

PROFILE

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Ying Gu

by Karl Daum



Ying Gu

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.



trivia - breathe a sigh of relief

i rana bath the other day. i thought it would make me feel better. the water at first was soothing, and my heart rate calmed, and i felt so fatigued that i lay down and fell asleep. i awoke choking on water and pulled myself up, gasping for a deep breath, panicking. i would fallen asleep and slipped under the water. the bath was cold and it would gotten dark outside and inside, and i would failed to turn on the light.

there i was, choking on water, struggling for a breath, sitting up in the bath in a dark room. and it was the most interesting thing to happen to me all week.

when i dream, i dream of flying. it doesnt matter where. i just look at everything from above, free, going any direction the wind can carry me. i fly over cities and villages and green hilld and valleys. i fly and i keep flying until i wake up and wish to go back. if i was to use a similar animalistic analogy for how i am now, i am more like a rat in a cage, waiting for an experiment to happen. i am waiting for nothing at all but it seems like something is coming, way down the tracks. i long to fly again.

Breathe a Sigh of Relief, 2021. Digital Photography, Typewritten Print.



trivia - craving

it was a surreal experience, having never witnessed anything like this in my life. i was constantly thinking about the end of the world or an apocalypse of some sort of where i would have to fight the physical battle of survival.

it was a strange and eerie feeling. i did not know what was going on in the outside world, and i was freaked out all the time. time was also moving slowly - or maybe i was losing the sense of time. i was accustomed to a fast-paced life, and the lockdown had brought it to a standstill.

i felt an insuplicable constant craving for food. it gave me a unique pleasure when there was a lot of food in the fridge and strangely i felt a strong sense of fear when some part of it was empty. time was moving slowly and i was struggling for survival.

i did not know how much time had passed or how much longer i would have to stay, now did i know how to satisfy my cravings if there was nothing to be found. all of these thoughts were driving me crazy, without anyone to calm me down.

Craving, 2020. Digital Photography, Typewritten Print.

For Ying Gu, portraiture is a complex reenactment that implicates the artist, the subject, the model, and the audience in one story. Born in Japan and raised in China, Gu says her practice changed when she moved to the United States at 17—an experience which opened her up to sharing stories and “being a listener and a responder.” In her current project, *Everybody Has a Secret*, text conversations, written accounts, and photography reconstruct the past.

Gu’s digital portraits span multiple frames. Before each shoot, the artist talks with her subject about their dreams, phobias, and traumas. These memories become her source material. She then works with a model to reenact the memory, adding her own aesthetic interventions to link the setting’s visual elements to the memory’s ethereal descriptors.

In *The Chaser*, the artist reconstructs a friend's recurring dream caused by unresolved childhood trauma. Gu's model, wrapped in plastic, hangs from a coat hanger off a drainpipe. In several successive images, the model descends a stairwell. Gu alters the images digitally, moving textures from the surrounding architecture until the visual plane is disrupted like a migraine aura.

Another work takes on the topic of a friend's overdose. The claustrophobic composition is littered with drug paraphernalia, pills, and dolls. Six images shift tonally from an institutional blue to an anxious red in the last two frames, where she encrusts her model in foil and positions her blind-folded before a mirror.

In this period of heightened anxiety, another series reenacts a friend's paranoia over having enough to survive at the beginning of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. The model wears a paper grocery bag over her head while searching the kitchen for food. Gu intentionally positions the camera in a way that suggests surveillance. In all of the artist's works, "You feel like something is watching you," she remarks.



Top to Bottom: *The Chaser*, 2020. Digital Photography, Typewritten Print;
Alice In Wonderland, 2019. Digital Photography, Typewritten Print.