

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Zhuojun (Vine) Chen

by Kristen Wawruck



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.

Zhuojun (Vine) Chen is a sculptor whose practice has recently made a leap from the tactile to the digital. The constraints of the current health crisis led to a loss of studio space and materials, while travel restrictions have kept Shenzhen-raised, London-educated Chen in her Pacifica, CA home studio. Unexpectedly, however, reconnecting virtually with friends new and old via online games has also opened up a plethora of new possibilities for art-making. With her own 3D printers, Chen has been creating a new world of figures situated in the complex history of anime, comic, and gaming culture—otherwise known as “ACG.”



Top to Bottom: *Mushroom 1*, 2020; *Mushroom 2*, 2020. Mix Media.



DMB, 2021. Digital modeling.

Chen describes the online role-playing game communities of Final Fantasy and others as inspiring her to open up her thinking about art-making. Through the games, Chen has connected with friends in non-artistic careers whose energy and creativity have motivated her to engage deeper with ACG subcultures. As a younger person once heavily immersed in this and other otaku media, Chen initially kept these interests separate from



Untitled, 2020. Mix Media.

that of her art-making. In rediscovering a sense of community over the last year, these boundaries have since dissolved, and Chen's new works are focused on creating new characters to exist in ACG worlds. These figures embody characteristics rarely seen in more mainstream platforms. Here, Chen is exploring the Japanese anime subculture yaoi, in which male-male romance and androgyny are key attributes.

In exploring these subcultural areas—while embracing what was once a self-relegated hobby into her regular art practice—Chen's new works are a complex study in self-discovery and identification. Her characters directly confront the viewer with imagery that has been marginalized in the countries of their origin (namely Japan, China, and South Korea), despite the co-optation and sanitization of ACG culture by big business. Her subversive, toy-sized printed sculptures will soon take on new life-sized dimensions.