The World of Eurydice

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March 2021

This project was submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Graduate Liberal Studies Program in the Graduate School of Duke University.
Abstract

As a creative project with an exhibition as its final presentation, my graduation project is a series of explorations of people trapped in private space, memory, and daily prayer psychology under the epidemic situation. My project consists of two parts. The first part, including drawings on paper and a foam sculpture, is the construction of the hell of memory, which explores the relationship between mourning and consumption. The second part is about the relationship between human spiritual desires and everyday objects. It is mainly an installation work, including some paintings, sculptures, and a short film played by a projector. Through the transformation and sanctifying of everyday objects, I explore the early witchcraft consciousness of human prayer rituals, restore religion and witchcraft rituals to the original prayer paradigm, and suggest the metaphorical connection between private apartment space and the closed spiritual world of individuals under the epidemic.

My graduation project exhibition time: April 2nd - April 4th, 2021

Rubenstein Arts Center, RM 235

Video record: https://vimeo.com/543308815

How to Use A Dishwasher for Divination: https://vimeo.com/543304921
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Acknowledgement

I am deeply grateful to Prof. Fick for his indispensable insight and guidance, without which this project would not be what it is. Many thanks to the people of Duke Graduate Liberal Studies, Kent, Anna and Lisa, for all your support and love.

Thank you to my dearest mother, Haibin Fang, who raised me, offered me the best love, and supported me to explore myself and the world.
Part One

The World of Eurydice: Artist Statement

This group consists of a series of mixed media drawing on paper and a foam sculpture.

Inspired by the story of Eurydice's disappearance on her way back from Hades when Orpheus looked back at her, this creative project explores the issues of death anxiety and trauma. As an essential theme in individual artists' creation process, the image of death and the world after death is usually combined with human vulnerability and mortality. This paper painting section includes four summons of dead pets, and paintings of the afterlife full of monsters in which they lived, trying to visualize human memory and mourning for pets. It tells a story about how people who are reluctant to let their pets die may try to bring them back from the underworld through the summons. Human obsession and memory create the space for companion animal ghosts to exist and wander.

I used a high saturation of candy colors to depict twisted, melted, cute and hideous ghost animals. In the process of constructing the world after the death of pets, I borrowed from the myths and legends of the underworld in various national cultures, such as Diyu in China, Inferno in Dante's Divine Comedy and Hades in ancient Greece.

I once drew some summoning charms as birthday gifts for my mom and my best friend and told them that they could use this summoning charm to call me
unconditionally. As long as I was informed that summoning charms were being used, I would come to them as quickly as possible no matter where I was. My mom said she would use it to call me home to help with the cooking, while my friend joked that she would like to use the summons after my death so that she could see my ghost that had been summoned. And when this friend’s dog died, she poured out her grief to me and said that if my summon charm could work on the dead pets, it would be something that pet owners would most want to buy.

This series of works was also inspired by a pet mourning website as well as the folklore-based summons game I invented myself. Companion animals have become very important in modern people’s lives, and many guardians have a high attachment to their pets (Luiz, 180). As companion animals are increasingly given personalities and seen as indispensable family members, they are also expected to have souls and an afterlife. Many Western pet owners are familiar with the design of the Rainbow Bridge: the rainbow bridge is closely associated with the Christian paradise where pets go to wait for their human companions when they die. In one of the courses I had in the 2020 summer semester, which is called Death and Dying, I learned about the existence of the Rainbow Bridge website (https://www.rainbowsbridge.com/poem.htm), an online grief support group. The website is where owners who have lost a beloved fur child can create a pet memorial. They can also purchase e-sympathy cards and other grief support services from the website. The small game and the story surrounding it as well as the Rainbow Bridge website inspired me to make this piece of art.

In this group of works, the characters collage is a witchcraft imitation of Taoist talisman and it implies the worship of language. The art style draws lessons from the
deconstruction and reconstruction of images by contemporary artists like Chicago Imagists in 1960s, who developed a figurative style that is a unique mash-up of comic book imagery, psychedelia, folk art and surrealism. With cartoonish monsters, spooky animals and juicy stones as my protagonists, I look to my subconscious for inspiration. I use comprehensive materials to complete the first part of this project, including but not limited to color pencil, charcoal, ink, acrylic, mark, washi tape, watercolor, air-dry clay, soft pottery, foam, wire, fiber and so on.

"Lippy," 1968, Jim Nutt

Lee Grantham (Chicago Imagists)

“Right up there with God,” 1986,

(Chicago Imagists)
The World of Eurydice: Drawing Series and A Foam Sculpture

The World of Eurydice

Details
Four Summons of Dead Pets, Mixed media on paper
Part Two

Donor: Installation and Artist Statement

This set of installation works is mainly composed of five parts: the wishing pond, prayer, the skeleton butterfly, wall pond series and dishwasher divination. I placed the series in two adjacent Spaces. Most of the sculptures presented in the first space are based on furniture, while the wall pond series is placed in another space with brighter light.
The title of this part comes from the Buddhist term "Gongyangren," or "donor," which means people who believe in Buddhism and pay for the construction of Buddhist grottoes. These donors and patrons are the sources of financial resources and spiritual support for the religious caves.
If the first group of works tries to depict the soul world of death, then the second group of works constructs the daydream-like spiritual space of the living. In this space filled with fragments of memory, the vacuum’s handle is deformed and extended into a green insect claw drawn from its sheath, and the air mattress sinks into a pond containing turquoise resin and coins.

This part is a demonstration and execution guide for receiving faint echoes from our spiritual world. It is a shamanistic healing tool to soothe the spiritual anxiety and
subconscious fear of death of individuals under the containment of the epidemic. Through the transformation and sanctifying of everyday objects, I tried to explore the early witchcraft consciousness of human prayer rituals, restore religion and witchcraft rituals to the original prayer paradigm, and suggest the metaphorical connection between private apartment space and the closed spiritual world of individuals under the epidemic situation.
1. The Wishing Pool

I made a small shallow wishing pool out of an old inflatable bed. I pour in colored urethane foam and resin and add metal bars to create the feel of an artificial attraction with many little
ads teaching customers how to obtain good luck.

Details

Many scenic spots in China have at least one wishing pond with coins lying at the bottom, even if the pond itself is not built for tourists to drop coins in. The wishing pond may have been an ancient well, a spring, a water-filled cave, or a fishpond. These pools are almost standard attractions, and the number of coins in them can be used to prove the popularity of the attraction. As for the origin of coin throwing and wishing, one theory comes from the Buddhist practice of offering. And coins become the most convenient offered treasure.
Throwing coins into temple pools became the most common and convenient act of offering. The act of "throwing a coin for a wish" can be found in both Chinese and foreign pools, such as the Trevi Fountain in Rome. In June 2017, there was news in China about a woman in her 80s who thought that throwing coins would keep her safe, so she mistook the engine of the plane for a wishing fountain and threw a handful of coins into it as she boarded the plane, causing the delay of flight CZ380 from Shanghai Pudong to Guangzhou Baiyun Airport. From a pool of water to an airplane engine (and, in a similar story, even a toilet), any concave object has the basic ingredients for a wishing fountain. This act of wishing reflects the paranormal beliefs people find in their daily life. Commonly associated with superstitions and witchcraft, Paranormal beliefs meet people's transcendental needs to varying degrees, and it has a clear utilitarian color.
A sightseeing pool in Chengdu, China, 2017

Roman Ondak’s 16mm film Lucky Day also gave me some ideas (Ondak 0:00-3:59). The work records the act of a man who crosses streets and empties a large number of coins into a fountain for good luck. It explored the contemporary possibilities of pilgrimage in a secular context.

2. Prayer

A praying mantis trying to block the wheel of time

Its forelimbs were raised high

Was it crying for help? Like a mountaineer holding up a ski pole in an avalanche?
The sculpture consists of a vacuum cleaner base and some scrap plastic. The top half is hollow and detachable, like a crab's leg that puts the shell back together after the meat has been eaten. The green color of the shell comes from gesso, watercolor and acrylic spray paint, and the rough brush strokes attempt to create an auroral hue. At the base of the sculpture, I used foam spray and Fake Grape to create a sweet nest with eggs in it.

In many ancient cultures, the praying mantis was endowed with supernatural meanings because of its prayer-like forelimb movements. In Bushman mythology, for example, the mantis is a god with creative powers. The ancient Greeks believed that mantises could show lost travelers the way home. And according to the ancient Egyptians, praying mantises can lead the spirits of the dead to the underworld. In ancient China, a praying mantis waving its forelimbs in front of a carriage was a very classic image. The mantis in this image was considered a symbol of overreach, indicating vulnerability and stubbornness, and also implying the fate of being brutally crushed and dismembered.
3. The Skeleton Butterfly

The installation consists of an upside-down umbrella, two coat hangers and photographs.

The umbrella bone and the clothes hanger both have the function of supporting and separating. The former supports the umbrella surface and separates the rain space from the dry space. The latter replaces the shoulder to support the clothes, which implies the division of the two states of going out and entering the house. A blowing umbrella is a common uncontrolled reaction in stormy weather, a sign that wet space and dry space are about to become blurred. The two vacant clothes hangers are connected, and flutter like a bone butterfly, forming a kind of spatial inversion and distortion. In many ancient cultures and religions, the butterfly was a symbol of the dead and the wandering spirits of people in their dreams. For example, in Greek mythology, the goddess Psyche, often represented as a maiden with butterfly wings, was the embodiment of the human soul; The ancient Chinese legend of Liangzhu, the
lovers turns into a butterfly after death. The accompanying photo, in which half a butterfly made of resin and soybeans is integrated by the reflection of a mirror, is also a hint of this fantasy space.

4. Ponds and Caves on the Wall

The background of this group of wall works is divided into white wall and transparent glass window. The continuous appearance and transformation of the cave and pond forms the artistic landscape in this work.
5. Video: How to Use A Dishwasher for Divination

https://vimeo.com/543304921

The single-channel video was shot in an apartment I rented in Durham, using Fuji XT4 and edited by iMovie. I used a crude first-view home video shooting method to tell how the plastic boxes were deformed by high temperature and high-speed water of a dishwasher, and the deformation of the plastic boxed predicted the position of the doorstone downstairs.

![Image]

Observing random changes in the shape of objects is a common practice among different ethnic divination cultures. Taking the tortoiseshell of Yin Ruins of ancient China as an example, by interpreting the shape and direction of the cracks in these burned tortoiseshells, the Shang ancestors tried to get answers to the questions posed to them by the gods, to obtain spiritual guidance. Such spiritual guidance and comfort from divination almost became an indispensable part of the daily life of the nobles and common people of the Shang Dynasty. Another example is that maidens in ancient Russia used the shape of a dripping candle to tell divinations about marriage and love.

Dishwashers are simultaneously characterized by high temperature, water flow, and unpredictable processes, and the resulting plastic forms are random and beautiful.
Part Three

Outsider Artist Inside of the Apartment: Accompanying Writing

When the sound of the air conditioner is magnified a hundred times
It becomes spring thunder
The plastic bag beside the ventilation
rustles like vegetation,
A drop of water from the tap,
The lizard in the desert raises its head.

My graduation project is a journey to explore the memories and feelings of people trapped in private space under the epidemic. And my creative process is also relatively private and closed. The anxiety and trauma of the epidemic can disintegrate a person’s life but creating art can enhance a person’s sense of order and integrity by salvaging and reorganizing personal memories and strengthening the connections between emotions and objects. Creating is my way of connecting with daily objects. By looking differently and paying more attention to the surroundings and even anthropomorphizing or sanctifying them, I can embrace the triviality of everyday life. This mind-practice approach is kind of like the grounding technique in psychology, which means to bring one's focus to what is happening now physically. It's also a little bit animistic but focuses more on everyday junk and consumable items.

I am inspired by the way outsider artists and apartment artists work. For outsider artists, to create art works is to construct a closed and complete spiritual world. The system of this world may be influenced by religion and folklore, but the core of creation
is very personal. Many of these artists are motivated by the desire to heal psychological trauma and to adjust in stressful situations. For example, Eddie Owens Martin (St. Eom) dealt with neurasthia through his paintings and the construction of his Pasaquan land; Coral Castle's own promotional material says that, before Edward Leedskalnin began to build his amazing art architecture, he was suddenly rejected by his fiancee just one day before the wedding; Annie Hooper began to create her environment after returning from a prolonged mental health treatment; Tressa Prisbrey maintained psychological stability and dealt with traumatic experiences by building "Bottle Village" in Simi Valley.

Eddie Owens Martin (St. EOM) (American, 1908–1986) at Pasaquan.

"Apartment art" is a term put forward by Gao Minglu to describe a completely independent and spontaneous form of art activity in contemporary Chinese art from
the 1970s to the 1990s. Apartment artists create a large number of cheap installations and random small concept works that cannot be displayed and sold in a few private spaces, which are "based" on their private homes. Most of the works are drawn from family and personal circumstances and are usually discarded after the exhibition.

"Apartment art" was created in an environment of high political oppression. Without the support of official public spaces, artists had to return to private spaces to work. "Apartment Art" has been developing for about 20 years without any funding or patronage from any institution (neither official nor gallery).

Apartment art in 1990s

The creative environment of my graduation project is very similar to that of apartment artists. The only difference is that what restricts the artist to the indoor environment is not political oppression but the epidemic. As a foreign student, I live in a single apartment on the sixth floor and make art in a small studio living room. In the process of creation, I am faced with problems such as limited space, shortage of
materials and limited production equipment. The living room of my tiny apartment has become my studio, with the tabletops and floors piled with materials for painting and sculpture. In order not to poison myself, I had to leave the window open all day long to let the wind take away the foul smell of the spray paint. While many of the outsider artists own at least one house or piece of land with their goal to make art timeless, the core of "Apartment art" is temporality and transience. I had to be very careful not to let the resin and paint drip on the floor of my rented apartment, and all the furniture and works would be sent to the secondary market or destroyed after the exhibition.

The long period of isolation caused by COVID-19 objectively created an isolated environment without much outside disturbance. In such an environment, I have a lot of time and space to reflect on the past and perceive myself, which led to my master project. As an Outsider Artist Inside of the Apartment, Art is my container of emotion and memory, and my exoskeleton as I walk on the earth.
Inside my apartment
References


Ondak, Roman "Lucky Day 2006." YouTube, uploaded by mat121, 10 Oct. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kSXgV5bKFaI