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Mengru Zhou
Syracuse University

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to articulate how my work as a painter aims to create emotional connections with viewers based on personal memory and the effects of color on human emotions. In reference to key selections of my work, I cite inspirations as well as sources that reveal how color psychology and color selection helps me express emotions more accurately and thus establish emotional connections with audiences through my work. I will also describe additional methods that I use in my work to express human emotions through facial expression and body posture. Ultimately, the purpose of my work is to heal myself and offer an opportunity for healing to my audience.

My Space of Emotional Belonging

by
Mengru Zhou

B.A.A., Central Michigan University, 2020

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

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A Sense of Belonging

"No place belongs to me. No, I don't belong anywhere." These words came from deep inside me when I started elementary school.

I was looking for a place that gave me a sense of belonging; that idea was ingrained in me as a social person. I've always been fascinated by the concept of belonging. What is a sense of belonging? Why am I in this space where I don't seem to belong? Of course, this is related to my experience. I was born and raised in Fuyang, China. Some of my life was spent living with my family, but a much larger portion of it has been spent living in another home or at schools.

During elementary school, I lived away from my family in my teacher's home. This caused me to feel like an outsider in my parents' home as well as in my teacher's home. Then during junior high and high school I lived in a dormitory, after which I went abroad for college. The experience of studying abroad caused me to become acutely aware of my status as a foreigner. Without a solid foundation of familial intimacy, my educational experiences felt lonely and painful.

In addition to the physical distance, I felt emotional distance from my family, even when we were together. Ever since I was a child, no one took the time to listen to or understand my feelings because I was not allowed to have emotions. The phrases I would hear most often were things like, "You are the elder sister, you should give more to your younger brother," and "You are the elder sister, you should be mature and sensible." Even though I was very fun-loving, childish playfulness in my home was most often only reserved for my younger brother. I grew to hate the term "elder sister"; it made me feel like an unheard, unseen, and misunderstood member of my own family. It also taught me

to prioritize the perceptions and needs of others while suppressing parts of myself. The emotional distance combined with the physical distance caused me to feel a deep sense of disconnection from others, and thus a lack of belonging.

I believe that a sense of belonging is essential to living a full and secure life. Abraham Maslow said, “If both the physiological and the safety needs are fairly well gratified, then there will emerge the love and affection and belongingness needs”.¹ All creatures need to love and be loved, and to also find a place and group where they feel safe.

In elementary school I began to construct my personal sense of a space of belonging through painting.

Painting Heals Me

Painting makes me feel at ease because it can quickly bring me into a flow state. A flow state is a psychological concept proposed by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in 1975. He used the term "optimal experience" to describe those occasions where we feel a sense of exhilaration². People are happiest when they are in a state of flow—a state of concentration or complete absorption with the activity or situation at hand. The act of painting creates this state in me in the following ways:

1. Intrinsic motivation; the act of painting is my intrinsic motivation. It allows my movement to merge with consciousness.

¹ Maslow, Abraham Harold. “The Theory of Human Motivation.” *Psychological Review*, vol. 50, no. 4, July 1943, pp. 381.

² Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. “Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience.” *Researchgate*, Harper & Row, Jan. 1990, pp.3.

2. Focus and concentration; I am so focused on the act of painting that I don't feel hungry or distracted by other stimuli.
3. Timelessness; my subjective sense of time changes when I paint; before I know it, 5 hours have passed by without notice.
4. A sense of ecstasy; I feel joyful, fulfilled, and overwhelmingly positive after completing my work for the day.

Painting brings me into this state of flow for two main reasons. First, painting is my way of self-processing and healing. It is a creative process that gives me empowerment, perception, and faith. In other words, painting gives me the right to express my ideas. I materialize concepts through painting symbols that express my inner-emotional world, which then gives me a sense of identity and belonging. Throughout this process, I can release the emotions and voices that I ignored while growing up and gain the opportunity to speak my true feelings. Similarly, Mexican artist Frida Kahlo³ powerfully communicates emotions from her life experiences, including a miscarried child, an unfaithful husband, fiery love, as well as physical and spiritual pain. She contracted polio at age 6, keeping her bedridden for 9 months and permanently

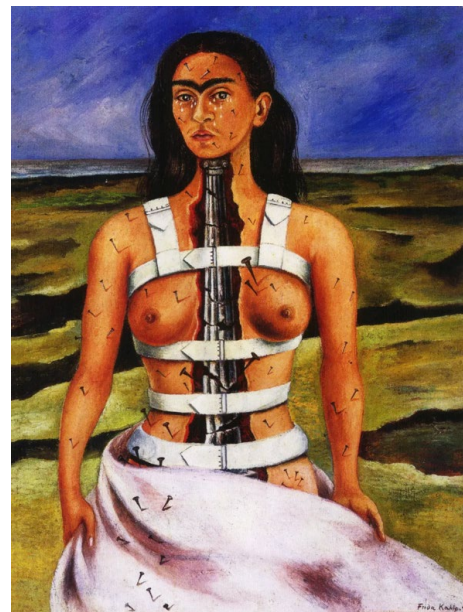


Figure 1, *The Broken Column*, 1944

³ “Magdalena Carmen Frida Kahlo y Calderón (6 July 1907 – 13 July 1954) was a Mexican painter. After the accident, Frida Kahlo turned her attention away from the study of medicine to begin a full-time painting career. The accident left her in a great deal of pain while she recovered in a full body cast; she painted to occupy her time during her temporary state of immobilization. Her self-portraits became a dominant part of her life. Frida Kahlo once said, “I paint myself because I am often alone, and I am the subject I know best”. She insisted, “I never painted dreams. I painted my own reality”.”

affecting her legs. At 18, she was involved in a terrible bus accident where a handrail pierced her spine, abdomen, and uterus. The crash caused her to need dozens of surgeries over the course of her life. In her 1944 painting *The Broken Column*, (Fig 1) she painted the effects of this experience. Her self-portraits often included the use of bloodstains, wounds, and tears as symbols of the pain caused by her many misfortunes.

Secondly, painting allows me to go from focusing on others to focusing on myself. Due to my past personal experience, I was accustomed to paying attention to others to gain their approval. This caused me to ignore my own feelings for many years. Painting connects me to my inner consciousness and allows me to hear, feel, and prioritize my inner voice. In the process of painting, my self-consciousness and anxiety disappear. After Kahlo started painting, she, too, began to focus on herself. During her relatively short lifetime, she created 143 works, 55 of which are self-portraits that depict her broken appearance and inner turmoil.

Constructing the Framework of My Belonging

“Belonging” can be defined as the subjective feeling that a person is integral to surrounding systems, including communities, cultures, physical places, and even animals and plants. I see this as a truly symbiotic relationship. I use "de-anthropocentrism"⁴ to build a space between human beings, nature, and society. Tsaiyi Wu proposed a paradigm shift in understanding the subject-object relationship as a matter of individual creation. "I propose a thesis that art is the arena where the artist may create subject-object relations, while true de-anthropocentrism happens when the artist recreates the self so as to relate to

⁴ De-anthropocentrism is the opposite of anthropocentrism, which is the belief that human beings are the central or most important entity in the universe.

the world."⁵ I try to create new relationships in my work, where there is no hierarchy and all objects exist equally. I hope to build a harmonious, innocent, and childlike space, one that respects the natural world that coexists with humans.



Figure 2, *Playground I*, 2022

My oil painting *Playground I* (Fig.2) was the first space I created with the intentions cited above. My work has always addressed nature, society, and culture, but they were all addressed separately, so I reorganized the ideas and language from my previous paintings and synthesized them. I painted a floating illusory space with a gradient background to create an unreal, dream-like atmosphere. Nature gives me a short-term breathing space to escape from everything. During my research, I learned about "The Anthropocene", which proposes that human activity has been the dominant influence on climate and the environment. I don't believe that humans have the right to "dominate" nature. Thus, in

⁵ Wu, Tsaiyi. "A Dream of a Stone: The Ethics of De-Anthropocentrism." *Degruyter*, De Gruyter Open Access, Jan. 2020, pp.420.

Playground I, I focused on explorations of alternative existence through the composition of incongruous elements, such as unusual animals being in a domestic space. I believe humans are equal to animals, plants, and other natural objects, and I consider them all as independent "individuals." Traditional Chinese religion has a deep-rooted influence on me. My family practices Buddhism, which believes in the spirituality of all things and in the power of nature. The animals in



Figure 3, *How can we manage not to touch anything?*, 2019

Playground I are derived from Buddhist stories of auspicious animals in Jataka tales, which typically appear in temple paintings. They are stories of elephants, monkeys, rabbits, and birds moving from conflict to harmony, and they represent good wishes of unity, peace, and tranquility in life.

I hope to communicate my emotions through the characters in my work. I expressed my current anxiety through the characters in *Playground I*. For example, even though the girl in the painting is sitting on a comfortable chair holding a cat, she is not relaxed. I also want to build a space of understanding for idealists who are as bewildered as I am.

Canadian artist Kim Dorland uses thick impasto in his work to create a dreamland of bright colors. For example, in his work, *How can we manage not to touch anything?* (Fig.3), the space he constructed includes elements that come from the real world and addresses issues of status and the catharsis of emotions. The dreamworlds he creates are

not beautiful fairy tales and instead have a vivid and terrifying atmosphere. The works express the contradiction and confusion between his conception of the spiritual world and his thoughts about the realities of life.



Figure 4, *The Dessert – Harmony in Red*, 1908

My Colors of Fauvism / Pop Art

I appreciate the art and colors of Fauvism⁶ and Pop Art⁷ and utilize them as sources of inspiration for my work. Fauvists considered color as a separate element, not just as a way to enhance other elements in a painting. They also ignored the outline, light and shade, volume, and space factors of traditional painting and established new painting standards. For example, in Henri Matisse's *The Dessert – Harmony in Red* (Fig.4), the work shows pure color. Red interiors and blue-green exteriors produce complementary colors to powerful effect. Matisse did not paint these objects objectively but instead created new elements through color, pattern, and line.

⁶ According to Artland Magazine, *Fauvism: The Art Style That Liberated Colors*. The term 'Fauvism' refers to a novel style in painting that characterized the works of a closed circle of French artists that was primarily structured around Henri Matisse. Fauvist artists broke away from traditional impressionist methods and innovatively experimented with exaggerated colors, composing their paintings based on wild color contrasts.

⁷ According to MOMA Learning, after World War II, it was in this climate of turbulence, experimentation, and increased consumerism that a new generation of artists emerged in Britain and America in the mid- to late-1950s. These artists began to look for inspiration and materials in their immediate environment. They made art that mirrored, critiqued, and, at times, incorporated everyday items, consumer goods, and mass media messaging and imagery. In reference to its intended popular appeal and its engagement with popular culture, it was called Pop art.

I relate to and practice Fauvism's point of view on color, which emphasizes expressiveness and subjective reality through the use of color from the emotional perspective of the artist. I believe that every aspect of my work is an opportunity to express subjective feelings; I am not interested in only objectively recreating images.

The colors of Pop Art also greatly influence me as both a viewer and an artist. Pop Artists used bright colors influenced by the mass production of new plastics and other materials after World War II, when life became full of brightly colored elements to instill hope. I love how Pop Art's vibrant and saturated colors grab attention quickly and allow me to enhance the expression of my painting through bright color schemes.

My Style of Magic Realism, Realism, Flat Modernism, and Flattened Perspective

My oil painting *Playground II* (Fig.5) was made with Magical Realism in mind. According to Wikipedia's definition of Magical Realism, it “depicts a realistic worldview while also adding elements of magic, often blurring the lines between fantasy and reality”. The purpose of my work is to construct an ambiguous space that combines elements of reality with elements of my inner world. I express observations of the real world through details and unusual perspectives. For example, the combination of dressing screens and playgrounds is incongruous, but they are real things that express my current state and mood. The girl standing in front of the playground symbolizes the happy space I long for. The girl peeking out from behind the screen symbolizes the state I want to

escape. Each element is a symbol of my inner world, expressing my hopes as well as my alienation and isolation from society.



Figure 5, *Playground II*, 2022

I also used the realistic painting method in some areas to depict things rationally, emphasize them clearly, and express them objectively. In this painting method, subtle gradations between dark and light are needed to make the depicted subjects look realistic. For example, I needed to enhance the contours of the character's facial features, expressions, and clothing through chiaroscuro and brush strokes.

In other parts of the painting I transform three-dimensional objects into two-dimensional flat images. I remove complex structures and form, shadow features, textures, etc., and use simple lines or color blocks to summarize the external outline to

create a "flat" feeling. Objects such as backgrounds, plants, and carpets are such things that I will often visually flatten in my work. Flat objects tend to weaken the perspective of space, thereby reducing the sense of three-dimensionality and increasing the sense of fantasy. Flat painting requires close attention to the distribution and use of colors to better enhance the work's desired atmosphere.

I also use flattened perspective⁸ in my painting process because it is reminiscent of the Chinese painting style I learned in my childhood. This is different from the linear perspective of traditional Western painting. The three components essential to the linear perspective system are orthogonal lines, the horizon line, and a vanishing point. For example, Raphael's *School of Athens*, (Fig.6) exhibits a strict linear perspective. In this perspective, the viewer will feel like they are in the center of the stage,

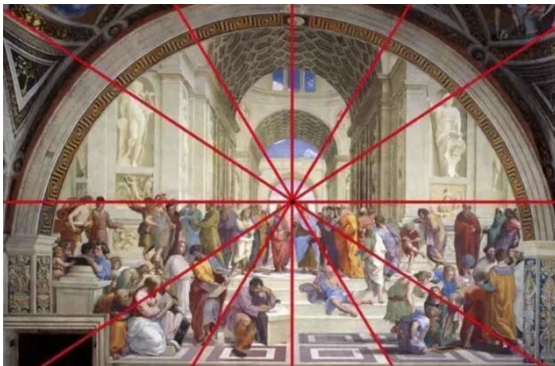


Figure 6, *School of Athens*, 1509-1511

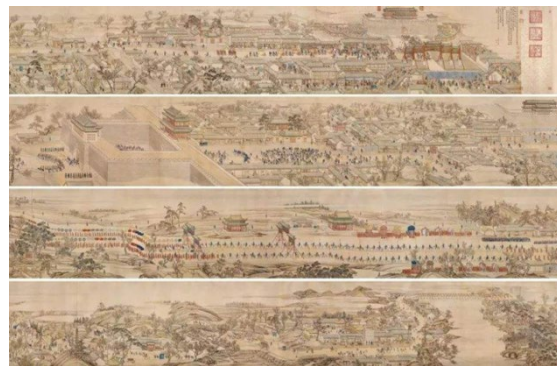


Figure 7, *Qianlong's Southern Tour*, 1751

with all viewpoints in a single vanishing point on the composition's horizon line. The whole work has a strong sense of three-dimensional space. The concept of "flattened perspective" is totally opposite to the linear perspective we see in western paintings such

⁸ Flattened perspective was first proposed by German Otto Fischer in his 1943 work *Chinesische Landschaftsmalerei* in which he stylistically analyzes Chinese landscape paintings.

as Raphael's. A flattened perspective can also be utilized as a "multi-point perspective" or a "moving point of view perspective", where there are multiple viewpoints and the viewer must move their position to observe. Much of Chinese drawing and painting is created after the artist has viewed the scene. It is a blend of the natural scene and the scene remembered or created in the artist's mind. For example, in the scroll painting *Qianlong's Southern Tour* (Fig.7), the artist began ascending a mountain in the morning and finally reached the top by the evening. The painting is a synthesis of a day's worth of travel. It doesn't depict one exact moment but rather a combination of moments and movements created from memory and/or imagination.

I echoed this style of Chinese painting in *Playground II* by using a multi-point perspective similar to what we see in *Qianlong's Southern Tour*. The viewer cannot find the focal point. My work usually does not have a prominent subject in the work. Even for a portrait, I don't want a single focal point and instead aim for all objects in the work to have equal importance, which, as I mentioned, is a driving conceptual force behind much of my work. Using a flattened perspective enhances the lack of a focal point because it does not set up a strong contrast between subjects. I also embrace the sense of visual distortion that a flattened perspective can create by combining objects from different perspectival spaces. I can subjectively modify visual information and rearrange it according to my personal feelings about its placement. By ignoring the conventions of traditional linear perspective, I am able to control my paintings in a more concept-driven rather than real-world way. I believe that the objects combined with the style of the work can be unified through painting techniques to create a believable, though not realistic, scene.

Emotional Connections

I would like my work to connect with my audience on an emotional level. I use my anxieties as a starting point to create alternative states of mind to share with my audience. My anxieties mainly come from the pressures of society. The development of technology and social media is rapidly accelerating, threatening the quality of face-to-face relationships. Society emphasizes “worldly” success over personal value; being "ordinary" is almost seen as a failure. Our highly connected and media-driven world has driven me to seek psychological and spiritual relief. I can enter an ideal space away from reality through my work, temporarily allowing me to forget the troubles and stresses of daily life. I hope to bring the joy I get from painting to an audience who also needs and seeks relief.

Ultimately, the purpose of *The Playground I* and *II* paintings was to build a space that contains emotions from the complexities of real life and to offer some hope for how to get through them.

Emotional Effects of Color

A plethora of credible research indicates how powerfully color affects human emotions. I use elements of color therapy in my paintings to create spaces that feel pleasurable and healing. According to common beliefs in the field of art therapy, color therapy is a type of holistic healing that uses the visible spectrum of light and color to affect a person's mood and physical or mental health. In my paintings, I choose a color palette that is intended to evoke feelings of happiness in my viewers. For example, red is the primary color in *Playground II* (Fig.5). I use red because it can help people who feel

tired or depressed by giving them increased vitality and energy. Red also attracts attention. Green is my secondary color. Because green is associated with plants and plants are associated with nature, using green can relieve stress and help people relax. I also use shades of yellow and orange, which can inspire joy and optimism.

According to *A Critical Analysis of Chromotherapy and Its Scientific Evolution*⁹, "Physiologically, all colors produced clinically tangible results. Exposure to warm colors increased respiratory movements, frequency of eye blinks, cortical activation, and palmar conductance (arousal of the autonomic nervous system). Warm colors consistently showed a more pronounced pattern of stimulation. Cool colors showed opposite effects by acting as a relaxant and tranquilizer for anxious individuals, lowering blood pressure, relieving tension, alleviating muscle spasms and reducing eye blink frequency. They also proved to be an aid for insomnia." It is scientifically undeniable that color has great power and influence over our emotions. I incorporate this knowledge into my creative process to both communicate and connect with my audience on an emotional level.

Emotional Expression

⁹ Azeemi, Samina T Yousuf, and S Mohsin Raza. "A critical analysis of chromotherapy and its scientific evolution." Evidence-based complementary and alternative medicine. 2005. pp481-488

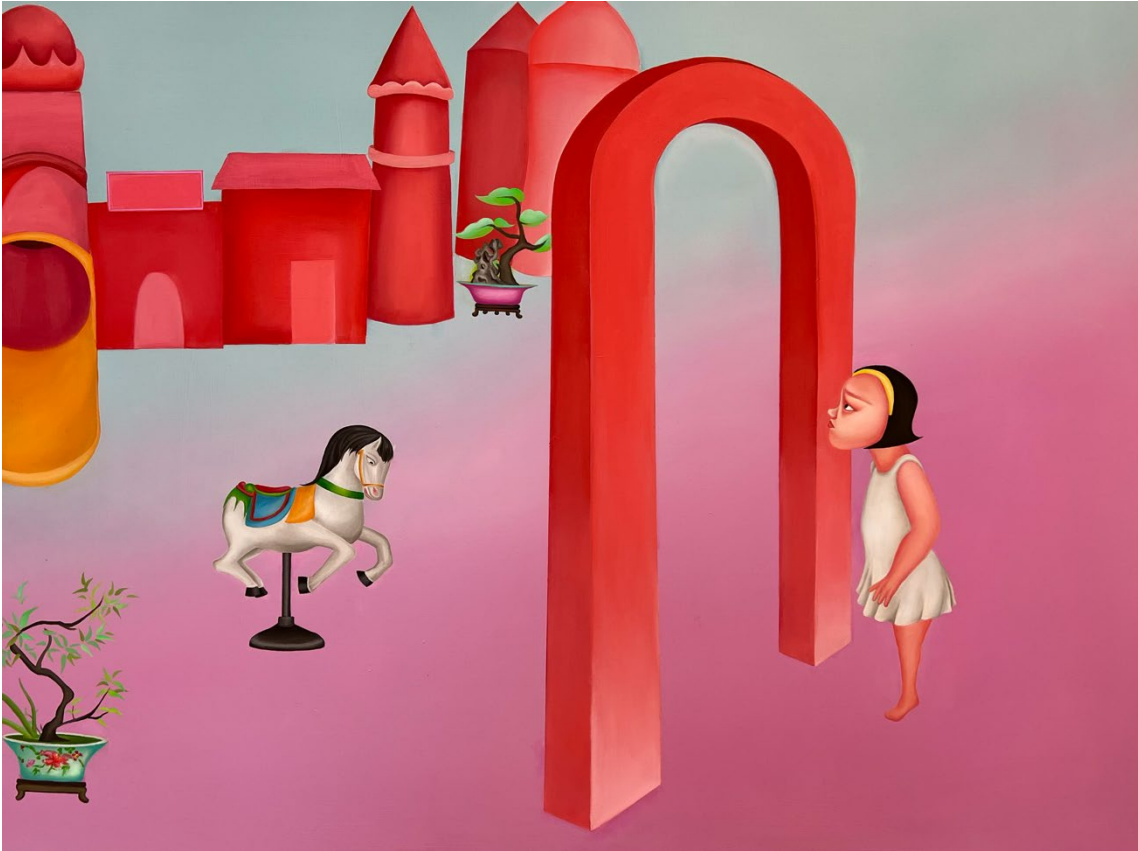


Figure 8, *Playground III*, 2022

I have found that the best way of expressing emotion in my work is by establishing an “objective correlative”, which is, “...a set of objects, a situation, or a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.”¹⁰ I am always looking for objective correlatives, usually in the form of human experience. Though childhood is a stage everyone goes through, each individual's experience is different in terms of their degree of happiness or unhappiness, peace or trauma. The word “childlike” comes to mind when discussing my work *Playground III*

¹⁰ Eliot, Thomas Stearns. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber and Faber Limited. 1939. pp.145.

(Fig.8). In this work, I chose to use many childlike elements to build a cherubic and playful atmosphere. Toys and playground equipment are elements within this work that can also evoke feelings that extend beyond being cute objects for children's entertainment. While they can create an inviting and nostalgic atmosphere, they can also stir up feelings of unease from painful experiences in childhood. The playground and toy elements in *Playground III* are associated with memories and experiences that belong to me. While growing up, I lessened the need to find security from the outside world and instead focused more on my inner world. These childlike elements make me feel safe and comfortable. I hope my viewers feel safety and comfort as well, however, again, I am aware that other emotions may surface in accordance with their own childhood experiences.

In addition to often using childlike elements in my work, I often use children's facial expressions and body language to express common human emotions. The seemingly lovable and innocent appearance of the children pose questions for my viewers. Is there a universal "cute"? Do all of the figures in my work appear cute to all of my viewers? According to Sam Von Reiche, PsyD, who wrote *Rethink Your Shrink: The Best Alternatives to Talk Therapy and Meds*, "The human brain is designed to love cute, small things by rewarding us with a shot of dopamine which makes us very happy to help guarantee that we will be drawn to our tiny babies and want to take care of and protect them."¹¹ I agree with this statement, and often consider this when I am painting an adorable child in one of my works. I emphasize the physical characteristics of children, such as round faces, exaggerated expressions, and round bodies.

¹¹ Yuko, Elizabeth. "This Is Why Tiny Things Make Us So Happy." *Realsimple*, 21 May 2021.

It is a long-known fact that people become affected by the media they consume. For example, a person watching a romantic movie may feel more inclined to fall in love, and a person listening to upbeat music is more likely to feel happy and upbeat themselves. Painting can also convey a strong emotional effect, such as the



Figure 9, *Springtime*, 1894-99

Stendhal Syndrome¹². As Megan D Robinson stated in her article *Florence Stendhal Syndrome: The Art-Induced Fainting Sickness*, "Experiencing art can have a powerful effect on the psyche and physiology, especially when accompanied by a buildup of expectations based on art history and hype. Seeing an iconic art treasure in the flesh can be overwhelming. Great art also stirs the emotions and can even influence our perceptions."(Robinson)¹³

Les Nabis¹⁴ were a group of artists that emphasized the expression of the artist's heart and emotions. I particularly like the work of Maurice Denis, who was one of the artists in this group, as his work gives me a sense of beauty and tranquility belonging to the fairy tale world. I love the girl, the blue sky, and the tree in Maurice's painting

¹² The term Stendhal Syndrome was coined in 1979, by Italian psychiatrist Dr. Graziella Magherini. it is involving rapid heartbeat, fainting, confusion and even hallucinations, allegedly occurring when individuals become exposed to objects, artworks, or phenomena of great beauty and antiquity.

¹³ Robinson, Megan D. "Florence Stendhal Syndrome: The Art-Induced Fainting Sickness." *Artandobject*, 21 Aug. 2021.

¹⁴ "Les Nabis were a group of young French artists active in Paris from 1888 until 1900, who played a large part in the transition from impressionism and academic art to abstract art, symbolism and the other early movements of modernism. The members included Pierre Bonnard, Maurice Denis, Paul Ranson, Édouard Vuillard, Ker-Xavier Roussel, Félix Vallotton, Paul Sérusier and Auguste Cazalis." (Wikipedia)

Springtime because they make me happy. (Fig.9) Such art heals my heart.

Communicating Emotion

As I've mentioned, the expression of emotions is the main aspect of my artistic language, and my work serves my emotions. I construct a space of belonging both through the act of painting and in the form of painting. In this process, I try my best to channel the emotions I feel in my everyday life directly into my work. Through this practice, I have discovered that many emotions are universal. For example, most people feel anxiety and fear failure in the pursuit of realizing their dreams. Because we live in a material society, most people desire "worldly" success and will feel sadness and insecurity when they lose something, such as money, status, or an important relationship.



Figure 10, *The Complex Adult World*, 2021

In my painting, *The Complex Adult World* (Fig.10), I address the sociology of emotion¹⁵, which was inspired by my often-confusing relationship with society. While preparing to make this painting, I learned that the sociology of emotion is a universal phenomenon, but our social environments - culture, ethics, and religion - are also factors that affect the expression and understanding of individual emotions. In this painting, I wanted to express the complexities of life. These complexities often arise from human nature, such as from the rules and desires created by society. In my life experience, I have found that learning to adapt to social rules is the “easiest” way to survive. In many cases, I will become quiet when I want to preserve my personality and principles. In this painting I also wanted to express the helplessness and sadness that I feel whenever I am confronted with the gap between reality and my ideals. To accomplish this, I again compared reality with my ideals through the metaphor of objects.

During my creative process, I focus on the external, or physical, expressions of emotion. Emotions are not just mental processes but also interact with our bodily systems and are oftentimes physically apparent. I emphasize the facial expression and body language of the characters in my work to resonate with social interactions between people. For the characters' facial expressions I mainly concentrate on the eyes. I paint the muscles of the face and eyes through light and shadows to accentuate the raw emotions that eyes can express. Eyes can easily convey emotion - for example, "smiling" eyes convey happiness or excitement, "glaring" eyes convey anger, and "wide open" eyes convey fear or surprise. Therefore, in addition to emotion, eyes can also communicate

¹⁵ “The sociology of emotion applies sociological theorems and techniques to the study of human emotions. For example, Karl Marx described capitalism as detrimental to personal 'species-being', Georg Simmel wrote of the deindividualizing tendencies of 'the metropolis', and Max Weber with's work dealt the rationalizing effect of modernity in general.” (Wikipedia)

ideas pointing to the context of emotions. Changes in the muscles of the mouth are also essential cues for expressing emotions. For example, when a person is in deep thought, their facial expression is altered by the relaxation or contraction of muscle groups in the face, especially around the mouth.

Body expression is also an essential emotional language. The figure's pose in *The Complex Adult World* is sitting, holding her chin in both hands in an unhappy state of deep thought. In my painting process I adjust my characters' postures to accentuate and exaggerate their emotions. Adjusting the height of a figure's shoulders has a large effect on our perception of their body language. Heightened shoulders can express panic, while a slouched posture can express a state of sadness or defeat. Similarly, sitting with feet pointing inwards can represent insecurity and tension, and placing a hand on a face can signify thought or pondering. Our body language, and the body language I employ in my work, communicates emotion both consciously and subconsciously.

Facial expression and body language play a significant role in my work; they require careful observation and execution to facilitate and enhance accurate emotional expression in my painting process.

Seeking Healing and Hope Through Painting

Gerhard Richter said that art is the highest form of hope.¹⁶ For me, painting brings hope to my life.

In the painting *The Crying* (Fig.11), a child is still my spokesperson. The sad mood of the girl contrasts with the calm surroundings. I choose the colors for a painting based on the psychological effects I'm seeking. At times I want to change, or contradict, the viewer's visual experience through the psychological effects of color. In *The Crying* I chose a calming blue color to contrast with the figure, whose emotion could be described as sad. Because blue has a moderate wavelength, people respond calmly to blue. I also



Figure 11, *The Crying*, 2022

¹⁶ “Art is the highest form of hope,” is a line first expressed by the German painter Gerhard Richter in 1982, in the catalogue text for the Documenta 7 exhibition.

added green bamboo to make the work rhythmic as well as because green is a similarly non-stimulating color of light with the ability to create a calm or hopeful atmosphere.

Color is an important element that I use to both seek and elicit healing and hope in my paintings. These colors help me, and I hope others, find relief from the troubles of the world.

During my artistic journey leading up to the present, I realized that I need to understand and listen to myself before I can express what I most desire to communicate in my paintings. Through researching as well as through soul-searching, I hope to create work that heals and strengthens me so that I can offer healing and strength to my audience.

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Vita

NAME OF AUTHOR:

Mengru Zhou

PLACE OF BIRTH:

Fuyang City, Anhui Province, China

DATE OF BIRTH:

March 10, 1995

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

Syracuse University

Central Michigan University

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Fine Arts in Studio Arts, 2023, Syracuse University

Bachelor of Applied Arts, 2020, Central Michigan University

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Critique Exhibition: Complex Adult World, Syracuse, NY 2022

Art Picnic Exhibition: Dunhuang, Shanghai, China 2021

ZERO Exhibition: Stay at Home Exhibition, Mount pleasant, MI 2020