation. Yiran also creates illustrations for scientific magazines like Nautilus.



How did you decide to specialize and pursue a career in graphic and illustration design?

I always liked drawing since I was little. I guess it's just really hard to give up on what you have been doing in your life. I decided to learn graphic design in university because it doesn't sound overly idealistic to me. And I kept pursuing the study of illustration after I got my bachelor's degree. I love graphic

design and it has a huge impact on my illustration works. But I didn't get a lot of chances to draw while working on graphic design projects. So, I thought maybe finding a balance between graphic design and fine art would be good. And that is why I choose illustration as a path.

Which illustration influenced you the most as a child? What are some of your favorite childhood memories?

As I recalled I liked reading atlases. I am really obsessed with those illustrations of intricate road maps and local resources of different places. I also remember my grandfather had a tiny little book about earthquake. There are a lot of illustrations and graphics about how

earthquake happen and what influence it has on our life. Among the beautiful childhood memories furthermore my favorite memory probably is sitting in the living room early in the morning listening to the radio while my grandmother was swiping the floor. Or took a long walk with my grandfather to the park near where we lived.





Do you remember your earliest drawing? What was it about?

I don't have any clear memories of my earliest drawings and I never see them myself. But based on what my mom said it's a pair of glasses of hers and a human face. I was about 2 years old.

Digital vs. analog. Do you have a sketchbook? What tools do you prefer for creating your illustrations?

I do have a sketchbook. I picked it up very recently. Because I work digitally for both my commissions and my self-promotional works most of the time. I feel like I do a



lot of online research for my visual references and just draw a base on digital images, which leads to absolutely zero real-life observations and experiences in my work progress. But it is the efficient way for commissions since it's not realistic for me to go out and find visual references and draw especially when my client wants the work to be done in two or three days. There are more resources online and working digitally allows me to explore different compositions, colors, and textures very easily. So, I prefer working digitally when it comes to commissions and self-promotional works. But I think a sketchbook is very important for me as well since I don't

want my work to be just based on downloaded images. I still need to experience life and observe instead of planning everything out digitally.

What do you enjoy the most about your job? What is the creative process behind your design?

There are two points that I enjoy the most: one is I can set up my own schedule and execute my work in my own way. The other is I can communicate concepts with an audience through my visual interpretations. I'm still very new in this industry and my clients are most magazines right now. When I'm working for magazines, the process begins with reading the article they send me throughout. Sometimes they already decided what title they are going to use. In that case, I will bring the question and pick up the information I need for the illustration while I'm reading the article. Then I will draw about three thumbnails and show them to the art directors. After they decided which one to use I will just keep pushing it forward and polish it.

Your work also includes the design of book covers. How did your passion for editorial design come about?

I think it's maybe simply because

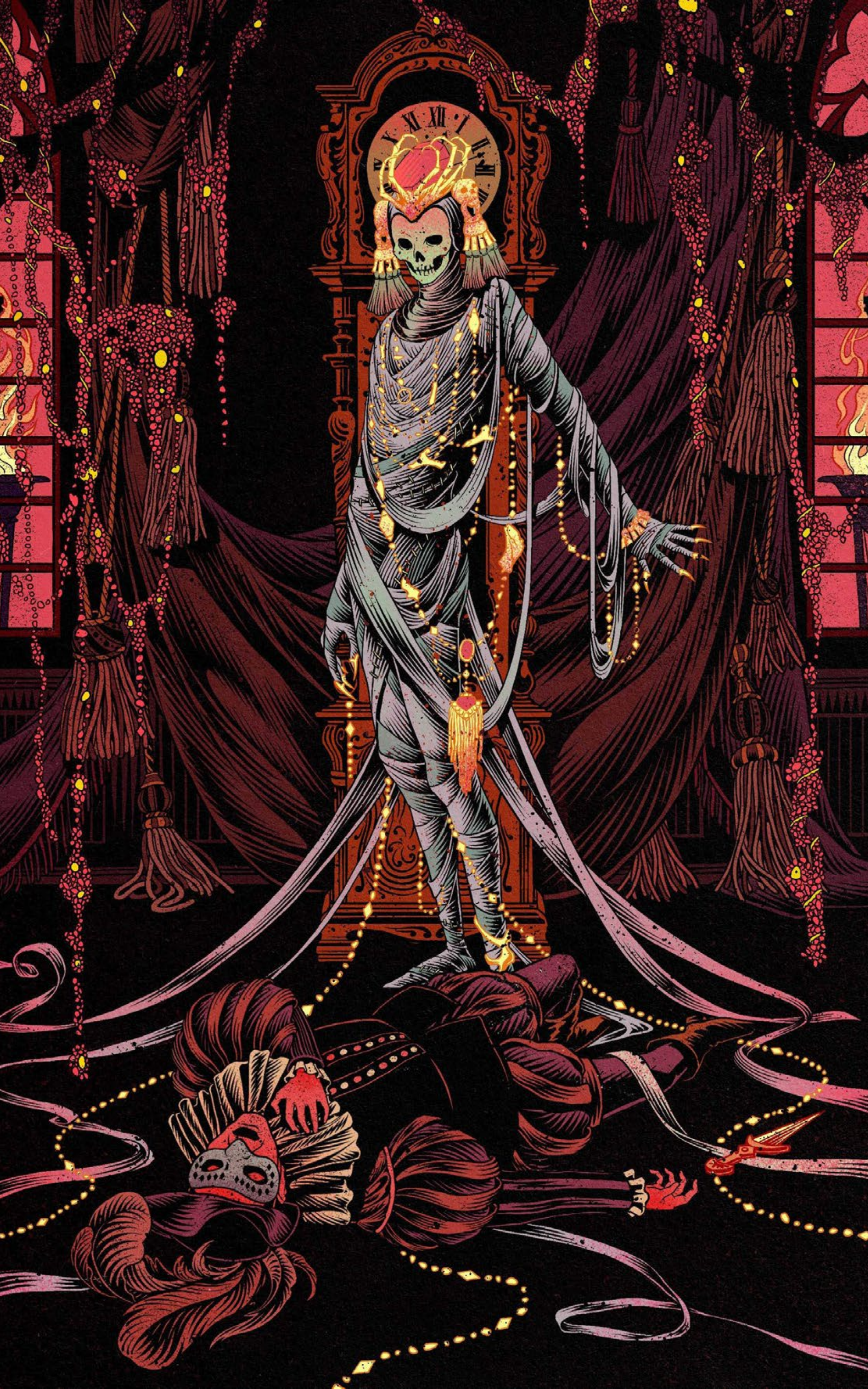
I like reading. Texts expand my imagination. And I always love to see different artists come up with different visual interpretations based on the same text. I'm interested in what interpretation I come up with as well. That's why a lot of my works are inspired by books or articles.

What are the major challenges to satisfying the need of authors and publishers? When creating a cover, how do you stimulate your creativity?

I've never worked with book publishers so far. But I can take my magazine cover illustration as an example. When I was working for Nautilus, they sent me the article which was going to be the cover feature story of that issue. The article was about Australopithecus, what their living environment was like, and their living habits. But the main vibe for that issue they were going for was building a link between us and our ancestors and rethinking ourselves. Which wasn't exactly the article's topic. So, I have to adapt the information from the article to the concept they wanted for the magazine cover. I choose a few points like time, environment, modern humans, Australopithecus, and mirror. To be honest, using a mirror as a metaphor was the editor's idea, so I had to follow. But it was a decent enough solu-



tion. I guess the challenge for me when I'm working with magazines is to balance what visual elements and visual interpretation I prefer to use with what editor or art director prefers. The next step was to organize these elements and make them work and that is my favorite part of the whole process. I didn't give a preference or answer about what should we reflect upon ourselves living nowadays. Since I want the reader to get the overall idea and give the answer by themselves rather than they get something too specific and narrative at their first glance at the magazine.



Does your style reflect the way you see the world? What better focus your personality, in your illustrations? Can you share with us the philosophy behind your creations?

Yes absolutely. I tend to go back to technique, craftsmanship, design of compositions, and basic forms when it comes to how I reflect the world or reflect my personality rather than concept and ideas. Especially as an illustrator, I think how I depict an object with my technique and craftsmanship that won't be replaced by anyone else easily is very important. The technique is the most direct way to reflect on how I see the world and how I visualize it on paper through my observation and craftsmanship. Also having a good understanding of shapes and forms is vital for compositions. When I'm trying to convey a either concept or feeling in my works, I always try my best to convey them through pure basic visual elements and put forms and technique on top priority.

Your horror and sci-fi graphics are very detailed and intricate. You open various portals. What can you tell us about these multi-dimensions between past, future, life, and death? How important is it to keep the portal open to build a new future?

That's a big question! Honestly, I

didn't think that much meaning behind them when I was creating those works. I merely tried to think of my own way to visualize the text I read without interpreting them. I know that sounds extremely boring and stiff, but that's basically what it is. Keeping the portal open to build a new future is important of course. Whether building a new future or starting a new project it always starts from imagination and daring to doubt instead of taking everything for granted.

What is the project you had achieved that represents you most? Can you tell us about it?

The several editorial illustrations from earlier last year can represent my typical style, technique, and content the most. I was preparing a portfolio for magazines last year. And I picked several topics including war, nature, and science since I want to train myself to be versatile when it comes to different content. For example, there's a piece I did that was based on how the war in Ukraine had a huge impact on the local environment. It was fun to explore how to use my visual elements to convey the idea and build a connection with viewers. Also, as an illustrator, it's necessary to connect with viewers through my works and share ideas and passions even though I value style, technique, and form more.

Photos courtesy of Yi Luo & Laotu

Yi Luo

Social Entrepreneur,
Curator, and Documentary
Filmmaker



Luo Yi has a Bachelor of Environmental Analysis and History, Claremont McKenna College and graduated from the University of Chicago with a master's in social science in 2015. Later she set up Laotu, a social enterprise committed to urban and rural sustainable development and consumer and youth education. She studied and worked in major cities around the globe, such as Washington, Hong Kong, and Beijing, but her passions remain strongly planted in the countryside. In 2012, she worked as an intern in the Wolong National Nature Reserve, Wenchuan county, Sichuan province. The county was the epicenter of the devastating 2008 earthquake, but Luo noticed that local traditions and culture were disappearing even though physical structures were being rebuilt. So Luo Yi decided to focus on promoting China's rural areas and sustainable development, and on encouraging urban-rural dialogue, including through programs for city dwellers to visit rural regions. Luo Yi is UNEP 2018 China Youth Champion of the Earth, Shenzhen City's 10 Excellent Youth, 2019 Top 10 Under 30 Social Innovator of China, 2020 G20 Young Global Changer.



When did you first realize you wanted to pursue a career that reconciles the conflict between urbanization and environmental protection? What initially drew you personally to becoming engaged in this theme?

In my first year at university I traveled to a panda habitat in China as an intern and became aware of the complexity of urbanization and environmental issues. Also, as I grew up in Shenzhen, a metropolis, for a long time, I was concerned about the urban villages in the city. I became interested in urban-rural issues from the social sciences perspective, mainly caring about the relationship between humans and nature. At the time when Laotu started, the Chinese government had not yet proposed the “rural revitalization” national policy in 2016. At the time, I thought that connecting rural and urban development was an extremely important issue, even if few people were paying attention to it. When the related government policy was introduced in 2017, more and more people started to be aware of the issue of rural-urban co-development.

How did Laotu come to life? Can you tell us more about it, what is the main mission and what activities it promotes?

Laotu’s mission is to share the stories of rural China, uncover local ecological products and lifestyles, and showcase their unique qualities. By highlighting the connections between natural, cultural, and economic resources in both urban and rural areas, Laotu aims to foster dialogue and understanding between these two communities. Rooted in the concept of environmental protection, Laotu has developed a range of original cultural, educational, eco-tourism, environmental protection, and public welfare initiatives that encourage young people to participate in rural revitalization. By enhancing the ecological, economic, and cultural heritage of China’s rural areas, Laotu harnesses the power of local communities, promotes local culture, and supports the sustainable development of China’s rural areas and urban-rural relations.



What were some of the biggest challenges for you personally and for Laotu at the beginning?

Due to my deep admiration for pandas, I decided to intern at the Wolong Nature Reserve in Sichuan during the summer of my freshman year. However, during my stay, I realized that the area was facing an unprecedented economic crisis and that traditional culture was slowly disappearing due to the devastating Wenchuan earthquake, which had severed mountain roads and destroyed the panda tourism industry. After spending a month in Wolong, I became fascinated by the local culture and returned in 2013 to film a documentary. Inspired by my experiences in Wolong, I collaborated with MBA partners

to establish the social enterprise “Laotu” with the goal of helping farmers sell their products. Over the years, we have continued to return to Wolong every six months with volunteers to document oral histories. The Wolong project has evolved from an urban youth education experience and rural oral history project to an incubator for public service initiatives. Supported by the Chinese Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the United Nations Environment Programme, the official organizing committee of the United Nations Biodiversity Conference, and the German Bosch Foundation, Laotu has become a driving force for public welfare, rural development, environmental protection, globalization, and sustainable development.



How has Laotu grown since its start? What are the goals you have achieved so far?

Laotu was established in 2016 at the University of Chicago, USA, and received support from Polsky Incubator through the Booth School of Business Social Enterprise Competition. Over the past few years, Laotu has been recognized by numerous media outlets, including Guangming Daily, People's Daily, Irish National Daily, The New York Times, and others. These publications have highlighted Laotu's innovative approach to promoting rural revitalization and sustainable development.

Raise awareness of “sustainable development” it's not always easy. What is the biggest misconception you've seen about this topic and how did you work for breaking it?

Sustainable development is an old concept, but in reality it is difficult to realise it. So I think we need to talk about the balance and conflict between economics, environment, and culture in specific contexts, and these need to be told in living examples.

The signs of climate change are increasingly evident every year. Have you noticed more concern or a change in people's habits? What are Laotu's initiatives based on this theme?

I witnessed climate change 20 years ago in the Qilian Mountains in northwest China, where glaciers are melting more quickly as global warming and extreme weather is now occurring more frequently. In recent years the Chinese public has become increasingly aware of climate change-related phenomena that come to life in such a real way, for example in different parts of China, we can feel the weather in different seasons from the past. But they still need to be pointed out that these problems are serious because they don't realize that this is a significant part of climate change. I don't think climate change and biodiversity issues should be analyzed separately, the Laotu does work both in frontline communities in national parks and encouraging residents in big cities to take positive action on related environmental issues in big cities.

Has something in your life changed since you founded Laotu?

In 2019, I participated in a scientific research activity in Antarctica, and on that ship, an Australian coach I met said to me: What you

are doing is very cutting edge, so lifestyle in China would be cutting edge too. I thought I wanted to be normal but later I found that my life is also cutting edge or can be cutting edge and I have to accept that in this society.

Can you share with us any meaningful story that has inspired you over the years?

What we remember most is the many stories about an old man surnamed Zhang. He passed away a few years ago, and we hope there will be more opportunities to share the local knowledge and wisdom he passed on in his life as a farmer, and many like him. Zhang, a 79-year-old man, who had experienced the Wenchuan earthquake in China and lived in a remote village. He embodied the spirit of rural China and passed on a sense of heritage and tradition. Zhang Shuping served as a captain in the military, later becoming a shepherd in the mountains. Zhang was proud of his heritage and concerned about the environment. He shared his knowledge and wisdom with anyone willing to listen, inviting visitors to see his private garden and taking people on hikes. Zhang was also passionate about beekeeping and his honey was popular. Despite being designated as a recipient of aid for poverty-stricken households, Zhang's



true wealth lay in the love and knowledge he shared with those around him. He was like a grandfather to those who knew him and eager to share his love of nature and wisdom. There are countless old people like him in rural China who have local wisdom that is very important to environmentalism for the future of the planet and human beings, and when they pass away, it is difficult to preserve that wisdom. That is why we still want to listen to and record the living stories and experiences of these old people.

Does Covid 19 Pandemic affected Laotu's activities? What about now?

When it comes to the impact of the pandemic on Laotu, I would say it should be different every year. We get ready to share more projects with the guys. We delayed a lot of projects during the COVID-19, so we are now ready to start again. For example, we're going to start communicating again with international NGOs, because many projects in China now also need a wealth of international resources. We hope that Laotu will have a more positive impact on public education after the epidemic.



Laotu, 老土, is a social enterprise shaping green consumption in emerging markets, promoting a cutting-edge sustainable development scheme for China and the world. While studying for her master's at the University of Chicago, Luo was encouraged by the Social New Venture Challenge to establish Laotu. In 2016, the idea became a reality and Lou's hope was her social enterprise could contribute to sustainable development in rural China while preserving traditional culture. One of its projects, for example, aims to help residents in Wolong reduce the use of chemicals in agriculture. Laotu helps local residents reduce the use of chemicals by empowering them with the necessary skills. Laotu also educates young people in urban areas, who are increasingly isolated from country life, about rural issues and culture. Its Course in the Mountains program takes young urbanites to rural areas where they conduct field research and interact with villagers. The program is designed to stimulate their understanding of the relationship between people and nature. Rooted in environmentalism, Laotu uses storytelling, online marketplaces, and educational programs to strengthen the network between city and country.

Photos courtesy of Jing Yue
Special thanks to Davina

Jing Yue

Fine Line Tattoo Designer Extremely
Detailed and Impactful



Jing has received traditional art education from both the Central Academy of Fine Arts and Zurich University of the Arts. Her expertise lies in the art of tattooing, where she intends to create magic on people's skin. Jing specializes in fine-line and elegant yet subtle colorwork. Fine line tattooing involves creating thin, delicate, and intricate designs on the skin, resembling fine artwork, abstract elements, or paintings using black and grey and color tattoo ink. This style of tattooing requires exceptional skill and precision as there is little room for error. Jing's work is beautiful in its complexity, and she takes the time to design unique and personalized tattoos for each client. She is not only a gifted artist but also a wonderful person who views tattooing as a way to connect the self with the body and promote healing for the spirit.



Can you tell us a little about yourself?

My name is Jing and I'm a tattoo artist located in the Arts District of Los Angeles. I have two adorable cats, and a few things I love are: traditional Chinese painting, Chinese calligraphy, and travelling!

Do you remember the first time you saw a tattoo that piqued your interest? What drew you to tattooing and how did you get started?

There is an artist I came across on social media whose name is Rit (@rit.kit.tattoo on Instagram if you want to take a look). I saw a video of her using real flowers and leaves for the tattoo stencils and placements on the body, and I was so inspired. I started out tattooing as a hobby because I thought it would have been cool to introduce myself with that fun fact. Can you imagine? Being in school and when you have to introduce yourself to others, normally people say things like painting, drawing, or reading, but I thought it would be interesting to say "I tattoo people for fun." I didn't end up going to graduate school, but I did pursue a traditional apprenticeship and then quickly finished my apprenticeship in a few months. I'm so grateful I always had clients from the beginning and with the help of Instagram, the social media app really helped me expand my career and clientele as my designs and work piqued many people's interest constantly.

How long have you been in the tattoo industry? Can you tell us about your beginning? As a woman in this industry, did you face any challenges?

I've been in the tattoo industry for 4 years now. I started doing thin, fine line tattoos first and I fell in love with it. It's a bit hard as a woman in the tattoo industry, and out of the four years, I've faced two big challenges. The first one was when I was a guest artist working at a traditional tattoo shop. While I was working there, I felt like they didn't accept fine line tattoo work so that discouraged me a bit, but now wherever I guest work I don't have that feeling anymore. The second challenge I faced in this industry was working late hours. In general it's scary to be outside at night alone, especially as a woman, and the same applies to when I have to work late. Most of the time, I have my studio manager with me when I'm doing late night sessions so I feel safe, but it's the times where I'm by myself that I get a little scared and unsafe. My studio is tucked away in a private building so no one can access the location freely, but sometimes you just never know what can happen. With all of the crime and incidents happening lately in Los Angeles, you can never truly shake off that scared feeling and always need to be on guard if anything happens. However, if I put the challenges aside, one of my favourite things about being a woman in the industry is my sensitivity and



donne di carta

FIRSTJING



having a gentle heart. I feel like having these two qualities enhance my work ethic in a way that I can feel and sense what my clients are looking for in their ideas and provide them with a design that speaks to them – and only for them.

Do you remember the first person you tattooed? What did you draw and create?

It's kind of a funny interaction really. I was at a gym class I used to go to and while I was waiting in line to check into the building, there was a girl waiting in front of me to do the same thing. I went up to her and told her I was an apprentice at a tattoo shop and asked if she wanted a free tattoo, and she agreed! I drew a fine line tattoo of Madonna for her.

What about the first tattoo on your own skin? What do tattoos represent to you? What do you love most about your job?

My first tattoo is a moon because my name means peaceful moon in Chinese! In addition to the meaning, I also heard a saying, "Be the moon and inspire people, even when you're far from full." After hearing this, I realised this resonates with me deeply and I aspire to be this type of person. This type of person is someone who heals others. Most of the time, people get a tattoo not just for a design on their skin, but for their soul – with the intent of a deep meaning. When clients reach out to book

a session, they're getting a tattoo to heal themselves and at the same time, I'm also healing and uplifting my soul and energy as they felt connected to reach out to me for a tattoo.

How much do you think tattoos are a private thing, and how much are they a public thing, to show to others?

I think it's half and half. I have clients who do it in private locations, such as the ribcage or on their backs, others have placements on more noticeable parts like their forearms. Both are good in their own way and I encourage everyone to get a tattoo where they feel most comfortable with!

Is there a difference in tattoo culture in Asia and the West, in your opinion? How is the tattoo scene in Los Angeles?

Yes, most definitely. In Asia, most people hide their tattoos from their families or from the public eye as some think tattoos relate to gangs. It's an old saying and correlation that I think everyone is aware of, but it still stands today in some countries. The tattoo scene in the west, especially in Los Angeles, is a bit different. In my opinion, I think tattoos in the West are considered high fashion. A lot of people get tattoos not only for their story, but to also show their personality. There's so many different types of styles and specialisations tattoo

artists do here, and a lot of people find an artist that fits their vibe. I like to think the type of style and design someone gets shows who they are in an art form.

Do you believe social media has altered the tattoo industry or introduced new trends? Do social influences contribute to the spread of tattoos, making them more popular?

Yes, of course! Tattoo artists nowadays can't just tattoo their work and be done, but sometimes they need to be a content creator if that makes sense. They need to make short videos or clips to showcase their work, but to also entice others to gain more followers and clientele, which to me is both good and bad. Good in the aspect of growing your audience, clients, and work portfolio, but also bad because you can be so consumed in making the perfect video or clip that you lose yourself in trying to please others. I most definitely think social influences contribute to the spread of tattoos to make

them more popular. I think people love to follow new and trendy things, especially when someone famous is the one who starts it, so I always tell my clients to get a tattoo that they would actually like to get. Not to get a tattoo to fit in with the current trend(s) or receive approval and be liked by others.

Can you share with us any meaningful story behind your work?

I recently tattooed two women that were adopted from China. As a Chinese woman born in a small town, I understand how hard it is to be a girl in China due to Chinese history and laws and preferences that are still followed today. I was incredibly grateful to meet these two women. It was so inspiring to hear their stories and how they're still honoured to get their Chinese culture and history tattooed onto them permanently. I was so happy to help them heal their hearts and create a design that meant so much to them, and I'm still absolutely honoured they trusted me to make their lifetime pieces for them.





China Under Ground