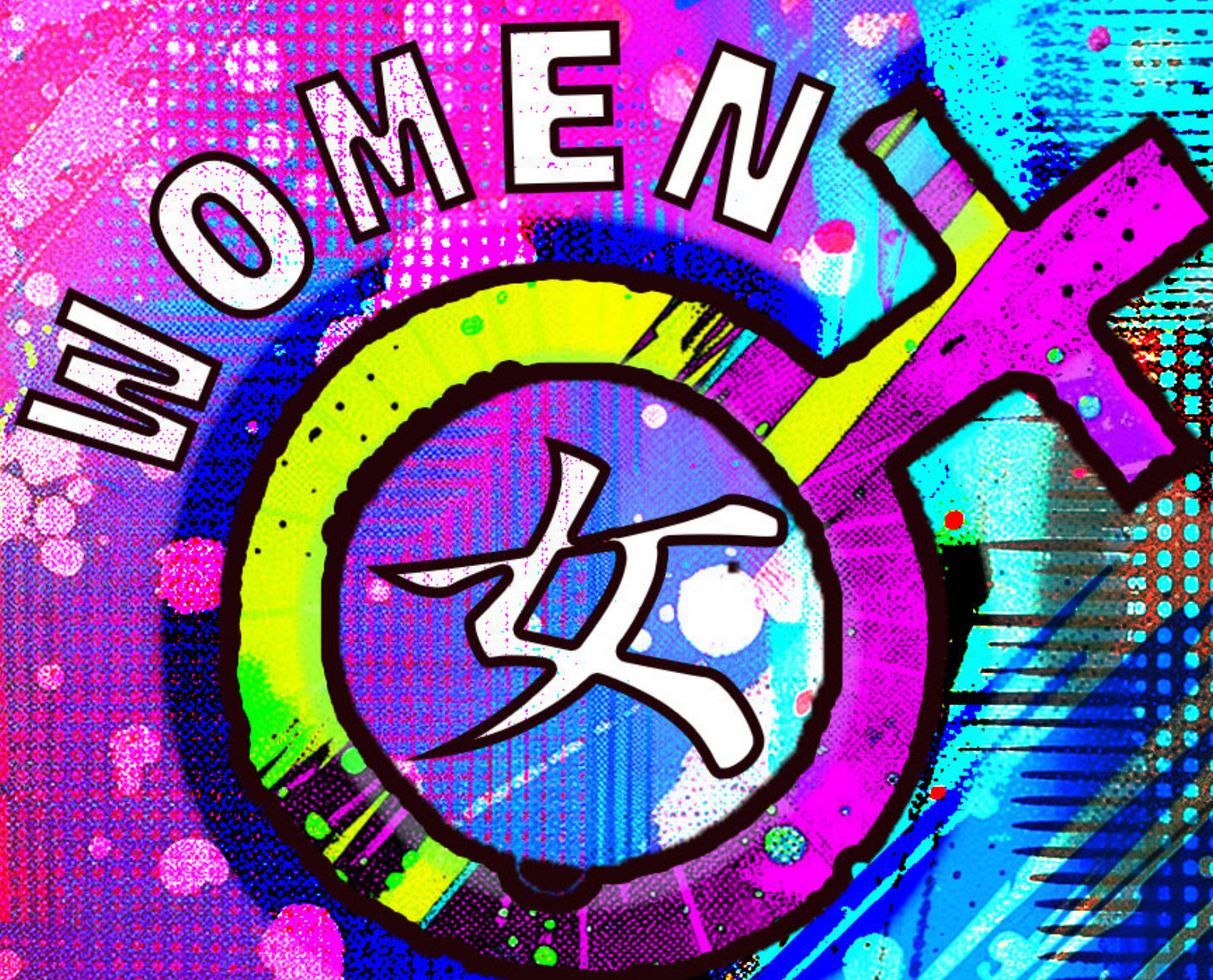


Planet China



International Women's Day 2024

The theme of International Women's Day 2024 is "Inspire Inclusion." This means inspiring others to understand and value female inclusion, promoting the rights of women and girls in all aspects of life. To create an environment in which everyone feels at their place and able to pursue their dreams and aspirations, it is necessary to accelerate the process toward gender equality. Therefore, it is essential to support the collective fight against discrimination. Promoting and safeguarding gender equality creates a just, peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous society capable of keeping the planet healthy for future generations. Over the years, discrimination against women has not only put them in conditions of economic inequality but also, despite the existence of laws and public awareness, some are still victims of domestic violence. Despite campaigns to prevent femicides in many states, many men continue to kill their partners or exes. To demonstrate solidarity with all those who face multiple challenges and who have been denied opportunities, it is important to share the stories of those who have succeeded, to provide a glimmer of hope in these times, still insecure due to wars and climate change. On International Women's Day, we remember that as long as a woman faces discrimination, harassment, inequality, or oppression, we can feel her pain as our own. For this reason, the success of one becomes a driving force for the others. Examples, stories, listening, and dialogue are the first steps to bridging gaps, moving toward understanding, and breaking down prejudices. By promoting inclusion and accepting differences, new perspectives or opportunities can emerge. We thank the women who have shared their stories with us and our readers, providing extraordinary testimonies that we hope will inspire other women. We celebrate their success in understanding and enhancing the role of women, deepening the dialogue and creating inclusion day by day.



This free ebook
includes interviews with
artists, writers,
entrepreneurs & thinkers

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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Layout

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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.





Jasmine
Chen



Katrine
Cheng



Amanda
Ruiqing



Claudia
Chanhoi



Su
Yang



Yuqing
Liu



Cici
Cool



Su
Hanwei

Photos courtesy of Jasmine Chen

Jasmine Chen

Shanghai's Most Outstanding Jazz Singer,
Songwriter, and Cultural Ambassador of Jazz



Jasmine Chen is a jazz singer with many famous musicians and songwriter, born in Li-aoning province, who lives in waiian guitarist and Grammy Shanghai. She was born into award nominee Jeff Peterson; a family of professional folk Brazilian guitarist, singer and dancers and actors and was songwriter Filo Machado; Sin-trained to be a concert pianist gaporean piano master Jeremy before falling in love with jazz Monteiro; and Hungarian pia-while studying at England's nist and composer Bela Szakcsi prestigious Leeds College of Lakatos. She has also performed Music. She returned to China with the Shanghai Philharmon- in 2005 to pursue her passion, ic Orchestra and the Shanghai introducing China's rich musi- Traditional Music Orchestra. cal legacy to the world of jazz. She played herself in the 2018 She has subsequently become hit film Crazy Rich Asians, di- one of China's most prominent rected by Jon M. Chu. Six of her jazz musicians, blending West- songs are in the film, and three ern songs with original Chinese are included on the soundtrack. lyrics. Her unique perspective Beside her film work, she is an connects one culture to anoth- ambassador for jazz music and er, spanning the gap between culture. She is actively involved traditional Chinese songs and in charitable work for Educat- the West's jazz legacy, as well ing Rural Girls in China, the and between forgotten folksong Renewal Project, and the Cam- and contemporary jazz sing- bodian Children's Fund, among ing. Jasmine worked together others.



Music has always been a big part of your life, I read that you were trained as a pianist from the age of 4. When did you first realize that you had a jazz singer inside you? What are your first memories related to jazz?

I started to realize I had a passion for jazz at the age of 20, during my studies at Leeds College of Music (now Leeds Music Conservatoire). Opting for a minor in singing, due to my longstanding interest in vocal performance, I was fortunate that my vocal teacher specialized in jazz. This led me to begin jazz singing under her guidance. I found myself captivated by jazz standards, such as ‘Cry Me A River.’ Reflecting on my initial encounters with jazz, they trace back to when I was 17 or 18 years old, living in my hometown in China. Prior to my studies in the UK, I purchased a Chinese music magazine dedicated to introducing Western music to Chinese audiences. That particular issue, fo-

cused on jazz, included a CD—a collection of songs discussed within its pages. It was my first exposure to legends like Louis Armstrong and Jobim. That experience was unforgettable and has profoundly impacted my memories.

You studied in England, can you tell us about this period of your education?

I was studying for my A-Level in a music course in Liverpool and later pursued an undergraduate degree in music studies in Leeds, majoring in piano performance. It was an eye-opening experience for me; there were many different lessons I could sign up for, such as jazz arrangement, music production, improvisation, and many more, which I had never experienced before. Additionally, I teamed up with other students from the jazz course to rehearse and perform as a band. We even recorded demos in collaboration with music production students.

Jasmine has presented TEDx talks and often speaks about jazz, music, and the cultural context for any number of audiences, from corporations to universities and arts organizations

The college was very supportive, allowing me to try many different things to enhance my musical abilities in general. This experience built a great foundation for me as a professional musician a few years later.

What does jazz represent for you? Which artists have influenced you the most? What are your greatest satisfactions as a jazz singer?

For me, jazz represents freedom, creativity, and collaboration, with everyone creating their own sound and voice. It continues to be a vibrant and evolving art form. Icons like Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Cassandra Wilson, A.C. Jobim, Peggy Lee, and Amy Winehouse have all been influential. My greatest satisfaction comes from being myself on stage, creating my own style of singing and performing, and interpreting music in our unique ways with other musicians. I love the appreciation shown by the audience during and after a





Jasmine's energy and vibrations connect people from the intimate stage of Shanghai's JZ Club to the big lights of Rotterdam's Northsea Jazz Festival

song, as the energy flows between musicians and the audience in the venue. Jazz also connects me to the world, bridging east and west, crossing cultures and languages. It allows me to travel and see the world, learning from different backgrounds.

You are an established name in Shanghai's jazz scene. What is the jazz music atmosphere like? What distinguishes it from cities such as Amsterdam, Barcelona, New York, etc? Is there any relation or connection between jazz cities?

Shanghai's jazz scene is vibrant, with many young Chinese jazz musicians emerging. These artists have honed their skills at music conservatoires both in China and abroad, bringing a fresh, energetic perspective to the scene. Additionally, experienced foreign musicians based in Shanghai contribute to both education and performance, collectively elevating the level of jazz in China. Although Shanghai is relatively young as a jazz city compared to others, the musicians here maintain strong connections with their



counterparts in established jazz cities. They collaborate on musical projects, performances, and recordings, facilitating numerous intercity exchanges.

In Europe, there is a cliché that says that jazz is music only for intellectuals and connoisseurs. Does that thought exist also in China? Are young people present and participating in jazz concerts?

The jazz audience in China spans a wide age range, from young to old. Young people frequently visit jazz clubs and concerts to enjoy live music, and they also listen to jazz through online streaming platforms.

You experimented with diverse combinations of Chinese components in jazz and you sing both English and Mandarin. What is your concept of innovation related to jazz music?

I would like to be the bridge between the east and the West, introducing one to the other.

Your contributions comprise both music on the soundtrack and appearances in parts within the film itself. Can you tell us more about how you became involved with the film Crazy Rich Asians? How did you prepare your performance for the film?

It was an unexpected experience for me. The story began with an email I received in March 2017, inquiring whether I was interested in singing a few soundtracks and appearing in a movie as myself. Initially, I thought it was spam,

but after revisiting it a week later, I noticed the email address originated from the official Warner Brothers website. Consequently, I responded with questions about the movie. Their reply was genuine, and they sent over the script, prompting me to agree. Film director John Chu had precise ideas for the movie's music. He provided me with a song list ranging from the 1930s to the '60s in Shanghai, all of which I was well acquainted with. Therefore, I spent a few days recording my vocal parts in a Shanghai recording studio and then sent them to LA for mixing. Playing myself in the movie offered a unique experience, as it was my first acting role. Despite portraying myself, it differed significantly from live stage performances. It required the involvement of numerous people just to film a single scene, even if for only a few seconds. I found myself repeating the same phrases 5 to 15 times, striving to maintain consistent energy throughout. The preparation focused on delivering my best vocal performance and presence in front of the camera, as it would be immortalized in history.

Who would you like to collaborate with in the future? What are your next goals and commitments?

I don't have specific plans now, but I would love to collaborate more with South American musicians because I have a huge passion for South American music, bossa nova, latino, choro... I would love to do some crossover music albums together.

Jasmine possesses a unique and unusual ability to navigate between two worlds and select the finest of what each has to offer. This trait helped her develop a large following among both Chinese and Western audiences, and she has captivated audiences worldwide

What would you recommend to anyone wanting to pursue a career like yours?

Never stop learning, find what you are good at in music, always try to collaborate with different musicians, be open-minded; grab any opportunities to perform or create music. If music is your passion, cling to it steadfastly. While the journey may not be simple, perseverance will eventually reveal its value.



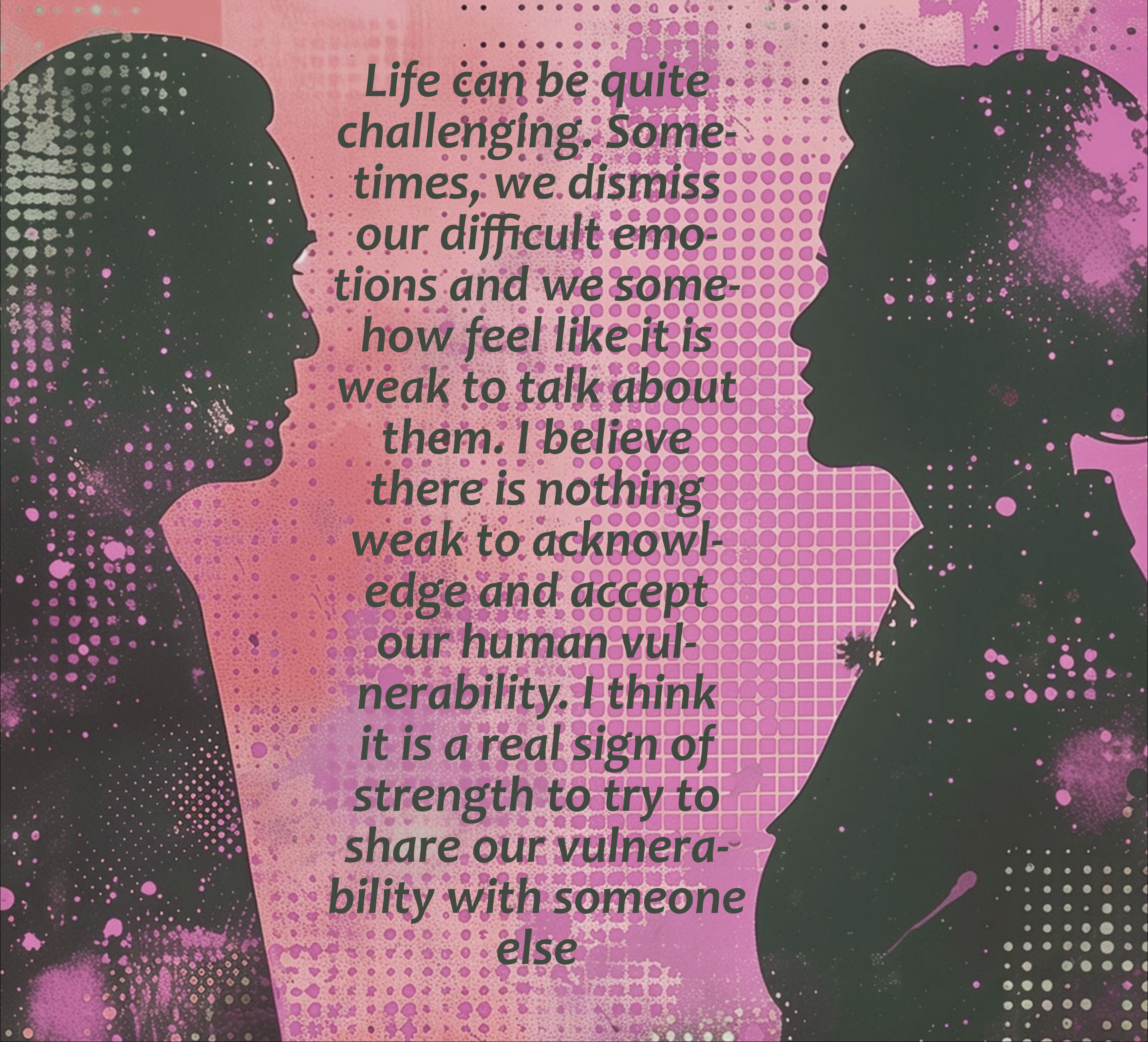
Katrine Cheng

Registered Clinical Counsellor,
Marriage and Family Therapist

Photo courtesy of Katrine Cheng



Katrine is a Registered Clinical Counsellor, Marriage and Family Therapist. Before completing her post-graduate studies, she had been studying in the United Kingdom and worked for different multi-national corporations in corporate wellness and development in Hong Kong. Katrine is passionate about her work. Katrine meets her clients with unconditional positive regard to join them, using a humanistic and experiential approach. She helps them see the processes in which they are caught in with their emotions and with other people. Katrine's work helps committed couples gain an understanding of their relationship dynamics, strengths, and growth areas. She fosters resilience and enriches their relationships. She also offers mental health counseling for individuals to reorganize their inner world and make sense of their lives. Katrine is also experienced in helping individuals with attachment issues and different kinds of trauma. She worked with international schools in providing counseling to children, adolescents, and families; and corporations in providing training in managing mental health in the workplace. Katrine conducts therapies in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin.



Life can be quite challenging. Sometimes, we dismiss our difficult emotions and we somehow feel like it is weak to talk about them. I believe there is nothing weak to acknowledge and accept our human vulnerability. I think it is a real sign of strength to try to share our vulnerability with someone else

What led you to become a marriage and family therapist Registered Clinical Counsellor?

When I was completing my health coaching qualification, there were three areas being covered in the course - Nutrition, Fitness and Mental Health. I found that I was particularly interested in the Mental Health modules, so I decided to receive training at The Samaritans to be a volunteer to provide emotional support to people who were suicidal or were in general distress. During the training, I found it was so life-affirming to be able to help others for a living and thrive, so I pursued further study in mental health counselling after the training.

From studies to practice, what were the biggest challenges in the beginning?

What I studied in the master degree mainly equipped us with counselling skills, a certain type of therapy and ethics; however, when I was actually handling cases in a clinical setting, I realised that each client has their own preference for how a counsellor should work with them, e.g. preference for the therapist's directiveness; preference for emotional intensity; preference for past orientation; preference for warm support, etc. Also, the presenting problems of each case is different, so I have been studying different kinds of psychotherapies after graduation from my master's programme to help my clients with different mental health issues and use different approaches to work with them.

Is there any particular area you specialised in? Can you tell us more about your work?

I am particularly interested in pre-marital and relationship counselling - helping committed couples to gain understanding of their relationship dynamics, strength and growth areas; helping couples in treating affairs and trauma; facilitating couples to cope with issues that arise in healthy ways; fostering resilience and enriching their relationships. I also help individuals with attachment issues, family conflicts and relationship issues, life transitions, stress, procrastination, perfectionism behaviours, low self-esteem, sleeping problems, depression, anger management issues, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, social anxiety and phobias, management roles readiness, workplace relationships, people communication and management skills, grief and loss, trauma.

Have you ever encountered resistance from clients receiving therapy? If so, how did you address it?

Yes, some clients would feel scared to take risks to connect with their difficult emotions when they are about to start their counselling journey.

I meet my clients with unconditional positive regard to join them at where they are in a genuine, supportive and nonjudgmental way in their healing journey. I hold and soothe them with relentless empathy in a secure-base therapeutic alliance where clients can feel comfortable to take risks with me as their companion to go into what is foreign, strange, dangerous, scary, sad, unbearably

stressful, painful or unacceptable in their inner lives and face their vulnerabilities together. I help them see the processes in which they are caught in with their emotions and with other people; re-organise their inner world that makes sense of their lives; find their emotional balance and redirect those processes into new directions.

How do you work with couples? How do you approach therapy with couples who have unhelpful communication styles?

When a couple comes to receive relationship counselling, they should have the same relationship goal. In the first session, we discuss the history of their relationship including what had made them feel attracted to their partner at the be-

ginning of their relationship to remind them of what brought them together before the problems arose in their relationship. I also ask couples to discuss their unresolved problems for me to observe their communication patterns and how they deal with conflicts. Towards the end of the session, I discuss the unhelpful communication styles which can be identified from their conflict discussions. Based on research findings, I explain to them about what are the communication patterns that can predict the end of a relationship, how they can eliminate them and replace them with healthy, productive communication patterns. After the first session, I ask each couple to complete a research-based assessment to analyse their satisfactions in different areas of their relationship.



After the first session, there are individual sessions (within the couple's relationship context) for each client to see me to talk about his/her perspective in their relationship's issues, his/her concerns or worries in the relationship before we come back to the couple's setting. Then we discuss the results of the assessment and help them to gain understanding of their relationship dynamics. Not just their relationship's growth areas, but their strength areas as well. Based on the research-based assessment results and information I have collected from each couple, I use interventions based on attachment science and evidence-based approaches to resolve conflicts in a constructive way and help couples strengthen their relationships.

Do you need to stay up-to-date with current research and practices in the field of counselling?

As a therapist and clinical member of professional counselling and psychotherapy bodies, I need to pursue continuous education related to counselling and psychotherapy each year. I pursue continuous education through different professional development activities, such as completing training courses or programs for additional qualifications in counselling and psychotherapy; engaging in professional reading and research; participating in professional peer supervision; participating in regularly scheduled supervision with a qualified supervisor; attending counselling and psychotherapy conferences and workshops to stay up-to-date with current research and practices in the field.

What do you do outside of work to maintain a healthy, balanced lifestyle? How do you manage stress?

Besides exercising, I am mindful of what I eat to maintain a healthy lifestyle. I follow dietary tips that are drawn from the teachings of Traditional Chinese Medicine - how each flavour corresponds to a particular organ of the body. According to TCM philosophies - "nourishing yang in spring and summer time, and nourishing yin in autumn and winter time", I consume food that is suitable for my own body condition and those that help my body correspond better physiologically and pathologically to the changes in weather and seasons in order to stay healthy.

I love arts, culture and history. I travel; visit galleries and museums; see ballet shows and watch movies when I have free time to maintain a balanced lifestyle and manage stress.

What role does self-care play in helping your work as a therapist?

Practicing self-care helps me as a therapist to reduce stress, avoid burnout and enhance my capacity to provide support to my clients. As a therapist, I monitor my own emotional and physical fitness, practice wellness and seek physical or mental health support when needed to ensure my professional competence.

In couples therapy, Katrine Cheng aims to remind individuals of the relationship's onset and the initial spark that attracted them to each other before any issues arose



Su Yang

Feminist Chinese Artist Challenges
Patriarchy & Beauty Norms Using Her
Artwork Across Various Media

Photos courtesy of Su Yang



Su Yang is a contemporary Chinese feminist artist. She received her Bachelor's Degree from Australia, and Canada. She has given lectures at the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University. In 2014, she received her Master of Fine Arts in painting from The State University of New York at Buffalo; and she is a PhD scholar in Chinese feminist art at The University of Melbourne. She has held outstanding solo shows in New York and Melbourne. Her art practice in order to examine the characteristics of female attractiveness and the body.

Kristyn Dingman – This Body of Mine Has Brought Children Into This World, 2023, oil on canvas, 40 x 30 cm (16 x 12 in)



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?

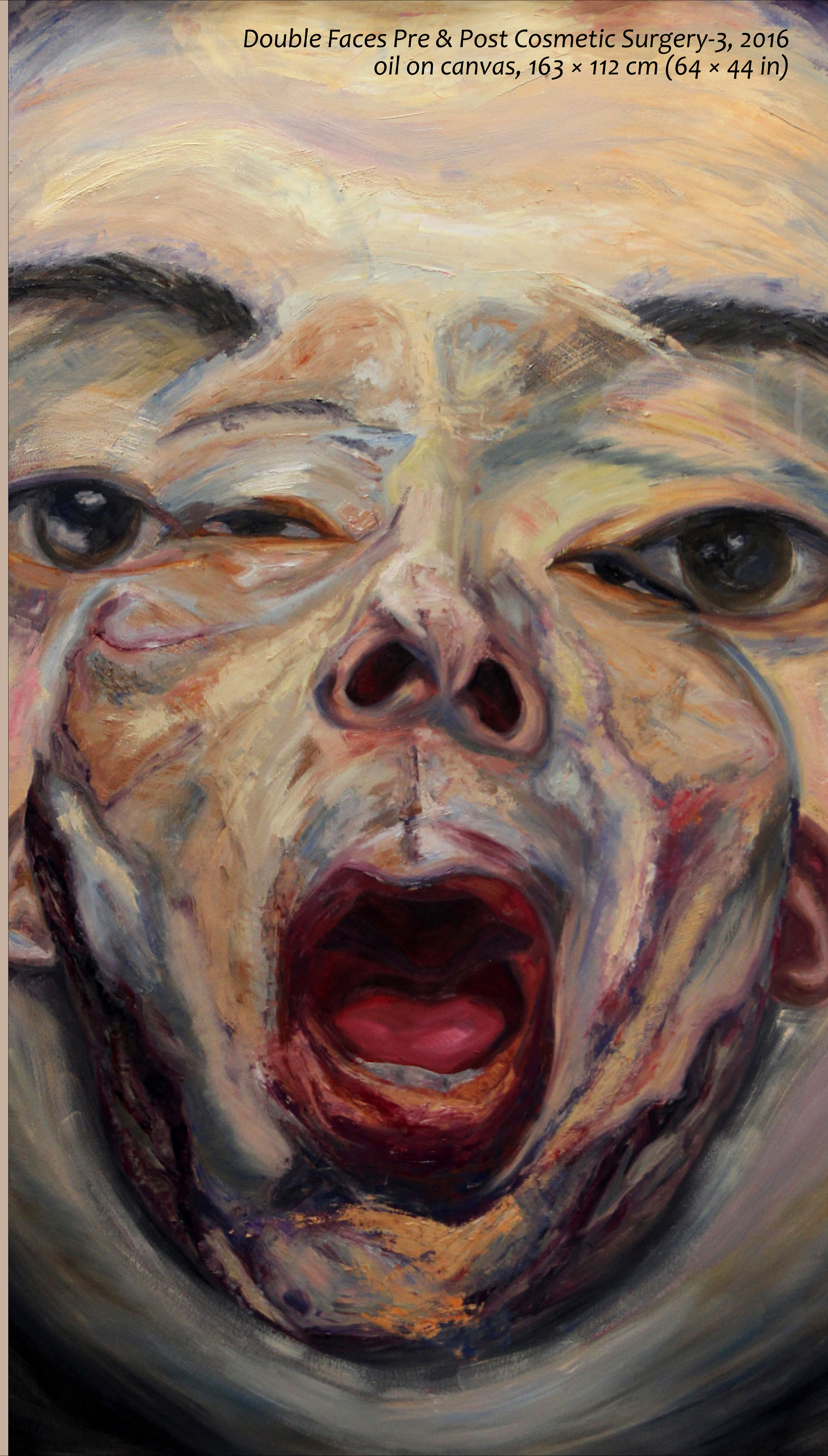
I was born and raised in China, and I proudly identify as a Chinese feminist. My artistic practice involves painting, photography, video, and film, through which I explore various topics within feminist studies. These include representations of women, mother-child relationships, and the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community in mainland China. My parents first noticed my talent and interest in drawing when I was very young, possibly even before I turned two. Throughout my childhood, I spent a significant amount of time enjoying myself in my father's studio and attending his art classes. From the age of ten, I began formal training in drawing and painting taught by my father in the similar way of traditional academy of art. My father, Professor Yang Jie, has been a significant influence on my artistic journey. He introduces me to a wide array of both historical and contemporary European, American, and Chinese artists. I have also drawn inspiration from the artists my father introduced to me. For instance, I honed my drawing skills by studying the figure drawings of Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres, Adolph Menzel, Nicolai Ivanovich Fechin, and Mao Yan. In addition, I developed my understanding of paintings and color by studying the figure paintings of Lucian Freud, Rembrandt, and Liu Bingjiang, as well as the color theory evident in Giorgio Morandi's still life paintings and the works of Impressionist artists like Mary Cassatt. Furthermore, my father

introduced me to Jenny Saville's paintings, which expanded my appreciation for the expressive power found in the works of female artists. Moreover, I have a deep respect for my professors. My MFA advisors, Professor Adele Henderson, Professor David Schirm, and Professor Joan Linder, broadened my review of artists and helped me identify my research interests in feminist art. My PhD supervisors, Professor Barb Bolt and Professor Jon Cattapan, enabled me to establish myself in the field of feminist art studies and interdisciplinary creative artistic research.

When did you get started? What did it mean to you and what do you love most about painting?

During my undergraduate studies in design at Tsinghua University, I learned drawing, painting, calligraphy, traditional Chinese painting, sculpture, design foundations, graphic design, glass art, and specialized in lacquer art for both studio projects and public space decoration. Upon deciding to pursue my MFA degree in the USA, I developed an interest in feminist philosophy and began creating a series of paintings exploring cosmetic surgery at the University at Buffalo. To further my research in feminist art theory, I relocated to Australia for my PhD studies at the University of Melbourne. For me, painting serves as a means to propagate feminist ideologies. It acts as a bridge through which I can communicate my ideas to audiences and the public. I consider my paintings feminist paintings. The purpose of feminist thought in my paintings is to contrast patriarchal aesthetics and structures and to reveal the impact of these on real bodies. Painting, unlike

Double Faces Pre & Post Cosmetic Surgery-3, 2016
oil on canvas, 163 × 112 cm (64 × 44 in)



new media, requires particular methods of production. Especially, for representing a specific form with oil, the tradition of production requires a painter's abilities and control to manipulate paint, combine the amount of paint, the weight of the hand, and movement of fingers to execute the desired image. These aspects are what I love most about painting.

Su Yang also creates videos and short films about the changes in society's beauty ideals and how women adhere to these standards through drastic and even hazardous cosmetic surgery procedures

Face-Lifts, 2014, oil on canvas, 147 × 170 cm (58 × 67 in)



What were the main challenges at the beginning?

It depends on the journey. The outset of learning drawing and painting foundations is fraught with frustrations stemming from anatomy and techniques. The challenges include mastering the ability to draw accurately within a specified timeframe, gaining con-

fidence in drawing, and ensuring that my drawings effectively convey characters and make objects vivid as subjects. Embarking on art-practice-led research presents its own set of challenges, particularly in identifying research topics and questions. These topics and questions must not only align with personal interests but also demonstrate potential contributions to academia and society. Additionally, they should offer avenues for engagement with the community and audiences.

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

Each painting may require a different amount of time to complete. Before physically painting each piece, I conduct research on the context of the project, considering research as an integral part of the creation process. The research phase often involves extensive literature reviews regarding the significance of initiating a new series. The first painting in each new series typically demands more time, perhaps around three months or even longer. However, subsequent paintings can be completed within a shorter time frame, ranging from one month to just one week.

What role does feminism play in your artworks?

I consider my paintings feminist paintings, thus referring to “feminist painting,” or “feminist art.” The debate around it has been in contention. Robinson’s insight into it provides the definition of feminist art, as an approach to art making informed by feminist thinking. The purpose of feminist thought in my paintings is to contrast patriarchal aesthetics and structures and to reveal the impact of these on real bodies.

Some surgeons consider themselves as artists. Some believe that cosmetic surgery is like sculpting with bodies. In your artworks, we see the suffering side. What do you hope people can feel and understand when they get to your artworks?

In my early paintings, I saw cosmetic surgery as having the same function as the historical, social regimes, which impose foot binding on vast numbers of Chinese women in history. Both celebrated the maiming of women for the sake of beauty. Later, I painted large-scale paintings to exaggerate the process and outcomes of cosmetic surgery so that they become surreal and unnerving images. These images show the desensitized nature and subsequent physical traumas of cosmetic surgery that question the idea of the “perfect body” and interrupt (heterosexual) male sexual desire and demands for an ideal female body.

For millennia, the human body and nature have remained central subjects of artistic beauty. Achieving perfection can become consuming for some individuals, raising the question: Is cosmetic surgery an attempt to exert control over nature?

It's more about exerting control over nature. The evolving social norms reflected in depictions of women, both in classical Chinese oil paintings and on social media, bear similarities to traditional European nude genre oil paintings and those found on platforms like Instagram. This reflects cultural influence and suggests that women are commodified within the global advertising and media landscape. The beauty standards propagated in cosmetic surgery

**Su Yang is also a
researcher who
focuses on Chinese
feminism and
feminist art studies**

*Invisible/Visible Hands – 2, 2023
oil on canvas, 40 × 30 cm (16 × 12 in)*



advertisements perpetuate anxiety among women, fostering a sense of inadequacy. Whether cosmetic surgery is viewed as a feminist choice or a patriarchal tool, the beauty standards promoted in cosmetic surgery advertisements, along with the notion of femininity, become products of capitalist consumerism.

Since I was a little girl I have heard the phrase “Chi bella vuole apparire delle pene deve soffrire” which means “Whoever wants to appear beautiful must suffer pain”. Why should women suffer in the name of beauty?

Women shouldn't have to suffer in the name of beauty. I see these ideologies as part of patriarchy, perpetuating the idea that a woman's worth is solely determined by her appearance as a sexual object.

Scars are often viewed as imperfections on a woman's body, whereas on a man, they may symbolize courage or valor. Similarly, society tends to place less value on the aging process in women compared to men, with men sometimes being associated with fine aged wine. What are your thoughts on this evident double standard?

The beauty standard has never existed in isolation; it has been shaped by various factors including culture, society, history, and politics, among others. This standard often reflects underlying issues of gender and race discrimination. That's why I aim to address these issues in my artwork, prompting questions and raising awareness among the public.

How do you see the role of women in today's culture and society? Do you think art can contribute to awareness by showing points of view that are not always taken into consideration?

Given my expertise in Chinese feminism and feminist art studies, I'd like to discuss the role of women in Chinese society today. Women have become increasingly competitive in various fields and have benefited from the social and economic changes over the last three decades in China. However, few women have made it into positions of power in the contemporary Chinese art world. Regarding the second question, yes, I do believe that art can contribute to awareness by showcasing viewpoints that are not always considered.

Yuqing Liu

Scent Researcher & Artist Moving Between
Multiple Invisible Realities, Connecting with the
Deepest Memories Through Fragrance

Photos courtesy of Yuqing Liu



Yuqing Liu, a renowned olfactory and narrative. Liu shared her knowledge and expertise with Chinese educational institutions, solidifying her position in the art and education communities. Liu's work reached new heights in 2023, playing a key role in Omega's "Every Shade of You" campaign in partnership with EcoScent. She created five distinct smells to enhance the audience's interaction with memories and emotions. Her the brand's new watch collection began during her post-graduate studies, when she pioneered innovative olfactory interaction design approaches, which culminated in a highly regarded graduate project. In 2022, as an olfactory Archiving System" and olfactory interaction art lecturer she emphasizing scent's transforming power in memory and narrative. Liu shared her knowledge and expertise with Chinese educational institutions, solidifying her position in the art and education communities. Liu's work reached new heights in 2023, playing a key role in Omega's "Every Shade of You" campaign in partnership with EcoScent. She created five distinct smells to enhance the audience's interaction with memories and emotions. Her the brand's new watch collection began during her post-graduate studies, when she pioneered innovative olfactory interaction design approaches, which culminated in a highly regarded graduate project. In 2022, as an olfactory Archiving System" and olfactory interaction art lecturer she emphasizing scent's transforming power in memory and narrative.

*Awakening: Scent Archive, Scent interactive installation
260cm L x 180cm W x 210cm H, 2021*



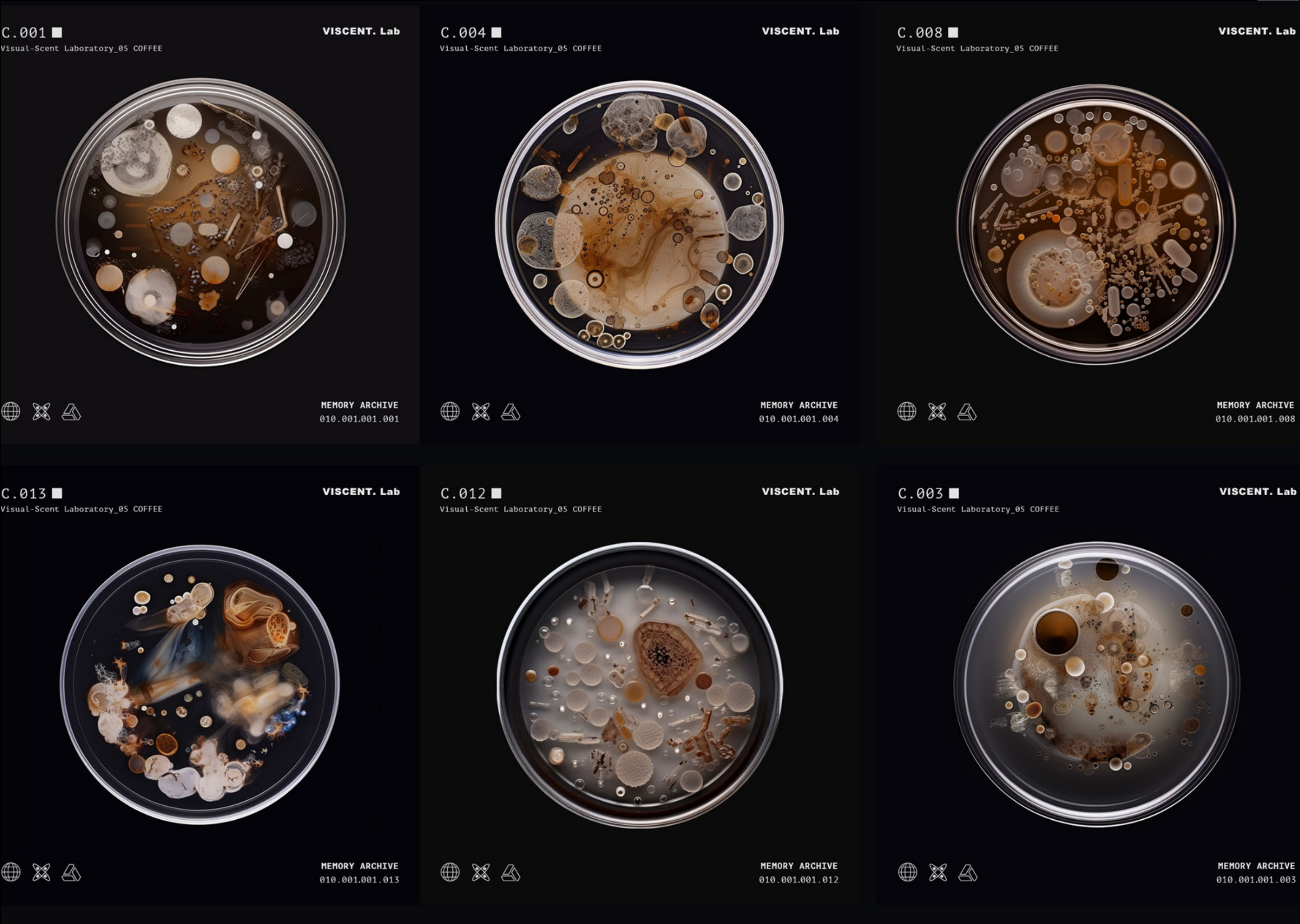
Who influenced you as a person and as an artist? What does art mean to you?

Art for me is a profound way to communicate and connect deeply, allowing individuals to express their thoughts and convey them in a personal form. My personal experiences and close relationships have shaped the way I express myself artistically, with my works deeply rooted in the desire to connect with loved ones suffering from memory loss. My grandfather’s gradual forgetfulness due to Alzheimer’s disease left me with a strong sense of helplessness, prompting me to seek a way through art to explore how humans can evoke and preserve memories. My pieces often revolve around scent and memory, as I believe human memory is a symbol of existence, and scent is a sensory stimulus that can directly link to memory, leading me to embark on the practice of interactive art involving scent and memory. Another person that influenced me a lot is Sissel Tolaas, a pivotal figure in the scent art field. I am consistently inspired by her work, which uses scent to explore urban memories, environmental history, and human activity in fascinating ways. Her ability to integrate olfactory materials into spatial structures to create unique scent-dominated sensory experiences captivates me. Her background as a chemist adds a rational beauty to her work, continually motivating me to develop innovative scent-based interactive

experiences.

You grew up in China and now you are working in the U.K. What cultural differences and what common points of view did you find? What did it mean for your artistic and personal path moving from China to England?

Growing up in China, the culture, environment, and education there shaped my worldview. I enjoy starting from my personal sensations, first exploring how I perceive the world internally, and then expressing my unique interactions with the world through installations and digital media technology. At the age of 20, I came to the UK to study interactive art and found the educational environment here more encouraging of critical thinking and interdisciplinary research practices. This led me to explore various experimental materials and delve into theories of neurobiology, integrating human-computer interaction technologies into my creations to explore a more fluid emotional exchange between myself and the audience. My move from China to London challenged me to push beyond traditional boundaries, integrating multisensory elements into my work. This transition didn’t just change my location; it transformed my artistic approach, allowing me to connect with a wider audience and explore the vast possibilities of scent as a medium for immersive storytelling and experience.

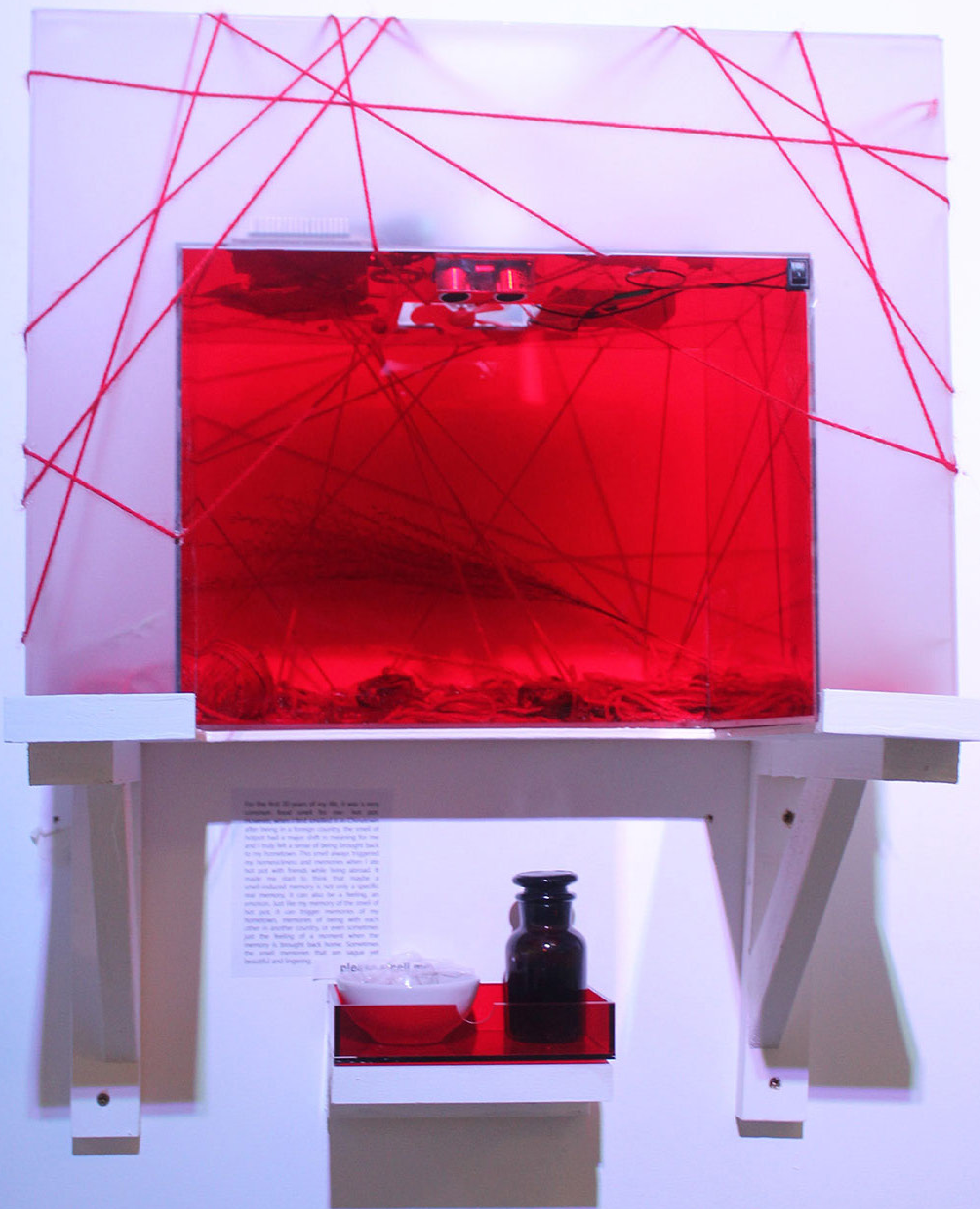


VI-SCENT.Lab: Memory Archiving System
Human-AI collaboration in Olfactory Visualization, 2023

How did your interest in the sense of smell arise? What drove you to create the combination of art and smells? How do you keep your inspiration alive?

My journey in olfactory interaction art is deeply personal, drawing inspiration from my grandfather’s battle with Alzheimer’s. His fading memories, preserved in sketchbooks filled with maps and stories, ignited my passion for exploring human memory through scent, a potent medium for triggering emotions and recollections. In a world dominated by visuals, I chose scent for its strong emotional and mnemonic connections, aiming to design experiences that resonate deeply. My work is a blend of love, loss,

and the pursuit of preserving the ephemeral threads of memory. At the heart of my practice is the belief that olfactory senses are crucial for perceiving environments, recording emotions, and signaling danger. I believe that the key to maintaining my inspiration lies in the continuous study and exploration of new technologies. I am convinced that scent remains an underexploited sensory trigger within cutting-edge technologies like virtual reality and mixed reality. My artistic mission is to access deep-seated memories and emotions through olfaction. I envision a future where technology encompasses all senses, expanding the boundaries of sensory interaction and memory preservation.



Awakening: Scent Archive (Smell Memory of Homesickness)
Scent interactive installation, 42cm L x 42cm W x 60cm H, 2021

On a practical level, what were the biggest challenges you encountered in the realization of your artworks?

One of the primary challenges in my work has been transforming the transient nature of scents into tangible art installations. This involves not only ensuring the longevity and consistency of scents but also integrating them seamlessly with visual and auditory elements. The process requires a delicate balance between technical innovation and artistic vision to preserve the essence of my ideas. My practice involves crafting intricate scent compositions that go beyond mere aromas; they embody complex memories and emotions, offering an alternative sensory experience in a visually saturated world. This endeavor to harness olfaction as a medium not only reconnects people with their primal senses but also bridges the gap between the ephemeral world of smells and tangible human experiences.

By leveraging technology and extending your art beyond traditional visual engagement, you immerse your audience in a deeper experience. What do you enjoy most when creating art?

In my art creation, which integrates technology to extend beyond visual art, I particularly enjoy witnessing the diverse and profound emotional reactions elicited by the scent samples I present. The personal and unpredictable nature of olfactory memories brings unique challenges and opportunities, enriching the interactive experience. It's fascinating to see how the same scent can unite people through shared recollections or evoke entirely different emotions in others, underscoring the subjective power of scent. This variability in responses not only highlights the intricate relationship between humans and smell but also what I cherish most in my art: the ability to facilitate deeply personal experiences and connections among my audience.

The Boiling Ocean, Memory Tea Bags, 220 cm L x 80 cm W x 100 cm H, 2023



What is your starting point? What is your creative process? How do you 'translate' your ideas into an art installation?

My creative journey begins with capturing a moment's sensation in life, triggered by various conditions. For instance, walking through London's alleys on a rainy day, the scent of damp rain mixed with concrete in the air and the shapes of buildings and lights reflected in puddles on the ground make me think of reflections in water as memories, stored and mirrored by a medium, yet fragile, easily blurred by a single footprint. This leads me to associate water and memory's shared characteristics as unique materials for developing olfactory experiences. This is how my creative ideas emerge, always in a special form. This initial spark is transformed through sketches, notes, and experimental setups into a concept. In translating these concepts into art installations, I pay close attention to the selection of materials and technologies to ensure that the final work accurately conveys the original ideas and emotions. For example, in the early stages of creating 'Awakening: Scent Archive', I developed a set of interaction design guidelines for scent-triggered memories through experimental design and extensive literature review. Throughout the creative process, I continually test and adjust to ensure that each artistic presentation resonates emotionally with the audience.

Smells and scents can stimulate a rich emotional response connected to forgotten childhood, or adolescence. The senses are doorways to lost memories. What do you want to explore? What do you hope to inspire in your audience? What are your most important findings, about the sense of smell?

As the Proust effect, scents have the unique power to immediately transport people back to a specific moment or awaken a deeply buried memory. Through creating olfactory interactive experiences, I aim to explore how scent memories resonate across different groups and individuals. Given the personalized and unpredictable nature of scents, crafting these experiences poses a significant challenge, as it's hard to ensure the conveyed concepts and emotions are precise. Rather than accurately transmitting subjective memories and emotions, I prefer to create a platform that encourages exploration and sharing, where the audience can experience scent scenes from my memories, potentially triggering their own, which might be similar or vastly different. This unpredictability is what makes scent memories fascinating. I hope to spark curiosity and a desire to share among my audience, often hearing intriguing life stories and inspiring new ideas during my exhibitions. I wish for participants to gain varied experiences and share their feelings with others. Regarding olfaction, I've discovered it to be a potent, yet of-

Yuqing Liu, is the artist who seeks to unravel the intricacies of human senses, focusing on how scent can awaken deeply entrenched, emotionally rich memories, an idea rooted in the Proust effecta rooted in the Proust effect

ten overlooked, sensory capability with strong signal recognition and information processing abilities, playing a significant role in narrative-driven immersive experiences. Furthermore, the concept of public olfactory memories, reflecting local culture, climate, cuisine, and even entertainment, is an aspect I find indispensable in my exploration.

*The Boiling Ocean, Scent Ritual Installation
100 cm L x 80 cm W x 200 cm, 2023*



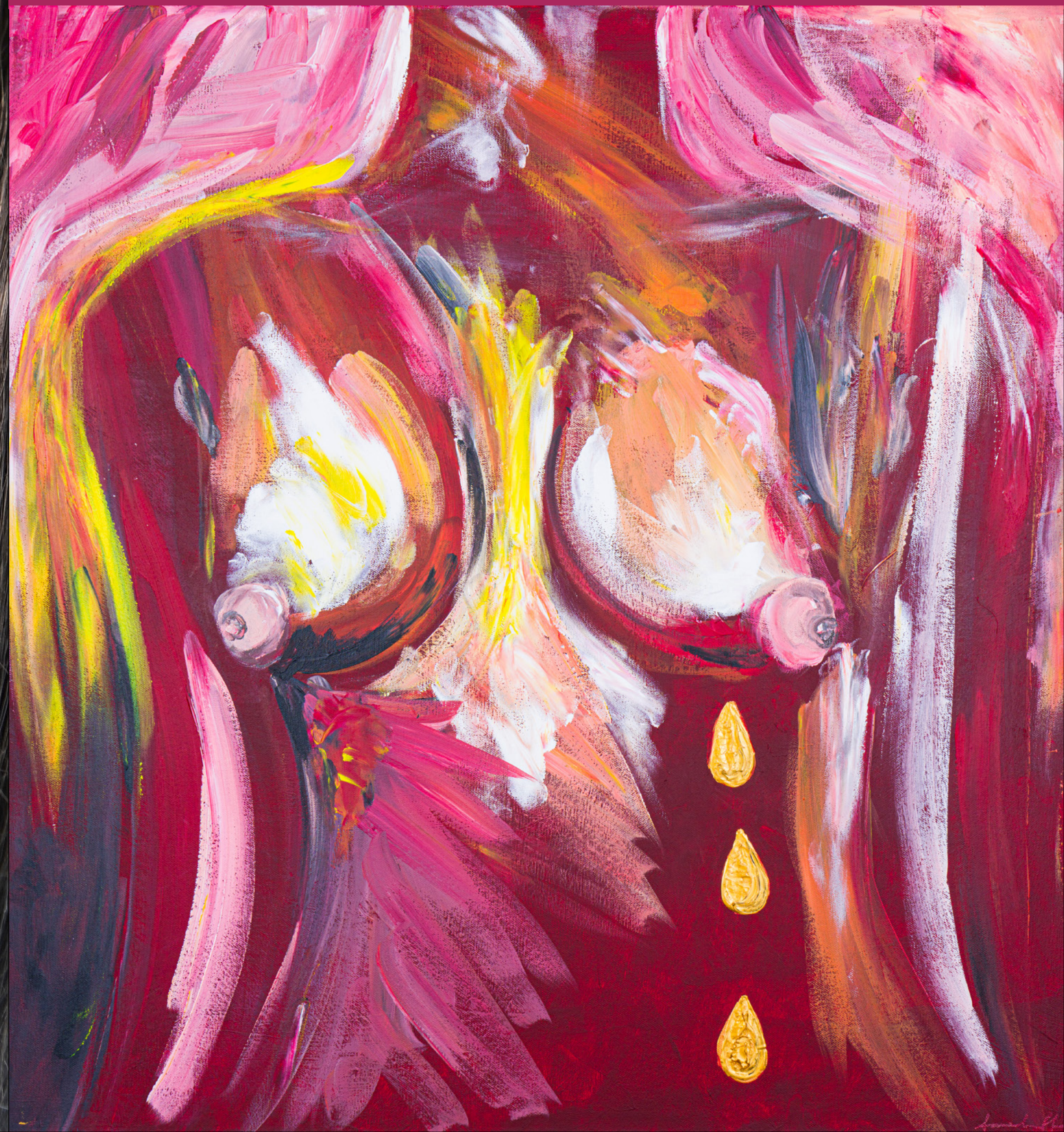
Amanda Ruiqing Flynn

Multidisciplinary Artist Proficient in a Variety of Artistic Mediums, Accomplished Writer, and Chinese-to-English Translator

Photos and illustrations courtesy of Amanda Ruiqing Flynn



Amanda Ruiqing Flynn is a multidisciplinary artist, writer, lecturer for and participating in artist residencies. She holds a BA in Chinese Literature and Development Studies from SOAS, University of London, and an MFA in Art and Design from National Dong Hwa University, Taiwan. To date, she has held four solo exhibitions and is currently based in Singapore where she has exhibited in many group exhibitions with her husband and son.



Could you tell us a bit about yourself? What motivated you to become an artist? Have you always had a clear vision of your career from an early age?

I was born in Singapore, and my family emigrated to the United Kingdom when I was eight, so I spent my formative years there. The impetus to be creative was within me from a young age; I fondly remember bribing my four-year-old brother to sit still for two hours so I could draw his side profile. The joy of painting and making sculptures with my hands was an everyday part of my childhood and education. I knew more concretely that I wanted to be an artist when wandering around museums and galleries. I would always feel this discomfort, this feeling that I didn't want to just be an observer of other artists'

work, I wanted to be the creator of it too. Before university, my art teacher took me aside and told me that it would be a real shame if I did not pursue art further, and those words have always stayed with me. The real catalyst for me to place art at the forefront of my life was when I was diagnosed with Cushings Disease at the age of 23. When all around me my peers were entering into their first post-university jobs, I was forced to take a step back after graduating from university as I waited to undergo a life-saving operation to remove a tumour in my pituitary gland and to receive radiotherapy too. So just as life was speeding up for my friends, life forced me to slow down for a year, and I quelled my deep anxiety about the future by the simple act of sitting in front of a blank canvas and pouring out my complicated

emotions. Art was my companion through illness and recovery, when everything else seemed uncontrollable, and that's when I knew I really needed it to survive. After I recovered from the illness, I saw life in a completely different way. I knew that having survived, if I didn't have the courage to look

within my heart and do what I truly wanted to do now, I never would. So I bought a one way ticket to Taiwan, and nestled within the mountains and ocean of Hualien on the east of the island, I further recuperated, taught children, and painted and created each day. The nature and creative projects



were a balm to process everything: illness, heartbreak, family issues, and importantly, to learn self-resilience. I grew physically and mentally stronger each day. This culminated in 2019, when I was awarded my MFA in Art and Design after being granted a full scholarship from the Taiwanese government. And now, in honouring the serendipity of the circle of life, I am back in Singapore, living here with my husband and son. So all in all, when I think about my vision for my career and life, I would say that at various crossroads in my life, the hand of fate has forced me to reckon with my life path, and I have had to make major decisions to either follow my heart and gut, or not. And I have always followed my heart, which has brought me to where I am today.

What piece of art impressed you the most in your childhood? What are your best memories related to art?

The art that impressed me most in my childhood does not sit in a gallery, but in a church. A small church in the tiny little village of Tudeley, Kent, a stone's throw from my hometown in England. I stumbled across this church one day, and whilst I'm not religious, I entered and felt this calm wash over me. For on the walls were panel after panel of stained glass windows, all painted by famous artist Marc Chagall. Imagine, this nondescript church in the middle of nowhere housing such beauty. The relative darkness and brick walls of the church contrasted with the light shining through the yellows and the deep blues of the delicate glass. To this day, I can't explain the feeling. And this was

long before I knew about Chagall's more famous artworks. One of my best memories related to art is standing in the Uffizi Gallery in Florence and viewing Self-portrait of Marc Chagall for the first time. As you might have guessed, I am a great admirer of Chagall's work. His surrealist depictions of floating people and animals in mid-air speak to me of love. So when I saw his self-portrait with a floating bride and chicken set in a backdrop of blue, it was just mesmerising to me. And housed in the setting of the Uffizi Gallery, which alone is magnificent, for it sits in the wider backdrop of Florence, I felt like I had come home – art housed in art housed in art. It

somehow reminded me of that little church in Kent, but I was hundreds of miles away in a different country, and a decade later.

You are a skilled multidisciplinary artist. What medium better focuses on your personality? What do you love most about your job, what are the greatest satisfactions?

I am akin to a chef who is obsessed and enjoys cooking many different dishes from different cuisines, and often fusion ones. And so when I create a piece of artwork, it's often because I have an idea in my mind that I want to come to fruition, something I



desperately want to say, and I am confident in using a wide range of mediums to create that. Apart from painting on canvas, I have tried my hand successfully at woodwork, metalwork and claywork. Having said that, the mediums I enjoy using most, due to their ease of set up and clear up (as I currently have a young child who likes to emulate me) is pen and ink, oil pastels, as well as using acrylics to paint with my fingers. The latter is a technique which everyone, regardless of artistic background, needs to try, for it's extremely cathartic! There is a freedom in taking away the middleman that is the paint brush and directly expressing your emotions on canvas which speaks to

my need for freedom. There are so many things I love about being a visual artist as I count myself very lucky to be able to visualise images in my mind and express what I want to say on the canvas. My greatest satisfactions are when someone looks at my work and it invokes something in them, whether that is an emotion or a deeper question that makes them look at their world in a different way, be that their environment, politics or the philosophy of life. I enjoy sparking thoughts and feelings that enable the viewer to understand their reality more or make them feel less alone. And I don't underestimate being able to evoke happiness, simple happiness, for it is not necessary to ob-

fuscate the viewer on purpose. I try to create art that is both intellectual and emotional, and is able to speak to another human. If I can do that successfully, I am satisfied.

What is the biggest challenge you face when you have to start a new project? What keeps you inspired?

The biggest challenge I face in starting a new project is overcoming the fear of failure and at the same time, that of perfectionism. Both can stymie the courage to create something great and true to myself. So if I am feeling this fear or inertia, I always tell myself that I can buy another blank canvas, or start again. When I drill

that into my mind, I finally feel like I have the freedom to make mistakes, which is when I create my best work – when I am fearless. Life alone keeps me inspired. Of course when something major happens, like the end of a relationship or an illness or the loss of a loved one, it is a catalyst for me to create in order to process my emotions. However, I think that life does not have to be a constant rollercoaster in order to create great work. In fact, some of the best subjects are of everyday life, of simple love, of family, a good conversation, observing a passerby in the street, seeing the patterns trees create in the shadows. Everything can be magical if you stop to live it and observe it.





Is any of your work related to a moment that marked a significant point in your life? Could you share with us the story behind it?

I think that every single piece of work relates to a point in my life. This point could have been a few minute's experience, like observing my child smiling, or a longer period, like the lingering emotion of grief. I would say that different seasons bring about different focuses and collections. The themes I have delved into for the biggest bodies of work I have created thus far are love, the environment and transitions, namely, Everything I Know About Love, Talking Trash and most recently, my children's picture book titled The Woof that Went Weng. Everything I Know About Love is an artistic reflection on my experiences of love from childhood all the way until my late twenties, encompassing the different types of love we encounter throughout our lives – familial love, first love, passionate love, heartbreak, grief, marriage. It's a celebration and mourning all at once. My favourite artwork in Talking Trash is a giant cup of spilt bubble tea, a very common and well-loved takeaway beverage in Asia. Bubble tea got me thinking about the amount of trash each cup generates, that a moment's pleasure for us can float about in the ocean for hundreds of years. So I created a sculpture made entirely of plastic bags as well as plastic found in and by the Pacific Ocean, which was ground into pellets, and remoulded. The Woof that Went Weng is a story about language and belonging, what it means to be an outsider at home, which reflects my own transition to Singapore from Taiwan.

You were born in Singapore and moved to the U.K. and Taiwan, you also have a huge knowledge of Chinese culture. What are the main differences and similarities that you have noticed in education and relationships?

This is a big question, where do I start! I want to begin by saying that while there are of course cultural differences in all three places I have lived, what binds us in similarity is the quest for belonging and happiness, even though that may look different to different people. Broadly, what I gained greatly from education in the UK was that it emphasised freedom of thought, critical thinking and creativity. In Singapore, I received a solid foundation in the facts first, and creativity is certainly encouraged, but it feels more benign, not so questioning. I think Taiwanese education is a halfway ground between the UK and Singapore, and there is a level of moral education there too – students are in charge of sweeping their own classrooms each day, for example. Taiwan is a great place to be an artist where many artists cross disciplines. In terms of relationships, I would say that there is a level of trust and openness I have experienced in Taiwan that I have never seen anywhere else in the world, and it exists even amongst total strangers. For example I was once late for a train, and I was running along the pavement dragging my suitcase in tow. A woman stopped her car by the roadside and asked if I wanted a lift to the train station. I got in and kept asking for her number to send her a gift of thanks, but she simply ushered me out of the car at the train station saying I would miss my train if I did not go immediately. That's it, simple kind

gestures, with no agenda. I don't think we can generalise about relationships but something that has struck me over and over again is that in the UK we often don't do business with our friends as we like to separate business and pleasure. However, in both Singapore and Taiwan, especially Taiwan, I have experienced the opposite, that word of mouth recommendations from a friend whose friend has a cake business, a B&B, anything, is the way connections are built.

Does living in different countries influence your way of creating and seeing life?

Absolutely, 100%. I think each move I have made has forced growth in me, like a tree that has branched out in different directions. Because each move forces you out of your comfort zone, and you have to remake and relearn all those basic tools of survival, from a new cuisine to making new friends and understanding new cultures and of course, learning new languages. Even mannerisms. So you unknowingly become an anthropologist, as you're observing other people all the time, and see things that others might not notice. And that in turn helps your creative endeavours, as you have a point of view that no one else does, or you are able to join the dots about human behaviour in ways that others have not thought about before. I can also meld different cultures, schools of thought and artistic styles into my own artwork. For example, I love using traditional Chinese pen and ink to create artworks in my own style.

You are also a writer and a Chinese to English translator. Could you tell us more about this?

Of course, I would love to! I have taught creative writing for many years and over the past four years, have been writing short stories and poetry, which have won competitions and been published in journals. I like to explore and subvert themes as well as stereotypes, in essence, playing with words in the way I play with paints. I think of writing as an alternative medium with which to express myself. One of my favourite stories is one close to my heart, a story about an unlikely friendship between a domestic worker and woman in Singapore; it was one of the winners of the Writing the City competition and has been turned into a podcast. Domestic workers are part of the fabric of Singaporean society, many households hire one to help with chores and child raising, so they are like family but also employees, and it's fascinating to me where the lines are drawn and blurred. Right now I have a children's picture book, a novel and a memoir in the pipeline. I am very excited about my children's picture book, of which I am the author and illustrator, as I get to combine my love for visual arts with the written word.

The theme for International Women's Day 2024 is Inspire Inclusion. How can art encourage inclusion and connect individuals? Could you share with us your vision?

Art absolutely can, as long as it is taken down from a pedestal that says it can only exist in high-brow galleries or as an economic transaction, it absolutely can inspire inclusion. My own work, which

has focussed on themes of love, feminism and the environment tries to illustrate that the human experiences we have in common far outweighs what we don't, so I try to build inclusivity through what I am saying with my artwork. I am also part of an art collective called Mama on Palette, a group of mother artists who are changing the world as mothers as well as artists. In the modern day, it's not easy for a woman to juggle raising a family and stay true to her artistic self. Oftentimes, it is seen as mutually exclusive. So to overturn this idea and be part of such a group that is doing so much to impact the community around them is incredible. Women are unstoppable and if society truly respects this, we can use our strength to connect with others through the arts, education, society, in all aspects of life. The possibilities are endless. My personal vision for how art can encourage inclusion is to use

art to show or tell something in a way that makes us see a situation from a point of view we might not have thought about before, and through this, we can connect to each other on an emotional level rather than be competitors against each other. If we put ourselves in someone else's shoes, whether that is a woman, a child or a domestic worker, it is difficult to hate another because you will try to think what life might be like for that person. Hopefully then, there will be more respect and understanding in society. Last but not least, art enables us to have a deeper understanding of ourselves, and we can radiate this strength outwards – the surer we are of ourselves, the more inclusive we are towards others. If you can connect on a human level of emotions – love, grief, passion, loss, desire – with another person, ultimately, the world becomes more beautiful to live in. That is my hope.

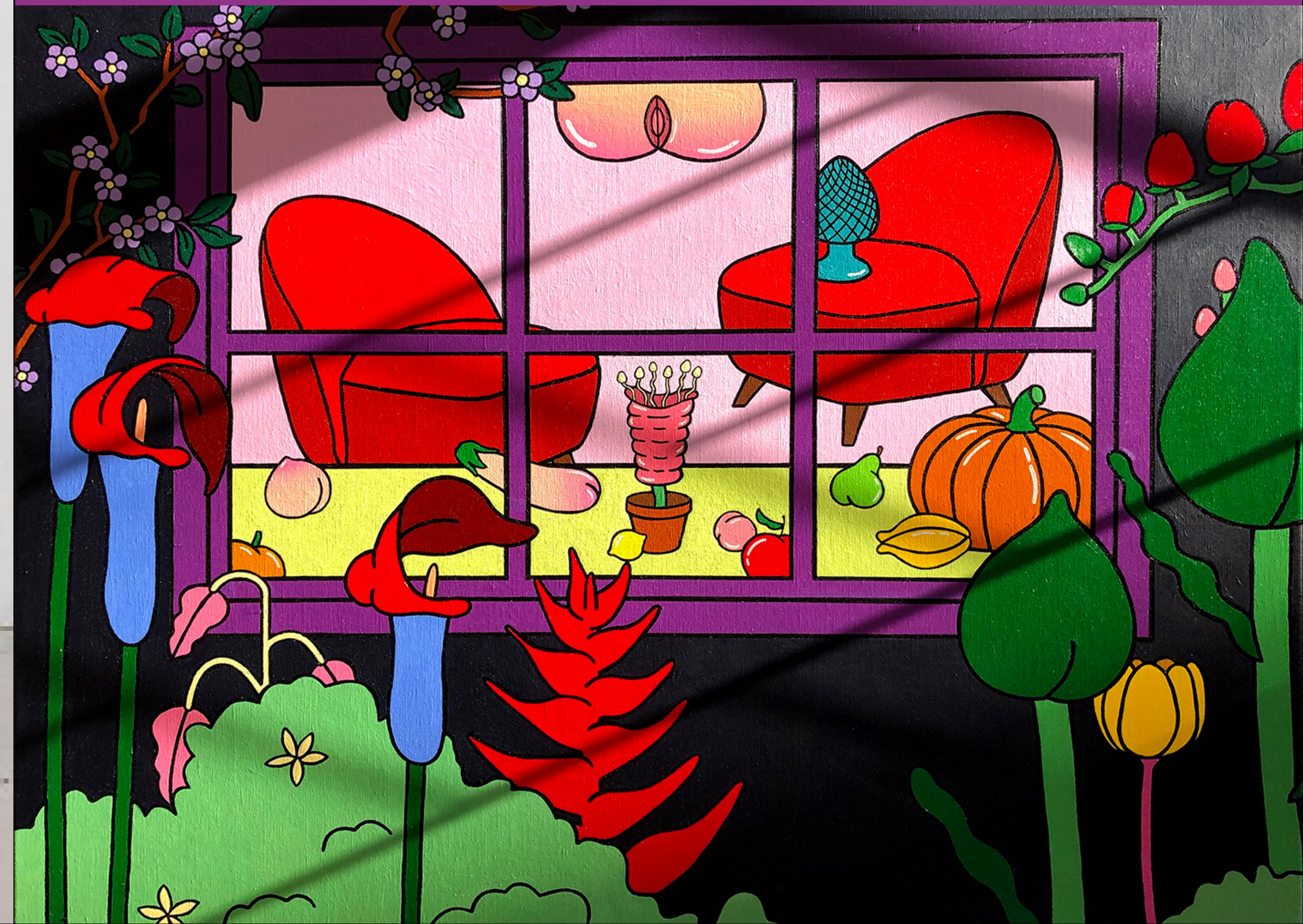


Claudia Chanhoi

Illustrator and Designer Who Breaks Through the Boundaries of Imagination



Claudia Chanhoi is an energetic and vivid illustrator and designer who grew up in Hong Kong. Through her illustrations, most of these creations feature women's body parts, she aims to communicate what is seen as a taboo or a shame in society: women's sexuality. She also focuses her attention on to-day's women's role. Her purpose has consistently been to promote greater awareness and embrace of sex and sexuality. She wields her art to spark discussions on 'no-no' topics, especially around the objectification of women's bodies. The focus of her art design reflects her ideology. Claudia's pieces underline that at first look women can seem easily catalogable, just to name a few. She has looked through a pop art lens and with bubblegum colors, but if the eyes let the flow of the designer move deeper, they can catch years of experience, different levels of curiosity and ways of understanding. This desire to help a full understanding drove her to a partnership with Teen's Key, a Hong Kong nonprofit for women. She is earning funds for Teen's Key by selling her merchandise featuring her art and is also producing new illustrations for use in a sex education course for the young. She has held solo exhibitions in Beijing, Miami, Hong Kong, Tokyo, and London and has worked with clients such as LELO, LUSH, NBC News, Playboy, JAJA Tequila, and HarperCollins Publishers, also been featured in many publications.

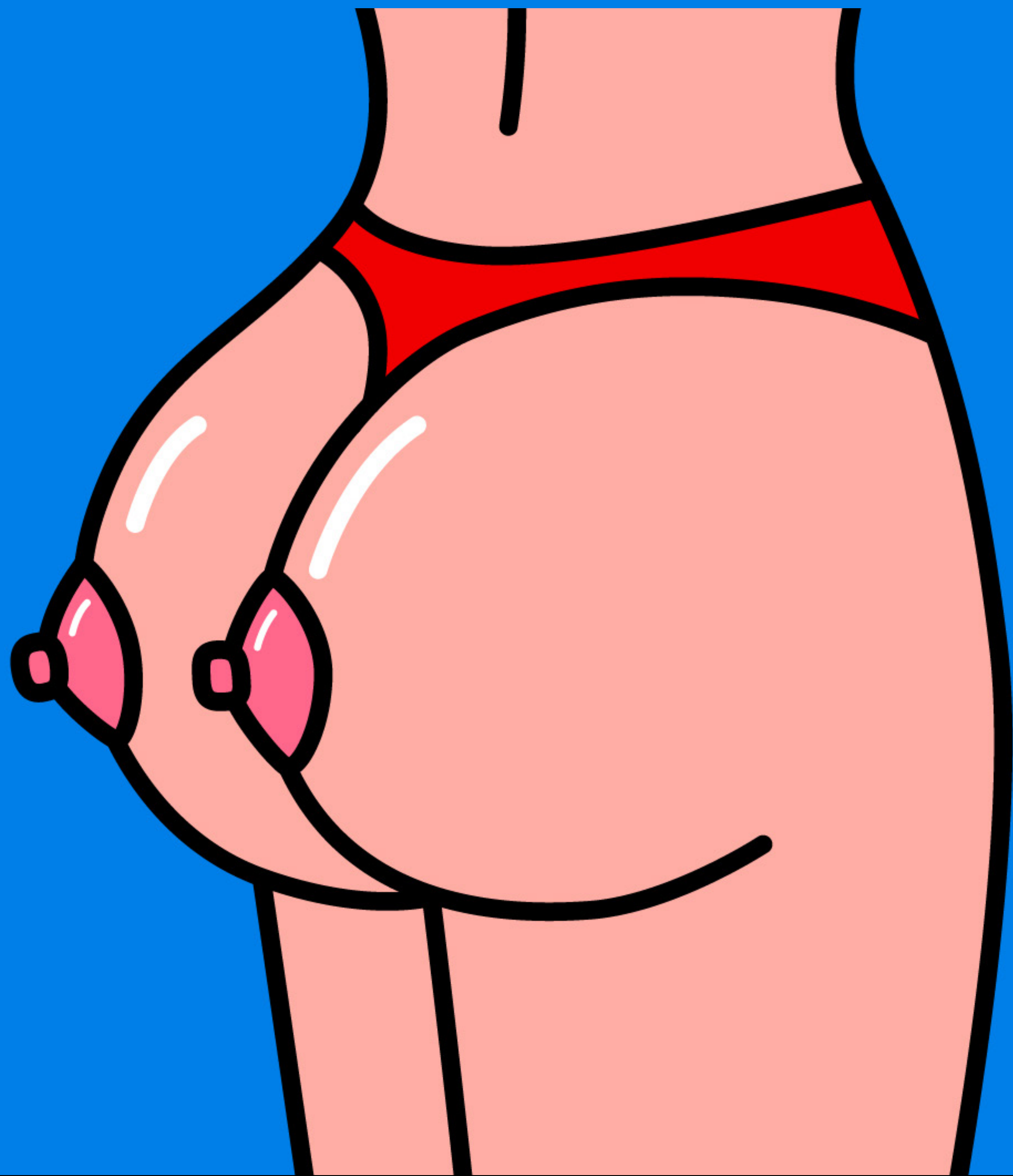


Can you tell us why you've decided to be an artist and what drove you? Graphic and illustration design was your first choice? How did you begin your artistic path?

I started painting at the age of 3 I believe. It was the only thing I loved doing and I think I was pretty good at it growing up. I always knew I would be a painter at a very young age and that goal has never changed. I pursued my artistic interests further by attending an Art school where I initially studied Graphic Design as I didn't know the difference between art and design. Later on, I went to the London College of Communication and studied Graphic and Media Design. My design background marked a significant turning point in my creative approach from traditional oil portraits to more contemporary digital styles.

With humour and sarcasm you point to women's sexuality. What motivated you to choose this theme?

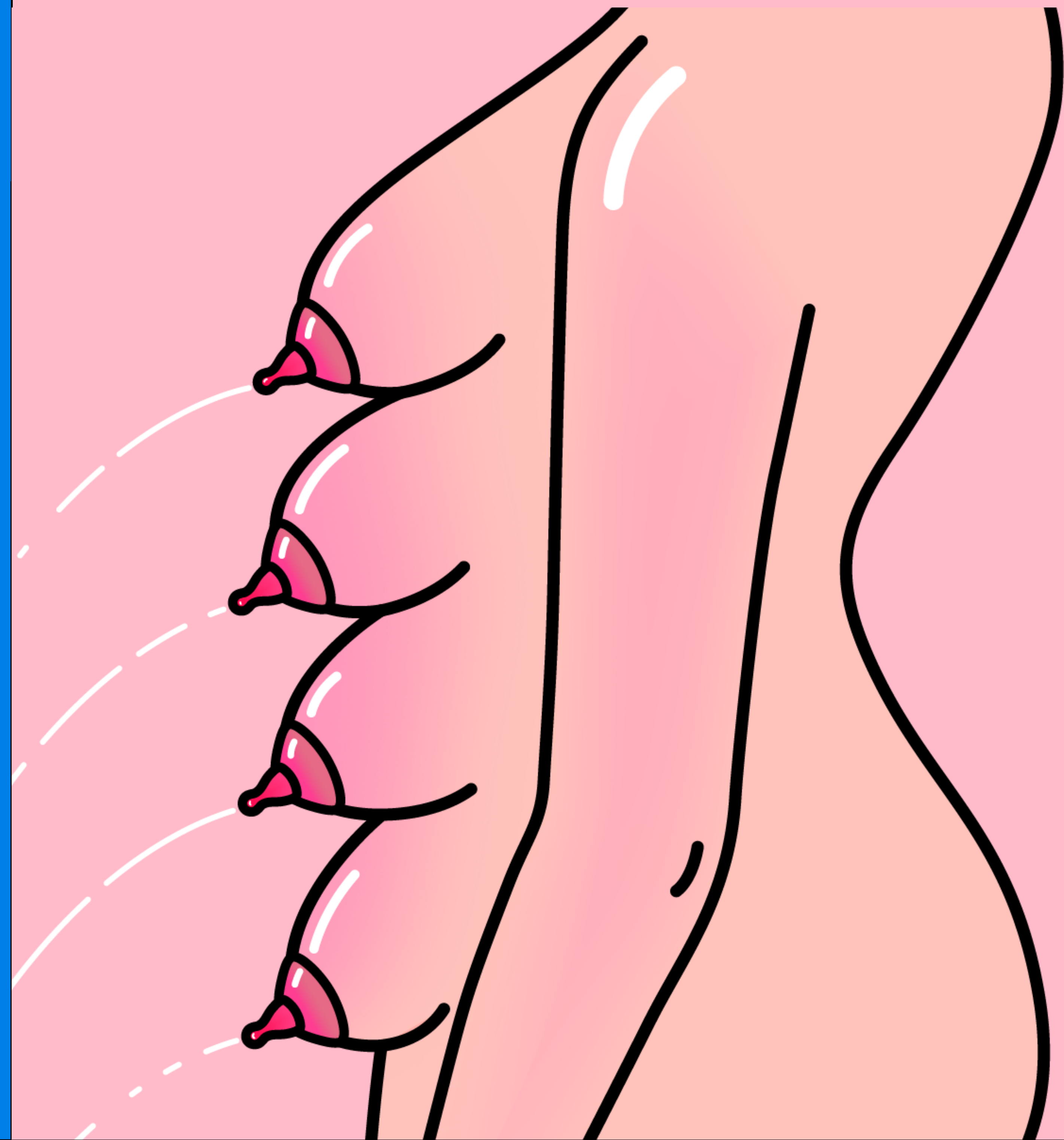
I was working on my university final project and I wanted to address the issue of "sexual objectification of women" because it was what mattered to me the most as a young woman who just entered her womanhood. I created 6 illustrative products, they were "boob milkshake", "pubic neck pillow", "leg chopsticks" and a few different ones to mock the idea of using women as sex objects. I don't think I intentionally "chose" to be humorous and sarcastic but I think this has always been my approach to controversial topics. I don't want to jump to a conclusion too quickly because I want us to have an open conversation and free thinking with an open heart.



Demystifying the female body through art and humor is a process to reclaim women's sexuality

You used the "female gaze" to communicate and create your own style. How has your vision shifted and evolved over the years? - You pictured the most feminine parts of a woman's body as a series of dishes. What do your illustrations want to communicate? What desire for sexuality are you trying to fully express?

My art has been my true expression of experiencing womanhood. I used to talk about modern dating relationships and female sexuality at the beginning because I was dating around in my younger years. Now, It evolves and matures as I experience my life throughout



time from dating different people to being engaged and entering a new page of my life. My art is not only a reminder to stay true to myself, but it also makes me let go of shame around my sexuality and things that I've found difficult to talk about, such as sexualisation, worrying about the biological clock and women feeling the need to be more masculine to be taken seriously at work, etc.

Have you encountered any stigma in the art world due to the “women’s sexuality theme” of your work? What were the audience reactions when you first started your design?

During the first few years of my career, there were people whom I encountered professionally, assuming that I'd be open to having a sexual relationship with them based on what I do. I think most people might think that I draw vaginas and penises just for fun

without any meaning. My ex's friends always joked about how kinky the sex would be with me just because my art involved sexual topics. And my ex did warn me that I needed to be careful to show my art to people, especially men because they might have a wrong idea about me. I was feeling very not understood and judged at that time. But I always believed that my art was much more than that. There are always taboos around sex and female sexuality. The negative association with sex has been deeply rooted in our culture (although our culture would never exist if sex was never happened). Their reaction was a good reminder that I need to be more open and honest with my art instead of stopping it just because I don't want to be seen as a “sex addict”. The most fun part of my work is that I get to challenge people's mindsets and open up conversations around taboo topics.

Claudia is redefining femininity, sexuality, and sex education. She addresses these themes with humor and sarcasm, inspiring in-depth debates and encouraging everyone to start a discourse about them

Do you think the relationship between body and nudity is changing or the female body is still viewed as the light of shame? If sex creates life and pleasure why sex has been seen, from some people, as dirty or vulgar? Is it the private aspect that creates a confusing message?

Sex is a natural and essential part of our human experience, and it should not be viewed as something dirty or vulgar. Social media, activism, and advocacy efforts have also played a role in shifting perceptions and attitudes towards sex. However, The perception of sex as dirty or vulgar can also be attributed to social norms and



religious beliefs that have been ingrained in us for generations. Every individual has a different perception of sex based on their experience, background, culture or religious beliefs. Some interpretations portray sex as a temptation or a source of moral weakness, such as rape, infidelity, and addiction, leading to a negative view of sex and the human body.

In the past, the topic of sex was often veiled and not openly discussed. Today, platforms like Netflix, Amazon, and Disney explore sexuality in diverse ways and depict various female body types. Despite this openness, do you believe there is still social pressure for women's bodies to conform to certain stereotypes?

I am seeing a lot of sexualisation in the media on the contrary. We are now living in a hyper-sexualised society where we tend to mix

“sexuality” up with “sexualisation” and this is how we have turned “sexuality” into “an unrealistic pornographic scene”. We are now definitely a lot more open to female sexuality and female bodies thanks to the movements of “sexual liberation of women”. However, we often see young people, especially young women posting racy photos of themselves on social media and claiming their actions as sexual empowerment or “expressing themselves to the fullest”. I do question if the idea of empowerment and liberation is being used as justifications for self-sexualisation and if they are hoping they can get attention, gain validation or even make a profit by self-sexualising themselves... I am not very sure if we are going in the right direction if we want to build a positive attitude towards sexuality and female bodies in an honest and empowering way.

Thinking about nudity: humans are mammals. Looking at other mammalian animals, the judgmental side does not emerge. What is lost in human communication and the look?

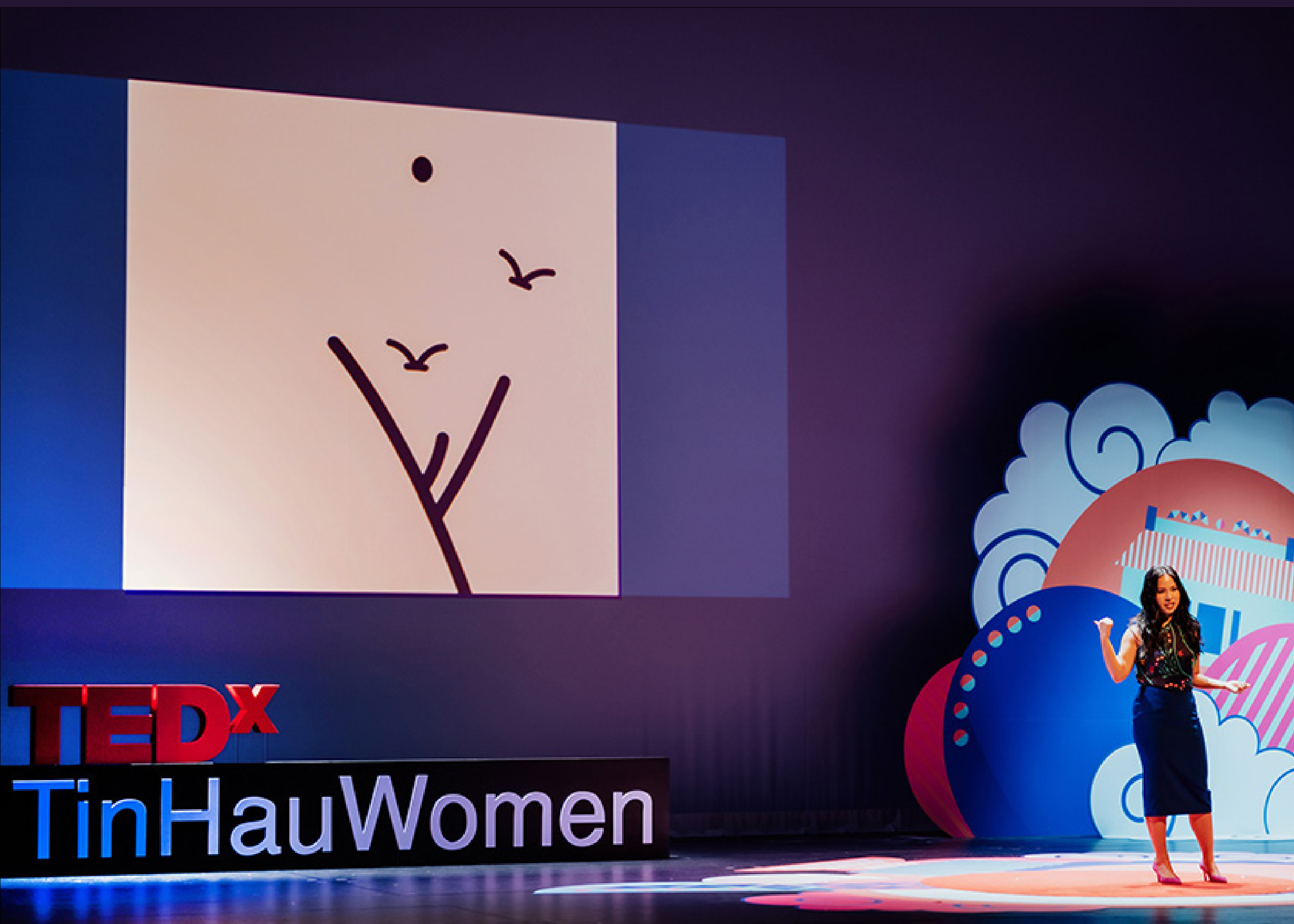
In the animal world, nudity is simply a part of life for mammals, and there is no societal or cultural judgment attached to it. I believe animals do not have the same complex social constructions and emotions that humans do.

I have seen that you customised summer-style cartoon bags. How did this project come to life?

That was a collaboration with Jump From Paper. The brief was super simple and straightforward. They asked me to draw anything I wanted on their 2D looking backpacks.

Do you have any plans to combine your design with gadgets or accessories in the near future?

I have made some socks, silk scarves and some T-shirt prints for charities and brand collaborations.



CICI
COOL

The Tattoo Artist Who Tells Stories And Emotions On The Skin With Her Colorful Compositions

Photos courtesy of Cici Cool



Cici Cool is a talented tattoo artist from Nanjing. She was a game illustrator before getting into tattoos. She creates, with precision, personalized designs turning the client's skin into incredible pieces of art. She plays with her realistic subjects by incorporating different elements from multiple styles such as new school, geometric, and watercolor, creating a fun and surreal collage of color where you can even see cartoons mixed with hyper-realistic images. Using several shades of each color, Cici Cool achieves the graphic effect that characterizes the new school, creating artwork that seem popped out from the page of a manga or street graffiti. Her perspectives that incorporate multiple elements can result in an effect similar to multi-dimensional achieving a certain distortion in the shapes without losing the concept. A characteristic of Cici Cool tattoos are highly detailed, bright and candy pop colors.



Can you tell us a little about yourself? What made you want to become a professional tattooist? What do tattoos mean to you?

Hello everyone, my name is Cici Cool. I was originally a game concept artist, but working in that field meant collaborating with a team, where I found it difficult to fully express my own ideas and designs. However, as a tattoo artist, tattoos are more than just images on the body; they represent profound dialogue between people and art, serving as permanent imprints of personal stories and emotions, which brings me immense satisfaction.

Can you recall the first time when you encountered a tattoo that caught your attention?

The first tattoo that left a deep impression on me was from an old Hong Kong film called 'Comrades: Almost a Love Story'. There was a triad boss in the movie who had an ugly Mickey Mouse tattoo on his back—a seemingly fierce person with an adorable side to him.

What about the first tattoo on your skin? Are you a tattoo collector?

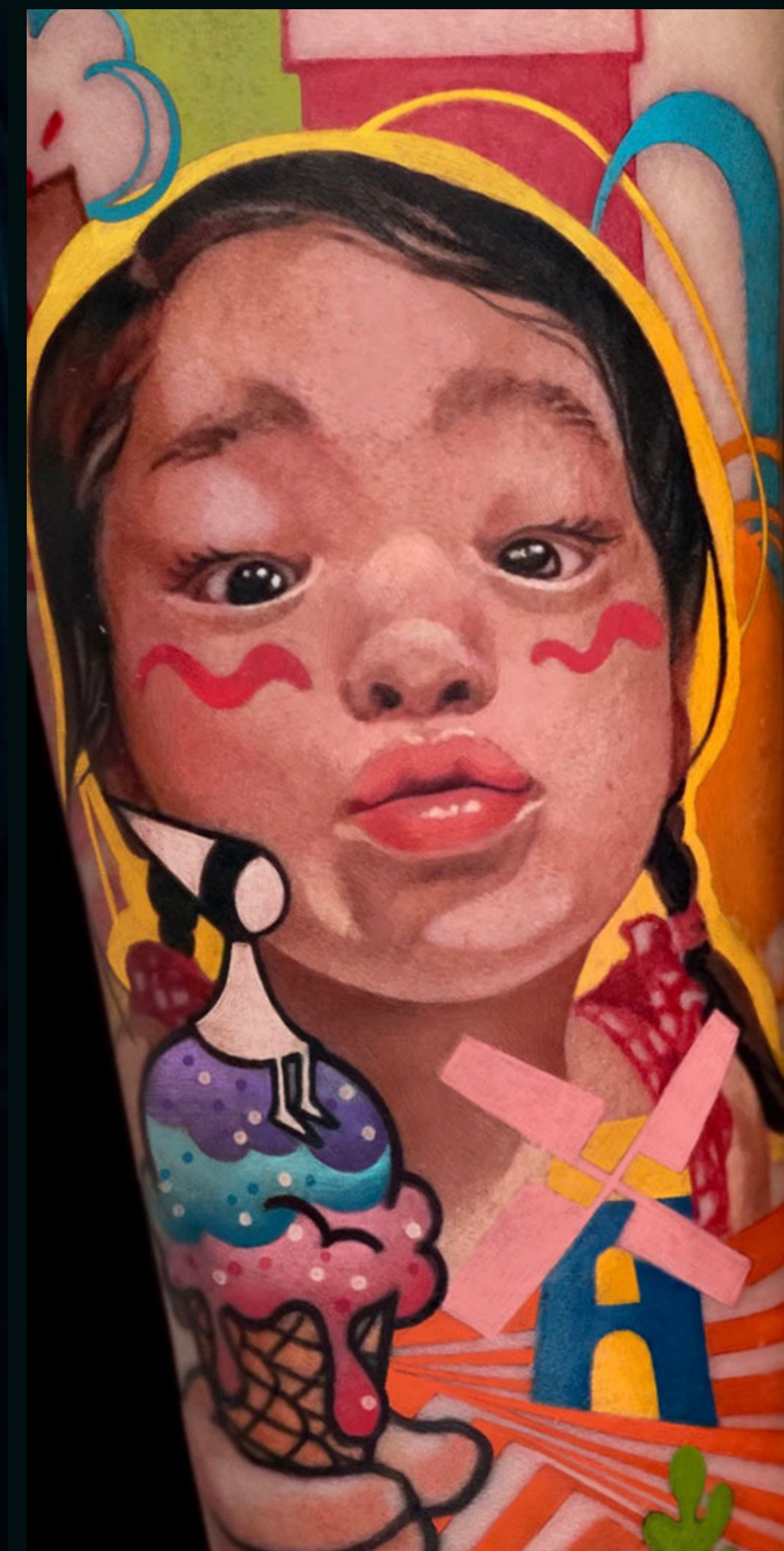
My first tattoo on my skin was a design of an all-seeing eye on my back. This tattoo marked the beginning of my transition from being a game concept artist to be-

**Cici Cool's tattoos
blend the New
School style, known
for its bright,
electrifying colors
and extensive use
of gradients, with
essential shading
techniques to
create a wide range
of tones**

coming a tattoo artist. Not only am I a collector of tattoos, but also a recorder of my art and journey.

How long have you been in the tattoo industry? Can you tell us about your beginning? And as a woman in this field, were there any obstacles you encountered?

I have been working in the tattoo industry for almost a decade now. Ten years ago, female tattoo artists were quite rare in China, and in this field, I faced numerous prejudices and challenges. Many believed that female tattooists relied on their gender rather than genuine skill, but through my passion for art and relentless efforts, I gradually gained recognition and respect.





Have your techniques changed since you started tattooing? Can you tell us about the kind of tattoos that you enjoy most to work on?

Since I started tattooing, my techniques have indeed evolved significantly, particularly in terms of detail work and color application. The type of tattoo work I most enjoy involves designing pieces that tell stories or express individual identities and sentiments, such as custom patterns or symbols with special meanings.



Do you remember the first person you tattooed? What did you tattoo?

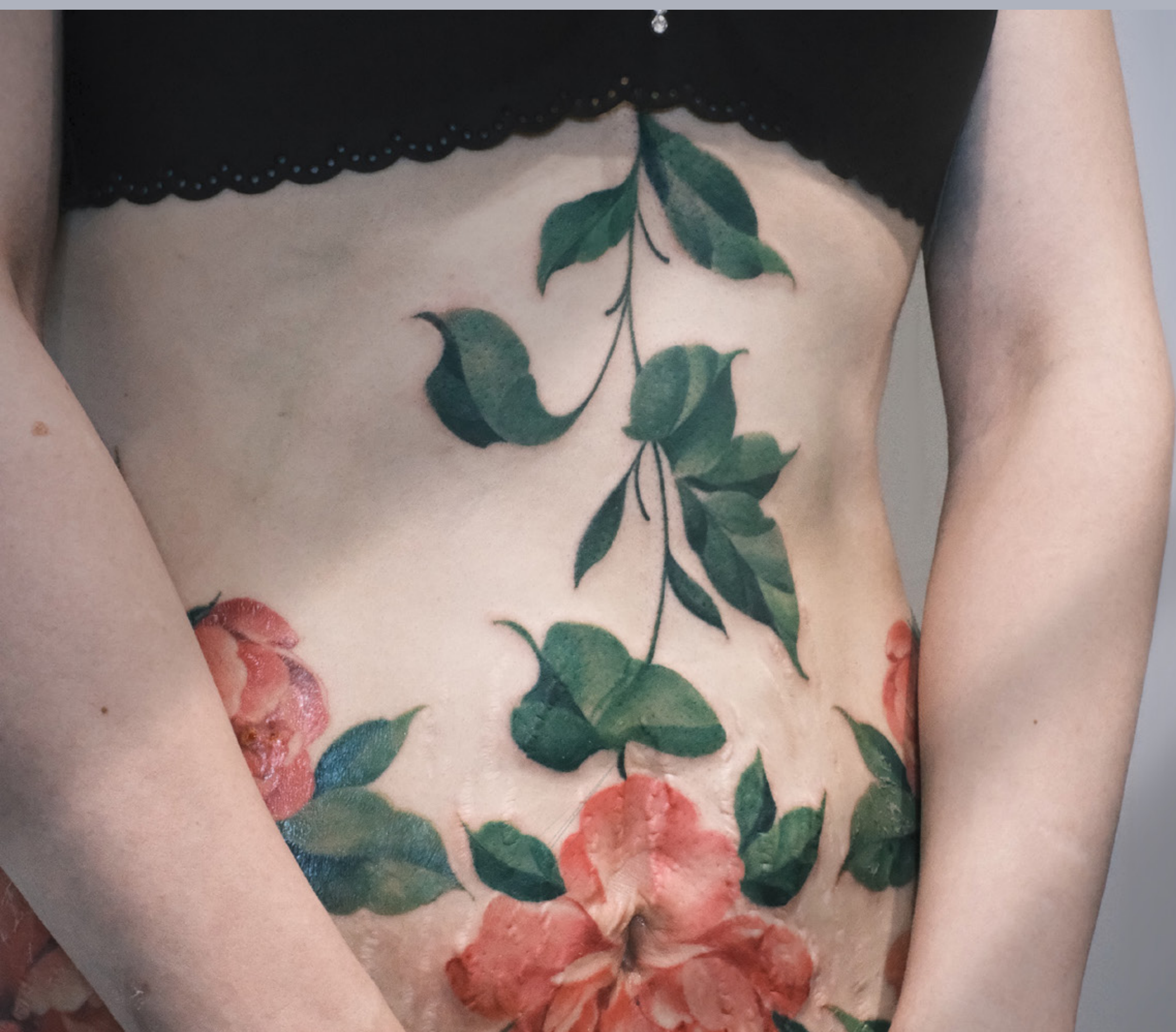
I remember vividly the very first tattoo I gave someone—it was to a close friend, and I tattooed a small star on her. That experience was pivotal, marking the start of my career as a tattooist and teaching me the great responsibility that comes with leaving a permanent mark on someone else's body.

Considering the diverse meanings tattoos have held across cultures and history—from symbols of group identity to expressions of personal freedom, with some of which are even diametrically opposed—how have you observed the evolution of people's tastes in tattoos throughout your career?

I've observed in my career how people's tastes in tattoos have evolved. Tattoos have shifted from traditional totems and symbols to personalized, custom designs, reflecting society's growing appreciation for individuality and freedom.

Can you share some stories with us that touched you emotionally about someone who asked you for a tattoo?

There's one story about a client who came to me for a tattoo that emotionally touched me deeply. A woman's father passed away suddenly from a heart attack while on a business trip to Tibet. Both she and her mother were struggling with grief daily. The daughter chose to get a tattoo of a photograph taken on her wedding day when she hugged her father, placing it next to her heart. Her mother got a tattoo combining her father's portrait with waves, as he loved fishing. During the process, the mother shared a poignant sentiment, saying, "He once promised to take me on a world tour after retirement; now let me carry him around the world." Hearing these words, I was moved to tears. This experience underscored the emotional power behind tattoos and the importance of them as enduring memorials of love and memory.



Su Hanwei

Fashion Designer Creating Cultural Bridges Between Diverse Styles, Narrated with Elegance and a Focus on Sustainability

Photo courtesy of Su Hanwei



Su Hanwei, a fashion designer based in New York, pursued her studies at Parsons School of Design. She launched her first collection under her label, Maison de Hoe, at New York Fashion Week in February 2023, and recently showcased her designs at Paris Fashion Week 2024. With Maison de Hoe, she masterfully combines the intricate mosaic of Chinese cultural heritage with contemporary fashion narratives, creating garments that balance beauty and transmute the mundane into unique narrative pieces. Su is committed to exploring impactful clothing designs, advocating for a more sustainable fashion industry. She engages in discussions that intertwine tradition with modernity, focusing keenly on rights, equality, sustainability, and humanitarian issues. Her contributions have been recognized in fashion magazines, and she has received the Tishman Fund for Excellence in Climate, Environmental Justice, and Sustainability. Furthermore, Su has reached the finals of the IYDC Sustainable Fashion Competition, underscoring her commitment to sustainable design practices.



Have you always had a clear career as a fashion designer since your childhood? How and when did you get into fashion design?

My passion for creativity was never confined to a single medium; it sprawled across the vast landscape of art and design, capturing my imagination long before I fully comprehended its impact. My foray into fashion design crystallized at 16 during an international exhibition in China, where my designs were publicly showcased for the first time. This pivotal moment, along with my education at Parsons—the pinnacle of fashion design schools in the US—smoothly transitioned me into the professional realm of fashion design upon graduation. In essence, my journey into fashion design was less about a single moment of decision and more about a series of

revelations and experiences that guided me towards this path.

What does fashion mean to you? Who has influenced you as a person and as a creative?

To me, fashion is an intimate form of communication, a visual language that allows me to express my innermost thoughts, feelings, and observations about the world. It transcends the mere concept of clothing as a necessity, evolving into a form of art and personal expression that mirrors the complexities of human emotion and societal dynamics. My influences stem less from singular fa-

Photographer @deanna.ll
Director/Designer @vvsuuuuuu
Model @hong.lin.liii @zoelhopkins
Makeup Artist @go_ny_go_ny

mous personalities and more from the collective essence of everyday people, whose fashion choices reflect their personal stories, societal roles, and cultural backgrounds. These observations serve

as a continuous source of inspiration, reminding me that fashion is a powerful medium for reflecting and shaping our understanding of identity and community.

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How does Maison de Hoe come to life? What is the philosophy behind it? What were the biggest challenges you encountered at the beginning?

Maison de Hoe emerged from a desire to blend the rich tapestry of Chinese cultural heritage with contemporary fashion narratives, focusing on the dynamic interplay between tradition and modernity. Our debut at the New York Fashion Week in February 2023, in collaboration with Chinese rock-star LiangLong, marked the realization of this vision. The brand's philosophy, "Crafting the Future from China's Heartbeat and Fem-

inine Strength," reflects our commitment to celebrating the resilience and elegance inherent in our dual heritage. The journey was challenging, particularly without a roadmap for brand building, but it was these very challenges that honed our focus and refined our approach to creating a brand that stands as a testament to the beauty of cultural convergence and the power of fashion as a form of storytelling.

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What are your sources of inspiration, and what is the creative process behind it?

My inspiration stems from a deep engagement with the authentic voices and narratives within Chinese contemporary grunge culture, juxtaposed with the universal theme of feminine strength. This involves immersive research, including exploring archives, documentaries, and photography, to capture the essence of our cultural identity and societal trends. The creative process is iterative, involving sketching, fabric experimentation, and constant refinement, to ensure each collection

not only tells a story but resonates on a personal level with our audience. It's about finding balance in the chaos and beauty in the mundane, turning each garment into a narrative piece that speaks volumes about our cultural journey and the timeless elegance of strength and resilience.

You debuted your first collection during the New York Fashion Week in February 2023. What did it represent for you? Can you share this experience with us?

Presenting our first collection at New York Fashion Week was a monumental achievement for me



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and Maison de Hoe, marking our transition from concept to reality. It was an affirmation of our brand's vision and a celebration of the journey thus far. The experience was both surreal and chaotic, embodying the frenetic energy of the fashion world while highlighting the significance of our work being recognized on such a prestigious platform. It was not just a debut but a declaration of our brand's identity and aspirations, an opportunity to showcase our commitment to blending cultural heritage with contemporary fashion in a way that speaks to a global audience.

Addressing climate change and pollution represents a significant challenge. A new sustainability is a top priority, primarily in the fashion industry. Can you tell us about your relationship with the materials and fabrics you select for your collections?

Sustainability is at the heart of Maison de Hoe, guiding our selection of materials and fabrics to ensure they align with our commitment to environmental responsibility. We prioritize natural and dead-stock fabrics that resonate with our aesthetic themes while minimizing our ecological footprint. Our approach to sourcing unique, recycled buttons from manufacturers and repurposing old clothing is a testament to our dedication to sustainability. These efforts, though small in the grand scheme, are steps towards a larger goal of creating a sustainable fashion ecosystem that values resourcefulness and innovation. We're actively exploring

more sustainable practices, such as zero-waste pattern making, to further reduce our impact and lead by example in the industry.

How has the sustainable fashion industry evolved over the years? What accomplishments have been made, and what notable challenges remain to be addressed?

Over the years, the sustainable fashion industry has seen remarkable advancements, from embracing transparency to innovating with eco-friendly materials. Brands have started to prioritize the entire lifecycle of their products, aiming for a circular economy where garments are reused, recycled, or composted, thereby minimizing waste. The adoption of regenerative agricultural practices for natural fibers has also marked a significant step towards sustainability, emphasizing the restoration of ecosystems. However, notable challenges persist. The scalability of sustainable practices remains a hurdle, as the integration of eco-friendly materials and ethical labor practices often results in higher costs. Moreover, greenwashing poses a significant challenge, misleading consumers with false claims of sustainability. Additionally, the global fashion supply chain's complexity makes it difficult to monitor and implement sustainable practices at every stage. Lastly, there's a pressing need for consumer behavior change; the fast fashion model still dominates, fueled by the constant demand for new, cheap clothing.

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Hair @mistermartinhair
Model Kaitlyn Cunningham



What are the primary obstacles to achieving sustainability in the fashion industry, in your view? Do you consider the ethical versus affordable dilemma to be one of the main challenges? Or, do you think misinformation and biases regarding the quality of zero-waste products play a significant role?

The journey toward sustainability in the fashion industry is fraught with obstacles. The ethical versus affordable dilemma is certainly a significant challenge; sustainable practices often come with higher costs, which can limit accessibility for the average consumer. Misinformation and biases about the quality and efficacy of sustainable and zero-waste products also hinder progress by creating skepticism among consumers. Moreover, the complexity of the global supply chain, the need for

technological advancement in sustainable materials, and the cultural shift required to move away from fast fashion consumption patterns all present significant barriers. Achieving sustainability is not only about adopting eco-friendly materials but also about changing the entire ecosystem of fashion—from production to consumption.

Consumers who support sustainable fashion and seek solutions are aware of the 'greenwashing' issue. How can they identify it? What are your thoughts on this issue?

Greenwashing is a significant issue in the sustainable fashion industry, complicating consumers' efforts to make ethical choices. Identifying greenwashing involves scrutinizing brands' claims for specific, substantiated information about their sustainability practices,

looking for third-party certifications, and being wary of brands that only highlight one aspect of sustainability without addressing their overall impact.

My thoughts on greenwashing are that it not only misleads well-intentioned consumers but also undermines the integrity of the sustainable fashion movement. It's crucial for there to be stricter regulations and standards to prevent greenwashing. Additionally, consumer education plays a vital role in combating this issue. As consumers become more knowledgeable and demanding regarding the authenticity of brands' sustainability claims, the industry will be pressured to adopt genuinely sustainable practices.

How can customers be more responsible? How can they raise awareness? What advice would you give to them?

Customers can foster sustainability in fashion by educating themselves about the industry's environmental and social impacts, supporting ethical brands, investing in quality over quantity, and adopting mindful consumption habits. Raising awareness can be achieved through social media, discussions, and supporting campaigns that aim for industry reform.

My advice to consumers is to start small and focus on progress. Every sustainable choice, no matter how minor it seems, contributes to a larger change. By demanding transparency, supporting ethical practices, and opting for sustainable products, consumers can drive the industry towards a more sustainable future. Remember, change starts with individual actions, and collectively, we can make a significant impact.

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Maison de Hoe at
Paris Fashion Week 2024





China Under Ground