Use a Visual Way to Depict Verse - Illustrations Of Indian Poetry Stray Birds

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Abstract

My final thesis, named Stray Birds, is themed as the poetry collection Stray Birds of the Indian poet Tagore. I have finished 12 illustrations in my final portfolio, each of which is accompanied by a special short verse. I have always been planning to paint a picture book about a poetry anthology. And I have been crazy about Stray Birds, a masterpiece of the well-known Indian poet Tagore. Tagore gives much importance to descriptions about nature in Stray Birds. A bird, a flower, a star or a raindrop can all be endowed with humanity and vitality. And that is exactly what I am good at. I am trying to turn abstract poems into specific pictures based on my own understanding without losing the color of imagination.
Use a Visual Way to Depict Verse

Illustrations Of Indian Poetry *Stray Birds*

By

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Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in Illustration.

Syracuse University
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Part 1. About my final portfolio

My final portfolio, named *Stray Birds*, is themed as the poetry collection *Stray Birds* of the Indian poet Tagore. I have finished 12 illustrations in my final portfolio, each of which is accompanied by a special short verse. There are the following 12 verses:

1) I feel the beauty, dark night, like that of the loved woman when she has put out the lamp.  (page 10)

2) The flaming fire warns me off by its own glow. Save me from the dying embers hidden under ashes.  (page 11)

3) My evening came among the alien trees and spoke in a language which my morning stars did not know.  (page 12)

4) Silence will carry your voice like the nest that holds the sleeping birds.  

   (page 13)

5) Let me think that there is one among those stars that guides my life through the dark unknown.  (page 14)

6) The sun has his simple rode of light. The clouds are decked with gorgeousness.  

   (page 15)

7) Let life be beautiful like summer flowers And Death like autumn leaves.  

   (page 16)
8) The mist, like love plays upon the heart of the hill and bring out surprises of beauty. (page 17)

9) Man barricades against themselves. (page 18)

10) The trees come up to my window like the yearning voice of the dumb earth. (page 19)

11) The fountain of death makes the still water of life play. (page 20)

12) The world puts off its mask of vastness to its lover. It becomes small as one song, as one kiss of the eternal. (page 21)

Part 2. The inspiration

I have always been planning to paint a picture book about a poetry anthology. Living in China, I have been accompanied by poetry since childhood. Poetry is the most ancient literary genre. Its most essential feature is beauty of expression. Poems are full of thinking, emotion and the rich imagination of the author. They feature concise language and strong rhythm. The soul of poems is expression of the emotion. All that a poem writes about is emotion about life. Many poets like to "play" with the sound of language or offer an emotional insight by describing what they see in highly descriptive language. They try to embody objective reality by capturing the emotional waves of life, so their language is always indirect and we need to figure out the in-depth meanings
through repeated reading. I think such features are in line with my personal style. I hope my graduation project carries profound meanings so that people can be impressed instead of forgetting about it too soon. That is why I choose poetry as the theme of my picture book. Just as each poem has different implications in different people's minds, each picture can be interpreted in different ways by different viewers.

I have been crazy about Stray Birds, a masterpiece of the well-known Indian poet Tagore, since my childhood. The work comprises 325 fresh untitled verses, most of which have one or two lines— either capturing a natural landscape or elaborating on a truth. Tagore gives much importance to descriptions about nature in Stray Birds. A bird, a flower, a star or a raindrop can all be endowed with humanity and vitality. The author believes there are inner links between human emotion and natural force. Nature integrates into human emotion or the other way round.iii And that is exactly what I am good at. I am trying to turn abstract poems into specific pictures based on my own understanding without losing the color of imagination.

Part 3. Creative process

First, I read Stray Birds repeatedly and chose from it some lines enlightening to me as the theme of my picture book. Then, I made drafts repeatedly until I was satisfied myself. The drafts did not need to be complete.
They could even be just some lines or color lumps because I kept correcting them in the process of drawing until I finished a satisfying work in the end.

Although my work is themed as “digital art”, I more and more felt the limitation of digital art in the process of drawing the group of works for my graduation project. I could always control all details, but I need some more surprising beauty. So I tried freehand sketching in this summer to integrate them with my digital art. I tried pigments used for traditional Chinese paintings. I painted at liberty on Chinese art paper with whatever colors I wanted. Besides, I dripped nail polish into water to form a thin layer of oily film with unique textures. Moreover, I burnt paper and shot the moment it caught fire and extinguished. All those materials and patterns were very beautiful. After they were combined with my digital art, my works saw splendid changes. Some wonderful “uncontrollable” textures were retained while I tried to better control every detail. Every attempt was a surprising and pleasant thing. And I believe that makes my works more unique.

Part 4. Artistic influences and how they affected the look of the work.

I like to apply decorative patterns of all kinds into my own works, in the hope that they can enrich details and endow my works with lingering charm. As I tried to make my pictures more decorative, many artists had profound influence on me, such as Alfons Maria Mucha,(page 25) Gustav Klimt(page 24) and the
Japanese painter Reiji Hiramatsu (page 26). I would also like to mention the Japanese painter Kayama Matazo and another not so well-known painter, Scottish painter John.

The works of Kayama Matazo have been evaluated as the combination of impressionism and Japanese painting. His sources of inspiration shifted from modern Western art to traditional RImpa Japanese painting and Chinese ink paintings. All of these influences were reinterpreted through Kayama's own refined and innovative styles. I was shocked when I first saw his work Spring Waves (1966) (page 22). This work is about mountains, but different from other realistic style, the mountains are composed of flowers and different patterns, while the mountains seem to be cut apart in the center to show their internal appearance. The wave represented by the silver wire is swelling between the three mountains where gold is interspersed. The waves are higher than the mountains, and a thin silver-colored foil is gathered in front of it, and the splashes seem to be shining. From the cherry blossoms and autumn colors covering the mountains, you can feel the two seasons, spring and autumn. This was the first time that I had felt the charm of decorative style. From then on, I began to try making my works more decorative by using different patterns to form the outlines of objects. Kayama Matazo is also very good at using lines. Endless lines form mountains and rivers. Fresh air is added to the whole work in a more abstract way. From then on, I gradually gave more importance to application of lines.
As for John Duncan, I saw his work, St Bride(page23) at the Scottish National Gallery, Edinburgh. The gorgeous angel wings and the detailed display of the costumer impressed me deeply. Mr. Duncan painted lots of praying men with decorative patterns on the clothes. Using such details on a whole makes the picture tell more stories. I love using such a method to depict stories. The angel wings in that picture influenced my technique of painting birds and other animals. I began to boldly use different colors to decorate animals of all kinds. And the seemingly shiny woman in white surrounded by colors in the picture also made undeniable influence on my technique of image building in my picture book Stray Birds.

Part 5. The influences on the work.

First, my work has been created based on the poetry anthology Stray Birds, which comprise poems about wandering birds or rovers. The one- or two-line poems usually capture a natural landscape or telling a truth. They are just like a lightning in the sky, light of waves, afterglow of the setting sun or shadow of dawn, bringing readers bright images and in-depth philosophical thoughts. The poems depict momentary images or rapidly changing imagined journeys without footprints of flying birds. The poet seems to see it but actually not. All the pictures are illusory and unpredictable. So I also try to make my works more lyric and emotional. I aim to describe a certain mood or atmosphere
instead of describing a specific thing as editorial works do.

Secondly, different Chinese and Western cultures have made a profound influence on my works. Western impression lifts the application of colors to a new height. Since I came to America, I have got more chances to visit museums and appreciate masterpieces. By learning from those rich and dreamlike colors, my own works have been upgraded to a new height. By contrast, classic eastern art pays more attention to the description of artistic conception, combining virtuality and reality in the same picture. Both traditional Chinese paintings and Japanese paintings apply lines to perfection. I have tried to absorb the advantages of eastern paintings and western paintings, integrating passionate colors and aesthetic lines.

Part 6. Initial vision of the Body of Work

My initial vision has never changed during the creative process. I have always been hoping to finish a dreamlike and emotive poetry picture book. I hope my work will have positive influence on people. There are more or less unpleasant things in life, and I hope that my work will become a temporary heaven for their soul. I feel happy when many people leave a message and say that my paintings make them feel relaxed, happy, and full of hope, which I believe is exactly what I want to convey.
Part 7. Market

This picture book is now popular mainly in the Chinese market. I will cooperate with China Comicfans Art Company to publish my graduation project *Stray Birds* as my first personal picture book in China. The company planned and published the personal picture book of Lisk Feng— *A Whimsical Trip* the year before last year and the personal picture book of Jun Cen— *The Negative Space*. It has rich experience in publishing artistic picture books and can fully guarantee the quality of the picture book. As for the American market, I plan to print my work into postcards and folders and send them to editors before it is published. After it is published, I will send it together with another picture book of mine expected to be published this year— *Anderson’s Fairy Tales* to editors to show them my capability of independently finishing a picture book.
I feel the beauty, dark night, like that of the loved woman when she has put out the lamp.
Stray Birds_flaming fire, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2018

The flaming fire warns me off by its own glow. Save me from the dying embers hidden under ashes.
Stray Birds_Whisper, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2018

My evening came among the alien trees and spoke in a language
Stray Birds _ Sleeping Birds, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2017

Silence will carry your voice like the nest that holds the sleeping birds.
Let me think that there is one among those stars that guides my life through the dark unknown.
Stray Birds_ Star, Sun Light, 11x17 in, 2017

The sun has his simple rode of light. The clouds are decked with gorgeousness.
Stray Birds_ Star, Summer Flowers, 11x17 in, 2017

Let life be beautiful like summer flowers And Death like autumn leaves.
The mist, like love plays upon the heart of the hill and bring out surprises of beauty
Stray Birds: Fortress, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2017

Man barricades against themselves
Stray Birds_ Fortress, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2017

The trees come up to my window like the yearning voice of the dumb earth.
Stray Birds_ Still Water, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2018

The fountain of death makes the still water of life play.
Stray Birds_ Still Water, Mixed medium, 11x17 in, 2018

The world puts off its mask of vastness to its lover. It becomes small as one song, as one kiss of the eternal.
Kayama Matazo, Waves of Spring and Autumn, 1966
John Duncan, St Bride, 1913
Alfons Maria Mucha, Moët&Chandon Crémant Impérial, 1899
Reiji Hiramatsu, Tokaido Fuji map, 2006
Bibliography

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2 Elements of Poetry: http://learn.lexiconic.net/elementsofpoetry.htm
5 http://kanshokyoiku.jp/keymap/momat15.html
7 Appreciation of Tagore’s poetry collection Stray Birds. Yincai Xu. August 2018
Vita

Awards:

World Illustration Award 2017 New talent shortlisted

3x3illustration Annual No.14 Student Show Merit and Honorable Mention

China Animation & Comic Competition Gloden Dragon Award No.14 Bronze

Creative Quarterly 50 Illustration Student Runner up

3x3illustration Annual No.15 Student Show Merit