

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Zhongyu Yuan

Interviewed by Yang Li



Starting May 10, you can view work by students in the MFA graduating class on the website 2021.CCAMFA.art and in the [Class of 2021 Showcase](#).

Works in this series were written by students in Glen Helfand and Maria Porges' respective graduate writing seminars this past fall and spring.

Yang Li: What kind of materials do you like to use?

Zhongyu Yuan: All the materials I use are fragile, like paper or tree branches. I don't expect my work will last for a long period of time. I prefer not to keep or store it. I'll find the material to replicate my work if I need to.

YL: Have you ever experienced not having an audience for your artwork?

ZY: There was once when I was working on *Donburi*. I'm the only audience for this work. But even if there is no one, no audience is another form of 'audience'. It also creates an experience. I think my experience is always the essential part of an artwork.



Free Range Visitor, 2020. Mixed media installation.



Free Range Visitor (detail), 2020. Mixed media installation.

Albert Camus' philosophical concepts of existentialism and absurdism inspire me, as well as traditional Eastern practices like Zen. For example, haiku poems are the pure observation of reality, not rhetoric with tons of fancy words. These ideas create my understanding of art, because they show a reality created by artists. The only meaning of this reality, I believe, is experience. It could be the experience of both the audience and artists.

YL: People are experiencing loneliness at present, because they are not interacting with others. Do you think people who see art online would get more out of it if they saw the same artworks in person?

ZY: I think if you see works in a digital version it is different. I really like how Tarkovsky, the Russian film director, creates a period and makes people experience this period by simulating a sequence of reality, but it's slightly different from the real reality, which fulfills the audience's memory. It is an experience of watching and remembering. And I think installation is a perfect way to express this idea. Installations include a space, no



With Light, No Wind, 2021. Mixed media installation.

matter if it is physical or digital, and once people see it, it will fill a part of their memory. Even if you hate it, it creates an experience in your memory. If you don't remember it, this kind of absence is also an experience.

Like Camus said in his 1942 book *The Stranger*, people living in contemporary society are more isolated, and everyone's a stranger to another. I don't think there is a way to break the boundaries between two individuals. The world outside their consciousness is objective. From an individual perspective, they know that they are isolated, but everyone does, which makes this isolation not that important. And back to my central concept, what is the most important? Experience.

YL: It seems Camus has had a significant impact on your art practice. Do you have any ongoing works you could share?

ZY: Absolutely. I'm using clothes hangers, with some branches. I plan to do many pieces like this with hangers in various colors and pieces of stained glass.



Timid Spectre, 2019. Mixed media installation.