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Paint the City, Paint the Life

Ya-Ling Huang

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PAINT THE CITY, PAINT THE LIFE.

BY

Ya-Ling Huang

Dec. 15st, 1994



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Grant Hargate

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A Master's Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Department of
Art of Lindenwood College in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Master's of Art

1994

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RECOGNITION

My deepest and most sincere gratitude goes to the following:

My dear parents, who support my studies abroad in the United States of America.

Dr. N. Dunathan, who always stands with me, encourages me and lets me feel I am part of her family here.

Assistant Professor Elaine Tillinger, who opened the view of Art History for me that gave me a new direction to my future and my career.

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To all the friends I met here. I am fortunate to met a number of great people during my stay at Lindenwood College. They gave me some of the most wonderful memories of my life; memories that I will never forget.

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PREFACE

I conclude my Master of Arts degree by expressing the deep satisfaction I feel in learning and thinking about art and in becoming a good artist. The Master of Art program Lindenwood College has made my future in art possible.

Prior to this, I had little experience. Now I have many ideas from the art history courses; they helped me to think and to learn more about art, and to enjoy the world of art.

This thesis will record my experience with art, and its influence on my stylistic development.

INTRODUCTION

After finishing high school and learning international business for three years, which is the traditional family career, I left to fulfill my dream of becoming a successful artist. I chose to study art abroad, so I left my country, Taiwan, and came to the United States of America.

The first college that I attended was Columbia College in Columbia, Missouri. There, I pursued my basic art training and finished my undergraduate studies. I received my Bachelor of Arts degree in 1993. Lindenwood College in St. Charles, Missouri left a strong first impression on me when I came to visit. Attending Lindenwood between 1993 and 1994 provided me with the opportunity to participate in a variety of courses that include painting, drawing, photography, and art history.

The studio classes not only gave me a knowledge of studio art, but also taught me how to think and how to create good work. The art history courses opened my eyes. I am now aware of the great accomplishments of the artists of the past. It was the art history courses that awakened my understanding and appreciation of art.

I like the European Fauvists and Expressionists. They replaced local colors of objects with colors revealing states of feeling and inner reactions to the subject. Cubists fragmented objects, or took them apart, and placed their flattened planes next to one another. The Futurists arranged objects, or parts of objects, in a kaleidoscopic manner, overlapping forms and parts of forms, to convey in a nonrepresentational way the sense of motion or speed. Artists like Kandinsky and Mondrian presented shapes and colors that bore no resemblance to anything in the world the eye recognized. I also like the Dadaists and Surrealists, who evolved a conceptual style of art. (Davidson, 1)

It is wonderful that there are master artists who left us great movements in art from which to learn. My knowledge of art is built on those master's paintings, inspiring me to develop my own style. Studies at Lindenwood College have guided me through my personal growth as an artist. The following paper is an analysis of my personal beliefs and goals and how I have been influenced through the study of painting, drawing, photography, and art history.

The Turning Point of the Creation

After only one semester of study at Lindenwood College, my head was filled with art. I began to understand what I was searching for in my art. To paint directly what I saw no longer seemed to gratify me any more. The strong energy of creativity started to develop inside me. I wanted to paint something about my life with emotion and imagination.

During the beginning of this semester, color and form became my primary concern. I believed that I could create effects of recession and movement of the Chinese bamboo brush painting in space solely through contrasts of color. I experimented with composition and color in my painting, allowing the color to become the form and subject. It was this theme that developed and transformed itself apart from all analysis, psychological or otherwise. Colors were a function of themselves.

During the winter of 1993, I went back to Taiwan, to have Christmas with my family. My family and I went to visit a native Taiwanese village after Christmas. Native works are filled with energy. When I entered a house made of stone, I saw an old man was sitting and making a kind of traditional hat. He used bamboo

string to arrange the base of the hat; it was a circular shape bamboo base. His fast moving hands were like a musical melody that attracted and held my eyes. I watched him construct the base of the hat until he finished. I asked him how he learned to make the beautiful hat. He pointed to the ceiling and told me that when he was a little boy, his mother wanted him to learn a skill so that he would be able to earn money for the family. His mother took him to the house of the best hat-maker in the village and asked the master hat maker to teach her son the skill. The little boy had a very difficult time, making a perfect hat base, so the little boy's mother put all the bad hat bases the boy made under the roof of their stone house. Then she told to the little boy, "I already put all of your bad works up to the high ceiling. That means you need to leave the bad stuff away from you and you will become a great hat-maker soon." After that day, the young man worked harder and harder. Soon he became another great hat-maker in the village, as he and his mother wished.

After I heard the story of this hat-maker's childhood, I looked up to the ceiling and I saw lots of circle bamboo hat bases on the ceiling. Those bamboo hat bases looked old and dirty, but behind

that I seemed to see a little boy's dream, the dream that pushed him to become a master.

The circle shapes of bamboo hat base on the roof was how the ideas developed for my works, *The Dream Under the Roof* (fig. 1), *The Boy's Hope* (fig. 2), and *Behind the Defeatist* (fig. 3). For these paintings, I tried to catch the beautiful circles on the roof, and the story behind these circles.

The Dream Under the Roof was my first experiment using color as form. It's symbolism enabled me to present my emotional interest, I response to the hatmakers story. This painting is completely different from the way I used to paint. I do not have a main subject for this painting, because I wanted to focus the intense emotion I felt from the story. I wanted to show that all of the hat bases can tell their own story. All the circular forms are like a progression from vivid primary colors with complementary color in each of the circular centers, to be less intense hues on the perimeter. Although my approach was not meant to scientific, the effect is more like a demonstration of color theory than a freely created work of art. The ceiling on the background is not clear to see but it can unite those motley circle forms together and give the painting unity.

After I finished the work, I felt there was something missing, so I tried to remember the old hatmaker's ceiling. Finally, I knew that I did not paint the feeling at the time of the hat-maker's early years. Of course, when I saw the bamboo circle bases, they were old and dirty looking, but I felt that dust of the bamboo circles contained a little boy's dream, a master's childhood memory. The dust on the bamboo base should be the spirit for the story and for my painting, too. I decided to use the Chinese brush painting's calligraphic style and use charcoal as the tool to finish the spirit of my painting, which turned the whole painting great.

This painting was my first real experiment with my own painting style and it was the turning point too. After I painted the painting, I knew that I could paint more freely in all my painting just as I did for this painting. And so this painting also lead me to another wild view and sense of my style.

The Boy's Dream is the second painting that I developed using the same kind of style as found in *The Dream Under the Roof*. Blue is the primary color for this painting because I wanted to emphasize the time of the past and I wanted my color to symbolize *The Dream Under the Roof*. In the color theory of

Kandinsky; "Blue is the male principle, severe and spiritual. Yellow is the female principle, gentle, cheerful, and sensual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy, the color that has to come into conflict with, and succumb to, the other two."(Hamilton 216).

His opinion about colors may be the best explanation for this painting. In fact, in this painting I not only painted the boy's dream consignment, but also tried to present the growing process of the little boy by the metaphors of the colors. Male, female, severe, spiritual, gentle, cheerful, sensual, matter, brutal and heavy, all of these emotional reflections compose and help define the stage of time. I would like to present life by this, *The Boy's Dream*. And maybe, I was not only painting his life, his dream, but also mine.

Behind the Defeatist, is another variety of my circle paintings, but different from my *The Dream Under the Roof* or *The Boy's Dream*. It contains a multitude of circles rippling off in an undulating spiral. The composition of this painting shows more arrangement than the others. I tried to present those circular shapes back in the archaic style. I think the orderly circle are the fundamental in order to build something architectural in shape from the circles bamboo bases and color. Needless to say, the idea of this

painting is still part of the story that the old native Taiwanese man told me.

Using pastel and cardboard as the main materials for this painting was a conscious decision. I believe that the pastel's simplicity and unadorned characteristics as well as the cardboard's rough texture can explain the emotion, an "origin", the color of primitive society, which is both pure and colorful.

I experimented and used different ways to express the feeling that the little boy's story gave me. People say that "Rome was not built in one day". The growth and success of the little boy's story had inspired me dramatically.

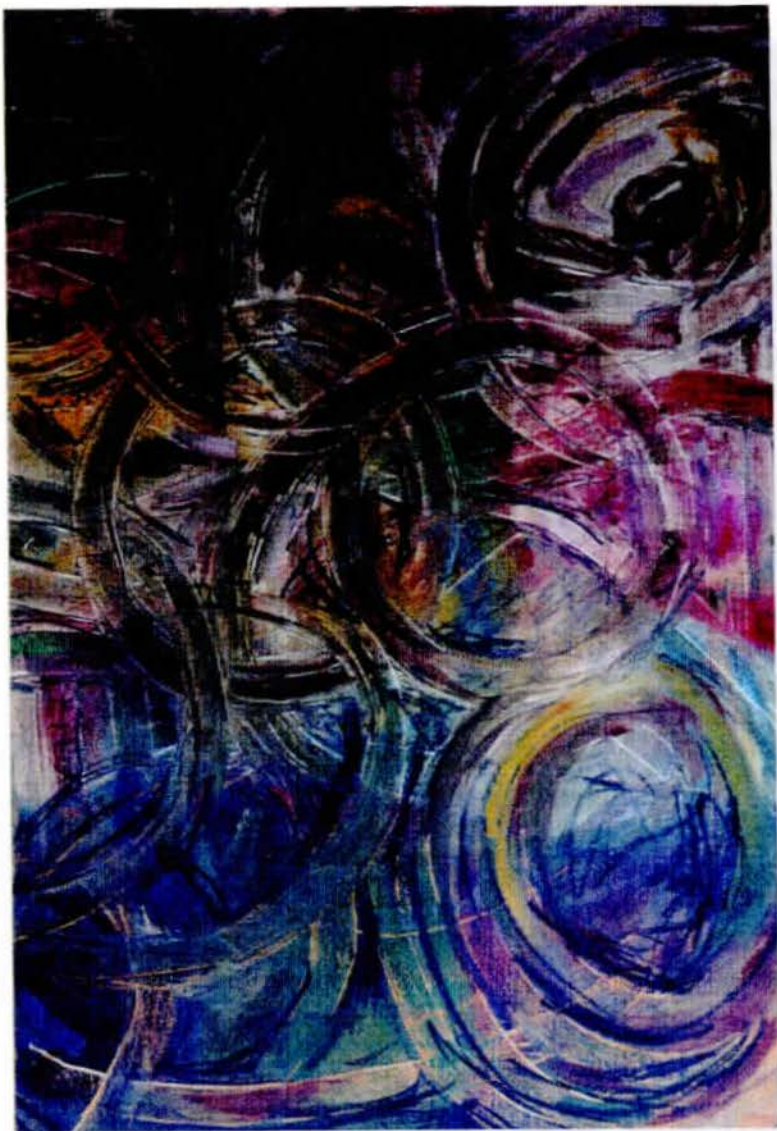


Fig. 1

The Dream Under the Roof

oil on linen, 30 x36"

1994

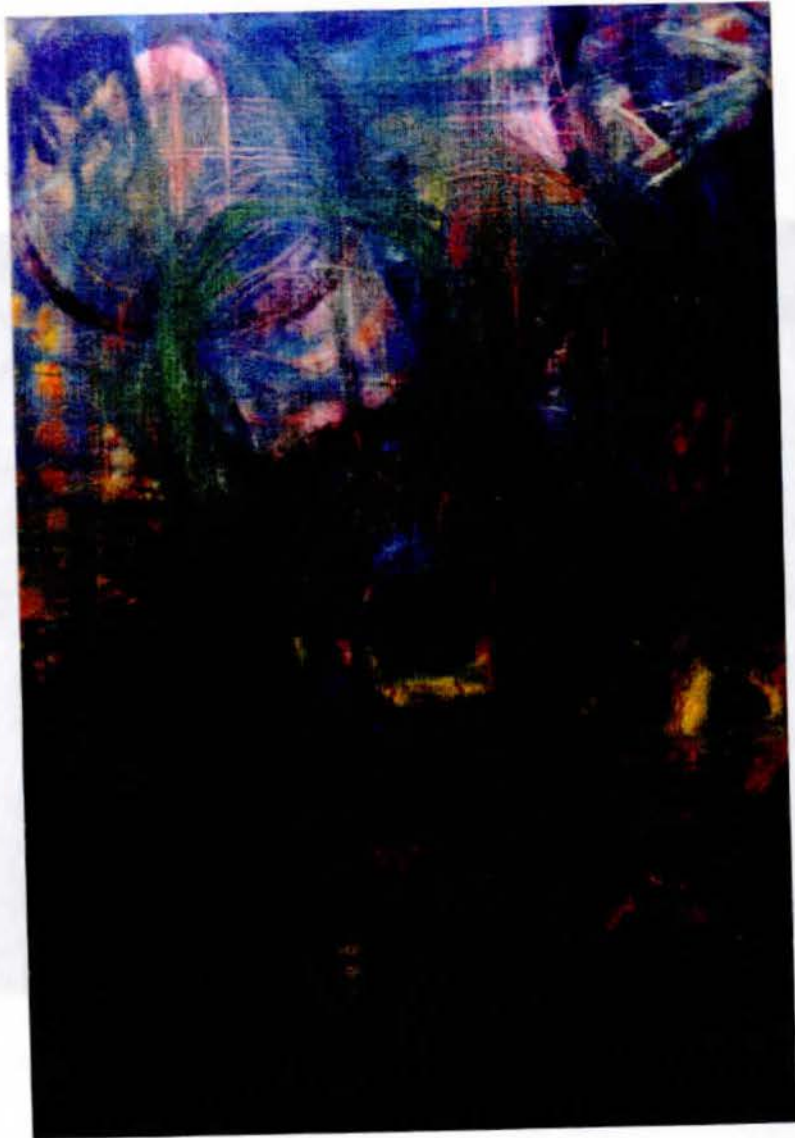


Fig.2

The Boy's Dream

oil on lined, 28" x 36"

1994

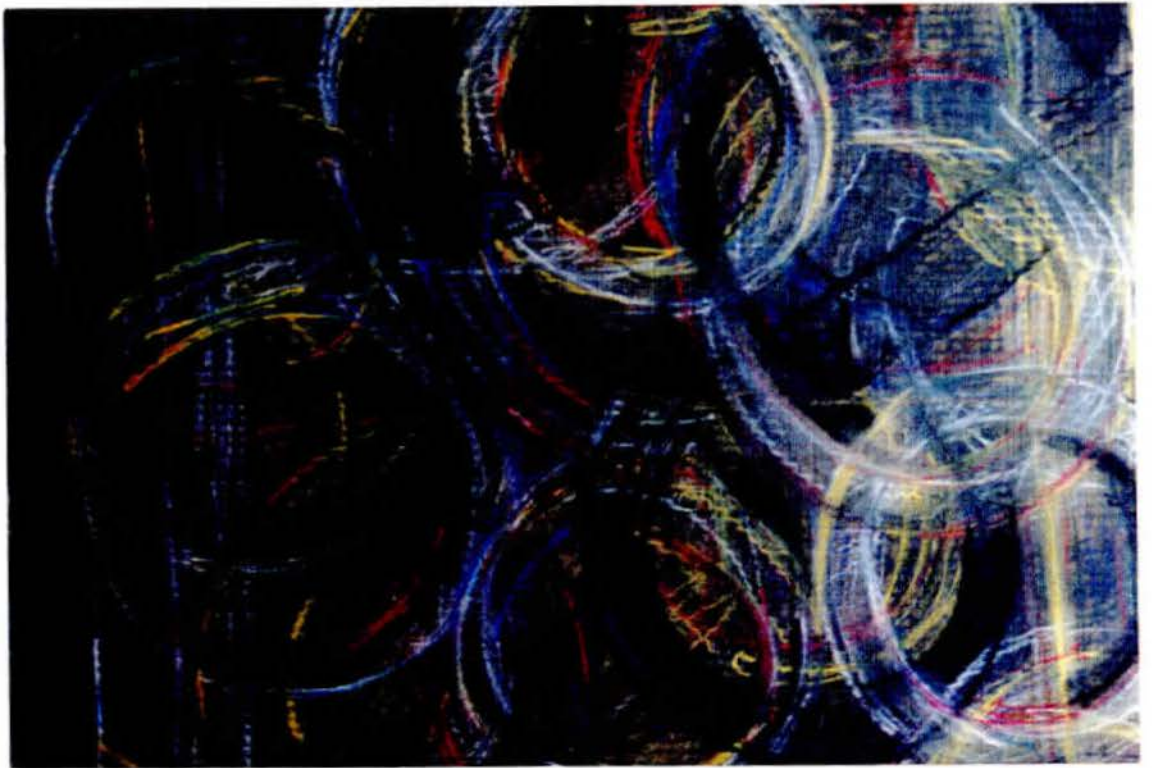


Fig. 3

Behind the Defeatist

pastel on cardboard, 30"x 36"

1994

Paint the Dream

As an artist manipulating material I discover I can invent new forms--forms which were never seen before. While some will not let works after from what looks logical or probable, others enjoy creating strange new worlds, and I want the skill to make such worlds seem real. Often these imaginary creations reflect an artist's determination to change the rules of reality. I want to create fantastic forms or let the fantastic forms happen, showing themselves as instruments that cooperate with the universal processes of creation.

Dreams are further examples of the connection between fantasy and the reality world. They seem to lack logical organization as soon as we awaken. However, while sleeping they look very real, sometimes even frighteningly real. In *Realistic or Fantastic World? #1* (fig. 4) and *Realistic or Fantastic World? #2* (fig. 5) I employ dream material to connect with my unconscious processes and shock me out of my customary ways of vision.

These two paintings were painted about one of my dreams, which described the world, as if the earth was different than we have

known. The life circle was totally different in my dream. There was neither ocean nor land, and all the animals and plants grew in the same space, at peace within this colorful scene. I did not think too much about the metaphor of this dream when I wake up the next morning. I just felt that the dream liberated me from practical necessity and put me in a better position to pursue my vision and intuition of and about form. The important point is that fantasy, the image of unreal objects and places and art is its principle outlet.

In these two paintings, I used many straight lines crossing all over the paintings. I have made the color of each area with different value changes from others, and yet seeing the painting as a whole., it could never be an abstract painting.

These crossing lines symbolized my personal philosophy which I have learned from my experiences. In my philosophy, I feel that however the world changes, or no matter what people think, the world stands still, so I still can be myself. All the criteria such as personal advantages and disadvantages may have covered all of the world. These different personal advantages and the advantages become the crossing line and different value in this painting. It

depend on how the viewer sees it, and how he/she thinks about it. Just as in these paintings, from the subject itself we can tell ... it is tulips and fishes, but with the lines that carry different value horizon ...it is the world between the real and fancy which is the space that allows for people to think profoundly.

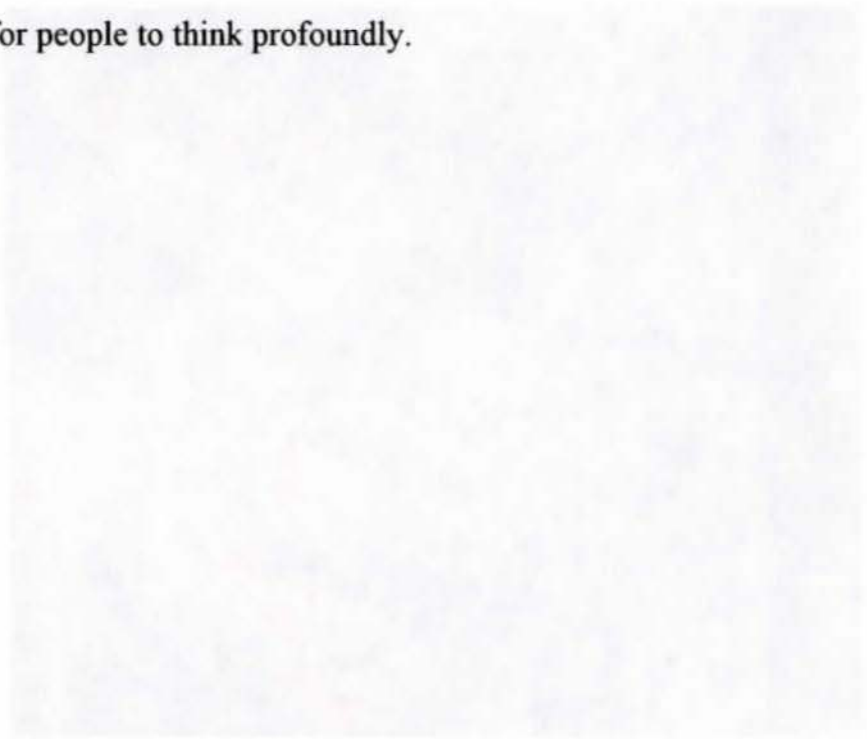




Fig. 4

Realistic or Fantastic World ?# 1

oil on linen, 30"x 34",

1994



Fig. 5

Realistic or Fantastic World? #2

oil on linen, 30" x 36"

1994

Paint the City, Paint the Life

I can hardly recall when I started to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of architecture and to paint the city landscape. There is a very close relationship between the city and the architecture. The art of the architecture emerges as different architecture relies on structural devices like arches, domes, and trusses which can be made of different materials like wood, stone, or steel. From different materials is also created the different character and personality assigned to the architecture and to the city. I always believe that best way to witness history and the development of the civilization is upon appraisal of architecture. Architecture connects the human spirit from generation to generation. I deeply enjoy the intimate relationship between humans and architecture. That is the reason why I chose to use this subject, the city, as a crucial part of my graduate thesis exhibition, as well as the major topic of this thesis.

During June, 1994, I went to New York City for few days. New York City is the business, entertainment and publishing capital of the United states. It is the nation's largest city, teeming, busy and always rushing. The museums, art galleries and theaters have made

this city's modern art activities an avant-garde place to be. The skyscrapers, the art exhibitions, the museums, the Broadway shows and millions of people create my impressions of this city as well.

I spent most of my time visiting art museums and received lots of new stimulus for my art creations. I remembered when I faced the millions of art works I felt seeing those art works made my life worth living. For the short duration in New York City, I also felt that I was a hungry person, hoping to absorb all of the knowledge that an artist should have know and need to known, when I visited museums and saw all of the great masterpieces. For those days, visiting New York City, became one of the most exciting and valuable trips in my life.

After I came back from my trip, I experienced stronger desires! I created paintings about New York City. I started to make several sketches base on the quick sketches and photographs I took during my trip. From these, my first painting about New York City was created and titled *The Wall Street-New York*(fig. 6)

Wall Street is the financial keystone of the country. When I went there, the first surprise for me about Wall Street was that the

largest financial center of the country has the narrowest street between the skyscrapers! Those skyscrapers almost totally obstruct the sun light as you came through on the narrow street. People seem try to walk as fast as they can and presented a scene of the metropolitan life in which work is more important than enjoying the sun light!

Thinking about the metropolitan life during my stay in New York City, I went to The Metropolitan Museum and The Museum of Modern art. I saw lots of great art works, but what remains is the strong impression Futurism paintings made on me.

Futurism was one of the art movements of the early 20th century. A related movement had come into existence in Italy and was about to erupt on the Paris art scene. The poet, Marinetti, had gathered around him a group of young artist to propagate and demonstrate the heady joys of Futurism. This meant an enthusiastic acceptance of the modern technological world: Machines, mass-production, mechanical sounds, speed, the destruction of everything old. The Futurists deal with the particulars of urban society at the beginning of the twentieth century and to some extent with the particular social and urban conditions existing in Northern Italy at

this time. Stylistically, they contributed little to painting, but their insistence on the dynamism of life as a basis for art permanently affected modern aesthetics.(Chilvers, Osborne, Farr 190)

From the character of Futurists' paintings, I found a reflection about the New York City I was going to paint. It gave me a good idea to work with in my paintings.

Unlike Futurists' paintings, I keep the subject of my painting more realistic looking. I want to show the changeable metropolis through different value changes across areas with intersecting lines, and still keep the buildings and the city as a realistic scene. When viewers see this painting they may feel that a little bit confused about its style. This painting looks like realistic painting, but not "real" Realism; also, it looks like abstract painting but, it is not that abstract looking. For me, it looks like my painting! I always think that metropolis is built on both beauty and debauchery. The city always has its own special glamour that lets people love it sometimes and feel sorry for it at other time. I believe it is the contradictory emotions of metropolitan life that always makes people confused about the life in the city. Therefore, my city subject paintings,

present my emotions and ideas about the metropolis through those value changed areas and crossing lines.

In *Wall Street-New York City*, I chose the view from the east side of the Wall Street looking through to the west end of the Wall Street. From this scene, we can see Trinity Church as it stands and faces Wall Street as a whole. Trinity Church, originally built in 1696-97 has Gothic style architecture. It stands there looking so peaceful and full of grace. When it faces the financial keystone of the country and those modern skyscrapers, it just touches my soul. It seems that it can provide me the courage to truly face life when I am in a unpredictable world. That is the reason why I like the painting so much.



Fig.6

Wall Street-New York City

oil on linen, 42'' x 48''

1994

Fifth Avenue of New York City (fig. 7) is one of my New York City impression paintings. Fifth Avenue is the most "valuable" street in the New York City, so I decided to paint the Fifth Avenue with Fauvism colors to present the populous street, which seems always have lots of hustling people walking and shopping.

I really like the strong colors of the Fauvist had used. Fauvism is a style of painting based on the use of intensely vivid non-naturalistic colors. It was the pioneer of the major avant-garde developments in European art between the turn of the century and the First World War. The outstanding characteristic of Fauvist paintings was the extreme intensity of their colors: pure colors, which the Fauvist used arbitrarily for emotional and decorative effect. Therefore, I used some pure and strong colors to paint this painting, and I abutted flat, geometrical shapes of high-keyed color, while I relied on a more agitated linearity that recalled the Futurism of Boccioni and Carra.(Chilvers, Osborne, Farr 176)

Basically, this painting showed progress from my last painting, *Wall Street-New York City*", because I want to continue my idea about the contradiction of the metropolitan life. I chose a view which had lots of people passing through the intersection on Fifth

Avenue as the subject of this painting, and both the middle-ground and the background is the famous street in New York City- Fifth Avenue.



Fig.7

Fifth Avenue of New York City

Oil on linen, 42'' x 48'', 1994

I saw a lot of great things during that trip. I still can remember the first time I saw the Brooklyn Bridge I had studied about the bridge's history from my American Art History course, but I almost could not believe that the famous Brooklyn Bridge was there before my eyes . I was there one day to enjoy the view of sunset with my friends. We sat on the bridge and exchanged our feelings about standing on this famous and beautiful bridge. I felt looking at New York City from the Brooklyn Bridge during great a sunset was just so wonderful!

The Brooklyn Bridge was a perfect vehicle to reflect the mechanistic forces of modern life on an affirmative vision of the spiritual potential of the new civilization. Ever since its completion in 1883, it had symbolized the "possibilities of the Machine Age" and underscored the emergent belief that the new technology would lead to a perfectibility of the human spirit. (Filler, 28). Barbara Haskell described this special bridge :"

Structurally, the bridge offered a visual synthesis of the spiritual and the material, the romantic and the mechanical web like steel cable system was modern

and ethereal; its massive granite piers, with their historic.

materials and details that recalled a more spiritual era, were rendered even more ecclesiastical allusive by virtue of their pointed Gothic arches.

The Bridge's unique central walkway effectively placed pedestrians at the center of the structure--a position furthered by the quadripartite cable system, which gave additional linear emphasis to the centrality of the human figure. (Haskell 100-103). Walking on the center of the structure and looking at the New York City is the most romantic thing to do. Standing on the bridge, it seems I can make contact with the past and the future. On the bridge, New York City seems to become more intimate to me.

A lot of artists have been affected by the bridge's intelligence and many art works have praised the bridge, from Joseph Pennell, Child Hassam and John Twachtman to John Marin, O'Keeffe and Gleizes They have seen the Brooklyn Bridge to be the symbol of a new model of existence.

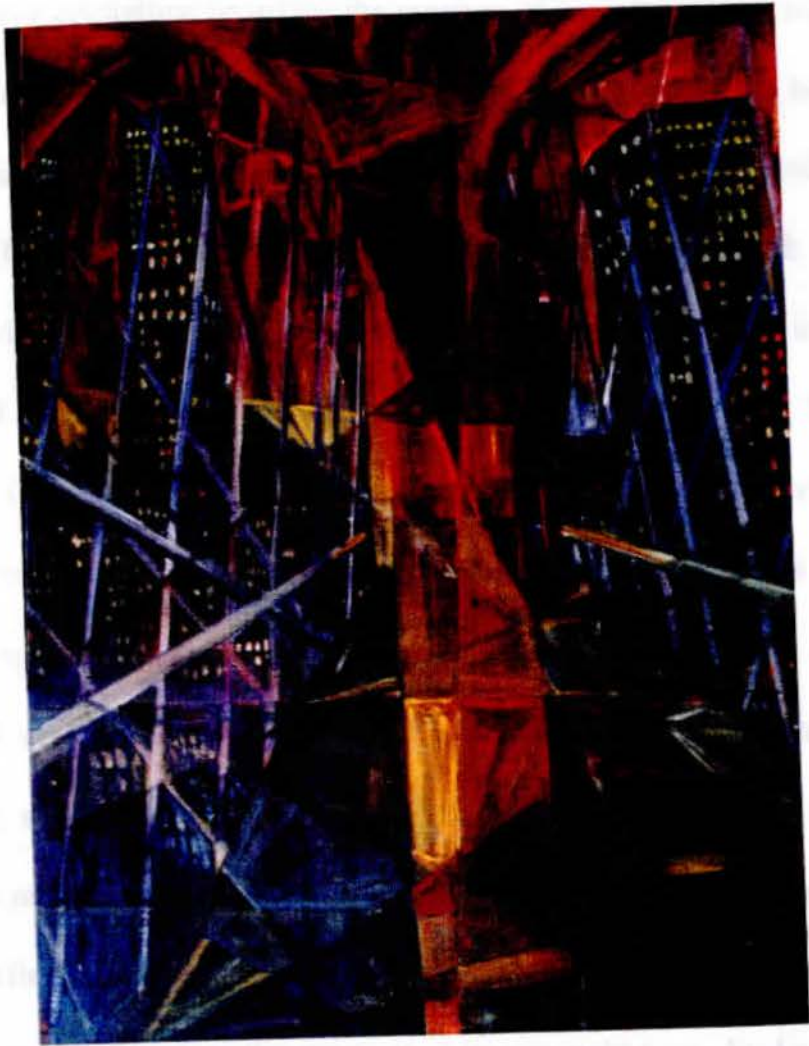


Fig.8

Brooklyn Bridge

Oil on linen, 42'' x 48''

1994

I had my own feeling about this great bridge, I employed the bridge as a crystalline board for the creation of a contemporary myth that reconciled the changeable world and the human spirit. I have my own painting of the Brooklyn Bridge. In My *The Brooklyn Bridge*(fig. 8) painting , the narrow Gothic arches interact with the steel cables of the bridge, radiate along with some crossing lines covered on the illuminated city, as through stained-glass. The narrow Gothic arches of the bridge seems the gateway which leads all of the efforts to a new civilization of America! Also it carries the human spirit to its grace.

I always thought that coming to study in the United States will be a great opportunity for me to enrich my experience and enlarge my knowledge. There are a lot of things out there for me to see. After I finished three New York City paintings, I felt that I needed to come back to the great city I live in right now- St. Louis. This is the city I know better than others and the place I wake up every morning. From my point of view , having the New York City paintings after I came back from my summer trip is a very good painting experience, yet to paint the city of St. Louis which is my actual environment could be more impressive for me. I may

go back to Taiwan after I graduate. If I do , I am not sure when I will have another opportunity to come back to visit again. Therefore, I just tell myself that I am going to paint some paintings about St. Louis and take some memories about this city for myself through those paintings.

Actually, I had painted the city of St. Louis several times after moved from Columbia to St. Louis area, *Downtown of St. Louis* (fig. 9) and *The Color Reflection of the City*(fig. 10) are my early paintings about the city of St. Louis. I painted *The Downtown of St. Louis* in the winter of 1993, after the first time I really had a chance to walk around the downtown area since I moved here. It was a cold Sunday morning and there were not many people on the streets, which gave me a good opportunity to appreciate what I have seen. Walking around the streets, Wei-Hao and I were surrounded by those old skyscrapers in the downtown. Seeing those old skyscrapers, I dreamed that I went back in time to the 60's or 70's, and saw the same prosperous years those skyscrapers had. For a while, I almost felt that I was in those years....*Downtown of St. Louis* was created under this daydream.



Fig.9

Downtown of St. Louis

oil on lined 24" x 36"

1993



Fig.10

The Color Reflection of the City

oil on canvas, 20" x 24"

1993

In this painting, the dark brown and blue tones carry the historic buildings; the dark brown and blue colors show the score of history. I want to show the viewer that even though the years have passed, those old building are still standing there; they are the eyes of the history. I painted some vivid colored flags on the foreground through the background to connect the past and present, and those bright yellow and orange color flags also present my vision about the vitality of the street. In the foreground of the painting I painted Wei-Hao and me on the bottom left side. It is interesting to me that I painted myself as the guest in the painting.

After I painted the three paintings about New York City, I started to create my personal style, the style which can present my ideas in my paintings. Then I used this style to paint my paintings about St. Louis. *The Sunday Morning at Downtown* (fig. 11), was the product of this style.

I always go to the downtown St. Louis on weekend when it is always so quiet, especially on Sunday morning. On Sunday morning, it does not see many people crowded on the street. Only few people walk though and birds fly between the buildings. All the buildings look like they are relaxing, without the hurly-burly of

jammed people and cars. The buildings seem to be satisfied with the sunny, quiet and warm Sunday morning. In my dream, I was one of the buildings enjoyed the Sunday morning in St. Louis. So I painted this *The Sunday Morning at Downtown* (fig.11) for remember this wonderful Sunday morning.

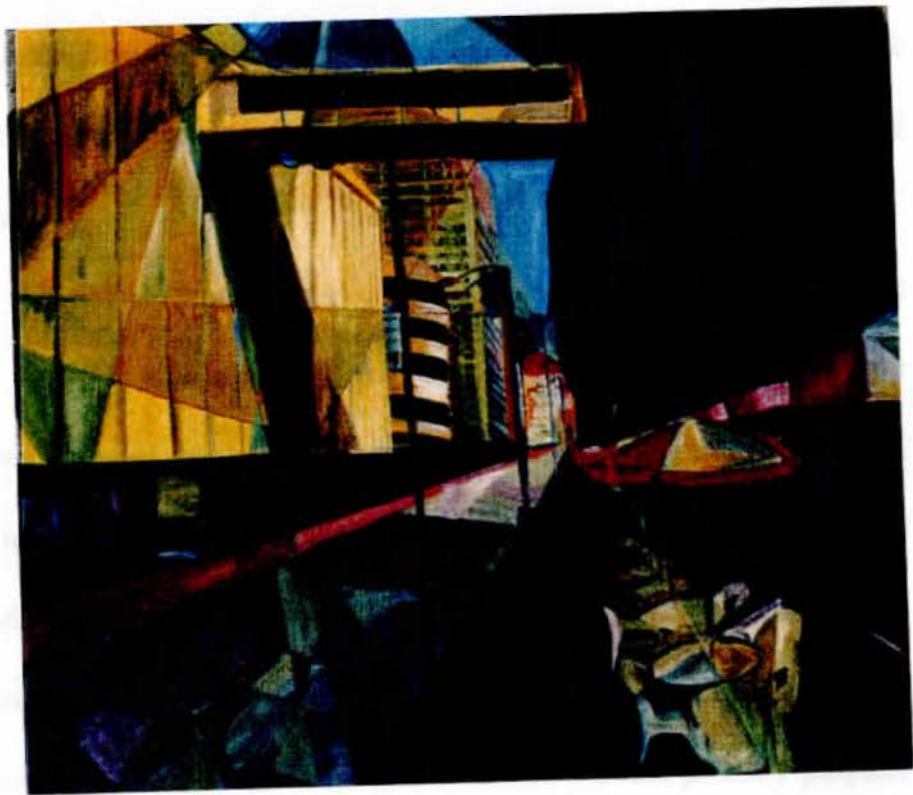


Fig.11

The Sunday Morning at Downtown

oil on linen, 42" x 28"

1994

The Gateway Arch of St. Louis has always been a great sign to represent the spirit of St. Louis. Consisting of 91 acres of manicured lawns and trees surrounding the Gateway Arch, this almost always the breezy spot offers an excellent view of the Mississippi River. I enjoyed taking a ride to the top of arch and had an aerial view of the downtown. I have been on the top of arch at least 7 times, finally I decided to paint an aerial view of downtown for myself.

I did not paint a lot of crossing lines for this painting (fig. 12) as I done on the others. I use surrealistic color to introduce the viewer to exam the city of St. Louis from a brand new direction that has never been discovered before. To stimulate the viewer's piece of mind and to share a diversity of vision that has represented the ordinary city. Furthermore, to explore the hidden side of the city as well as the to detect the mind of the viewer was the primary purpose of this art work. After all, we can never underestimate the potential of mind extension .

I could not think a good title for this painting, so I still leave more space for me to think more about this painting. That is what I really want to do for this painting.



Fig.12

Untitled

oil on linen, 40" x 44"

1994

I always envy that most American families have a big yard, but in Taiwan buy little land can costs a lot, only the very rich family can have their own yard. Our family has never been among the rich, we only have one verandah outside of our home which is on the sixth floor of a big apartment complex. My mother planted different kinds of flowers on the verandah. Of course, she plants one of her favor flowers, the orchid. She calls her verandah the garden of orchids.

When I saw that some one planted orchids in their yard, during a drive on Delmar Blvd., it reminded me of my mom's little orchid garden on our little verandah. It gave me an idea of painting those orchid plants.

I did not use as many crossing lines on this painting which I called "*Mom's Orchid*" (fig. 13). I have the straight lines all over the painting and each area between the straight lines I show the different textures of different material, I tried to paint the texture of each area like Chinese painting, pastel drawing, and watercolor by using oil paint. It's kind of good example about who I am.

I am a Chinese, who had a great-grand mother from Holland. I was born raised in Taiwan and learned everything I could about

our culture. Then I came to the United States of America at age 18, I started to absorb the western culture from the schools I went to and to absorb the culture from the experience while I stay here.

For all of my background, I felt that I am a part of this painting. I am a person who has both the western and eastern thinking, sometime I feel confused. Sometimes I can find an equilibrium between these totally different cultures which can help me find a footing . All of these experiences became the intention for this painting. I want to show how I found the equilibrium from the western and eastern world. Therefore, I painted the eastern painting and western painting texture together in this painting. The intention of this painting is not just a colorful flower painting any more, it has more consciousness presentation from the painting it own language.



Fig. 13

Mom's Orchid

oil on canvas, 24'' x26''

1994

Conclusion

All of the works in this graduate exhibition are part of my personal experience for the years I have stayed in the United States of America. It is not a long life experience or a dramatic life experience, it is also not a very remarkable experience, but the important thing for my paintings and for my presentation of my works in this thesis is truehearted and sincere.

For me, I always think the most important rational quality for an artist is sincerity, to face himself/herself, and to find a good way to present his/her experience and thinking in their work. That is what I tried to do and will keep doing it to pursue the creation of advanced art work.

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1994 Annual Student Show at Handren Gallery, Harmon Hall,
Lindenwood College (Had Third Place award for one of
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1993 Group Art Show at Wong Culture Gallery, Columbia
College

1992 Annual Student Show at Columbia College.

1990 Won the First and Second Place in the City Student Art
Competition, Kaoshiung, Taiwan

1990 Annual Student Show for the City Student Art
competition, Kaoshiung, Taiwan