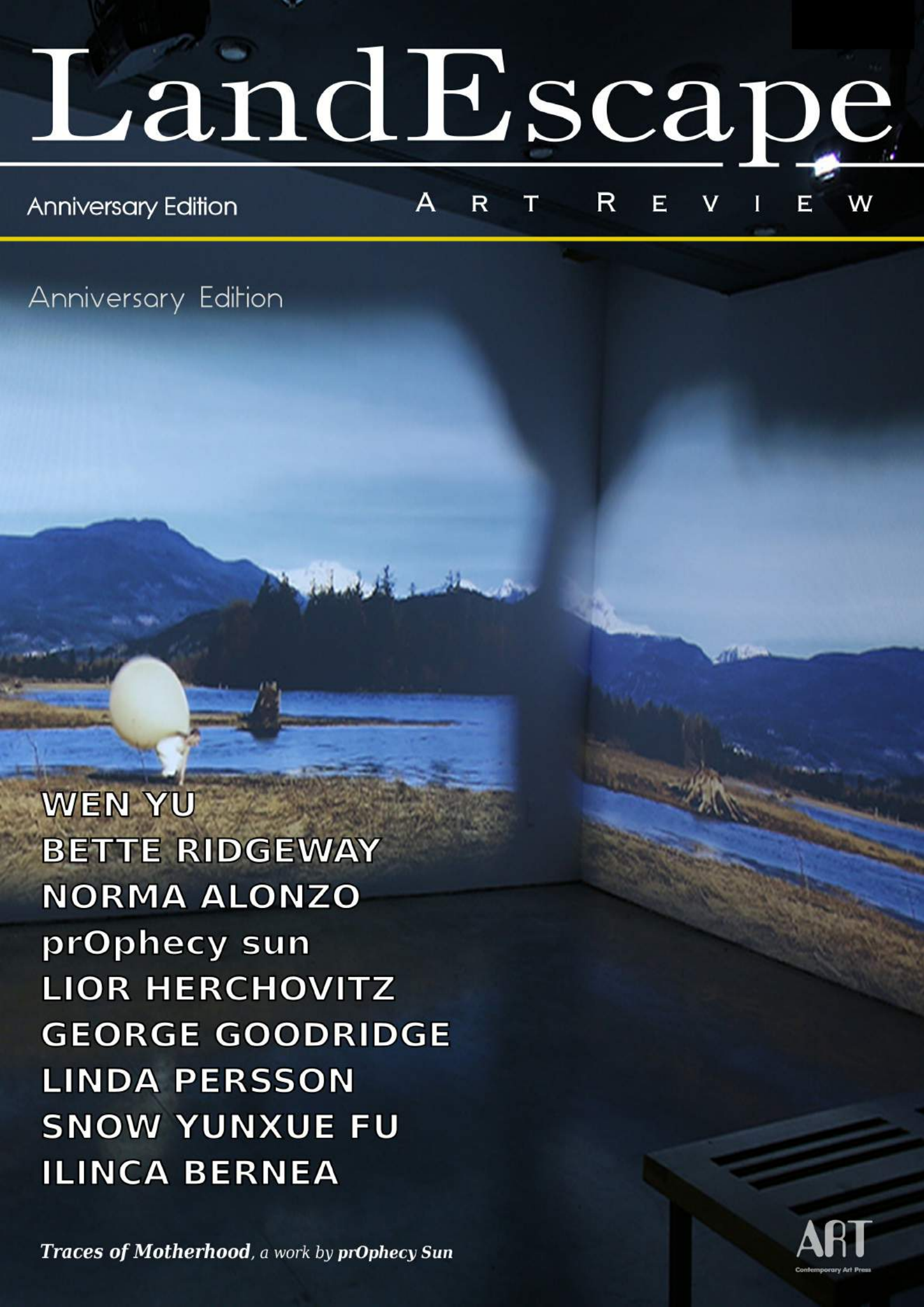


LandEscape

Anniversary Edition

A R T R E V I E W

Anniversary Edition



WEN YU
BETTE RIDGEWAY
NORMA ALONZO
prOphecy sun
LIOR HERCHOVITZ
GEORGE GOODRIDGE
LINDA PERSSON
SNOW YUNXUE FU
ILINCA BERNEA

Traces of Motherhood, a work by **prOphecy Sun**

ART
Contemporary Art Press

Wen Yu

Lives and works in Boston, MA, USA

An artist's statement

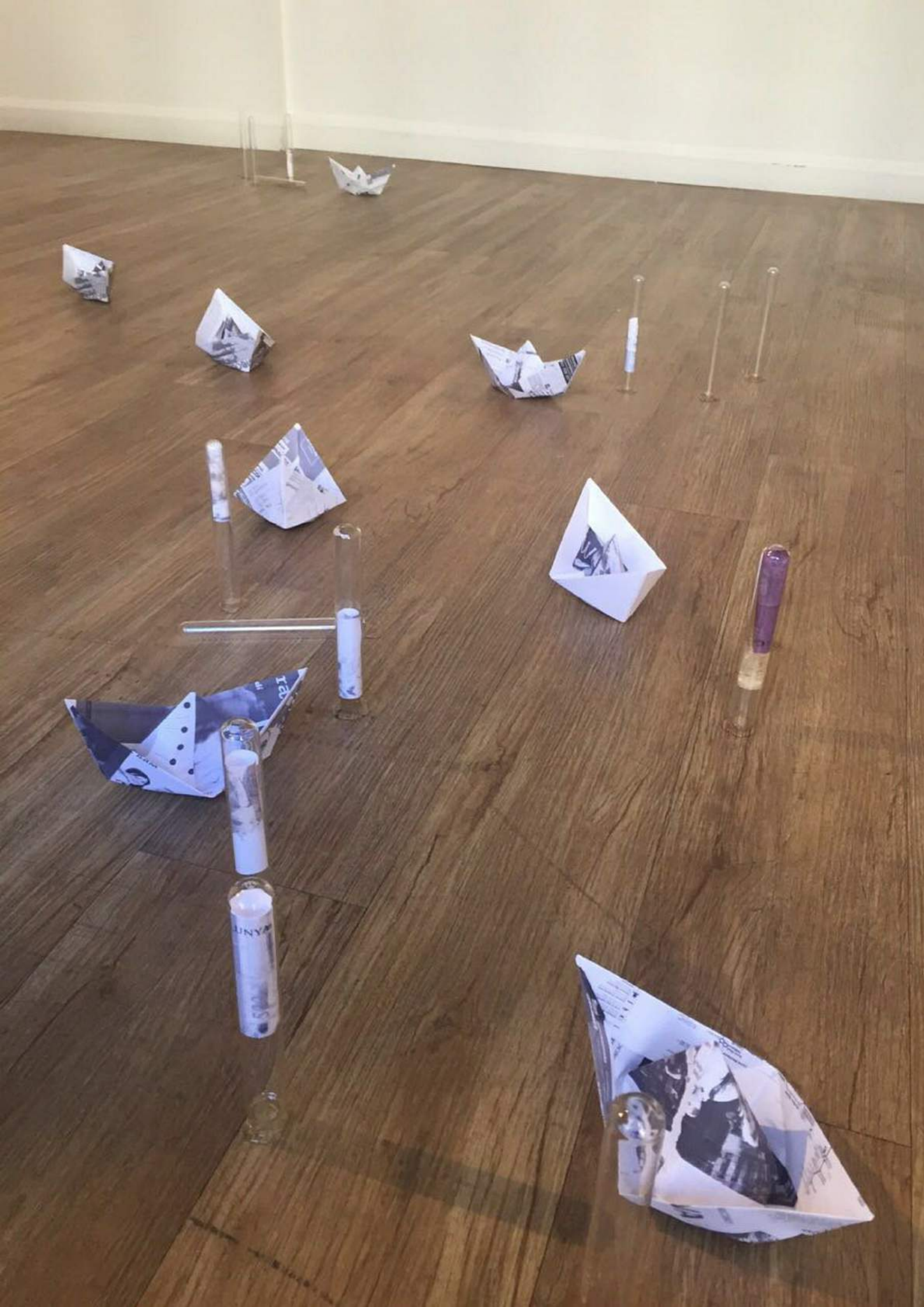
My paintings feature abstract cityscapes that capture my vision of ongoing urbanization through exploring both the composition and the relationship between different layers. Growing up in Suzhou, China, I witnessed radical changes in my hometown as it has developed from an ancient city to a contemporary business hub. However, reminiscing about the traditional architecture in Suzhou still remains in my mind. After moving to San Francisco over three years ago, the post-modern architectures (de Young Museum, MOMA, Contemporary Jewish Museum) are further inspired my interests in geometric shapes. The urban life experience in the two cities enables me to mirror a city's transformation. It stays with me, and come alive in my paintings where I shape them on the canvas.

My original inspiration was a combination of Bach's fugues, traditional Chinese gardens in Suzhou and structural elements of post-modern architectures. The visual language (repetition elements) of those architectures becomes a rhythm. Inspired by Bach's music that I practiced in my childhood on the piano, I imbued the idea of musical score into my work as a way to see the architectural rhythm. Meanwhile, building those forms on wood is somehow connected to the feeling of urban construction. Transferring the impression of the traditional and modern

architect by creating gestural line drawings, an imaginary space is mapped out with different perspectives. Deeply influenced by my graphic design background as an undergraduate, I am interested in researching compositions that could unify all the distinctive elements in my work. Also, my training as a designer has helped me develop my preference for creating a subtle and clean surface.

Painting is a way of working in a system where every painting contains numerous layers that are carefully applied. From an uncontrolled watery under painting to intentional strict geometric shapes made by silkscreen, these paintings reflect my thinking path. The geometric patterns and the organic movements showcase contrasts which may represent the twisted opposites and in an urban environment. Having tried out many designs in computer software, this process-based approach of silkscreen allows me to sense the space and composition physically. Several of my paintings use grids as a conceptual indication to calculate time and imply changes. This body of work is executed on wood with mixed media. Some of the pieces are diptychs that create conversations among each other. Although the whole process is strictly controlled, I paint with an empty mind.

Wen Yu



LandEscape meets

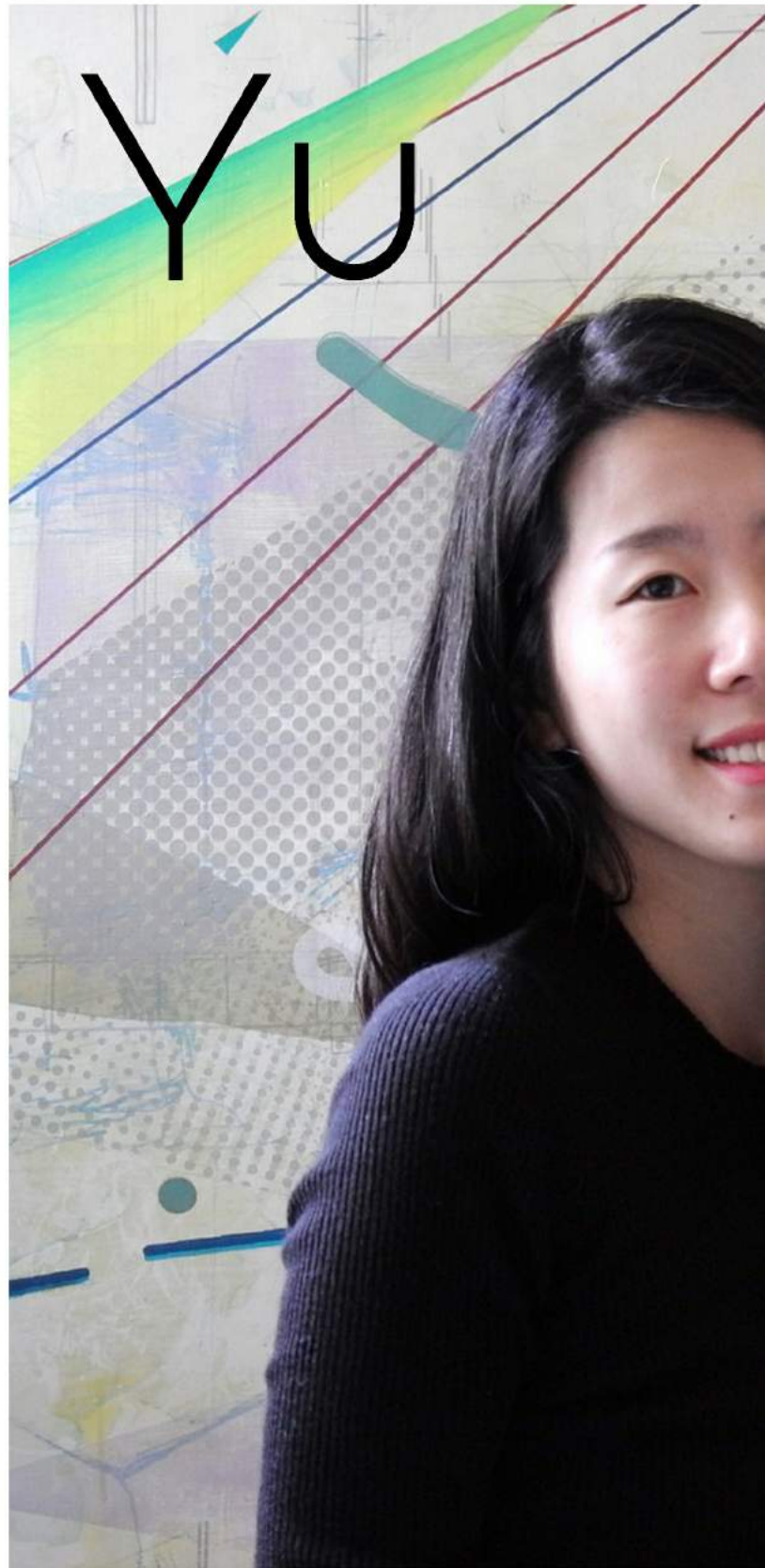
Wen

An interview by **Josh Ryder**, curator
and **Katherine Williams**, curator
landescape@europe.com

Moving from Bach's fugues, traditional Chinese gardens in Suzhou and structural elements of post-modern architectures, artist Wen Yu's work deviates from traditional trajectory to explore unexpected synergies between different cultural heritages: in her body of works that we'll be discussing in the following pages, she triggers both the perceptual and cultural parameters of the spectatorship, to provide them with such a multilayered experience: we are very pleased to introduce our readers to her stimulating and multifaceted artistic production.

Hello Wen and welcome to LandEscape: we would start this interview with a couple of questions about your background.

You have a solid formal training and after having earned your BA of Visual Communication from Soochow University, you moved to the United States to nurture your education with a MFA of Fine Art / Painting from the Academy of Art University of San Francisco and with a MS of Visual Arts Administration, that you recently received from Boston University: how did these experiences influenced your evolution as an artist and how does the relationship between your cultural substratum due to your Chinese roots and your







current life in the United States inform the way you relate yourself to art making?

For me, it is a way to demystifying the process of art-making and art practice. I have been pushing myself to explore the boundary of art. I hesitate to call myself as an artist but rather an art practitioner.

I am always eager to know the nature of the system and how it runs.

My educational track from a visual communication to fine art is a significant change although they all fall into the board category of art.

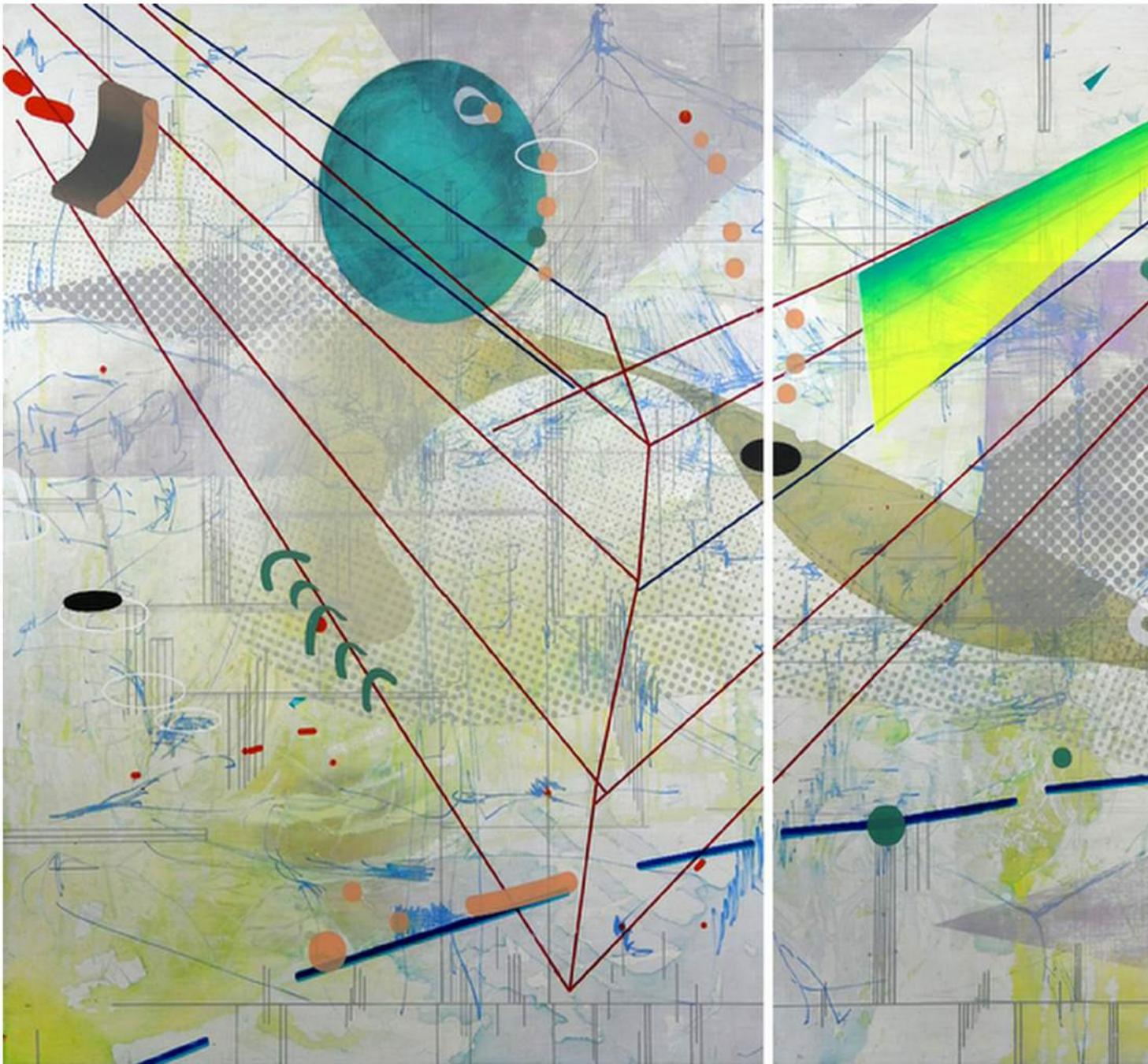
Majorly it is because I no longer think about the



functionality of the work I produce but rather the inherent meaning I am going to deliver. However, I am able to carry on the skills acquired from visual communication in terms of design, layout and software skills. My college is one of the top 5% research universities in China and through this degree I have gained extensive

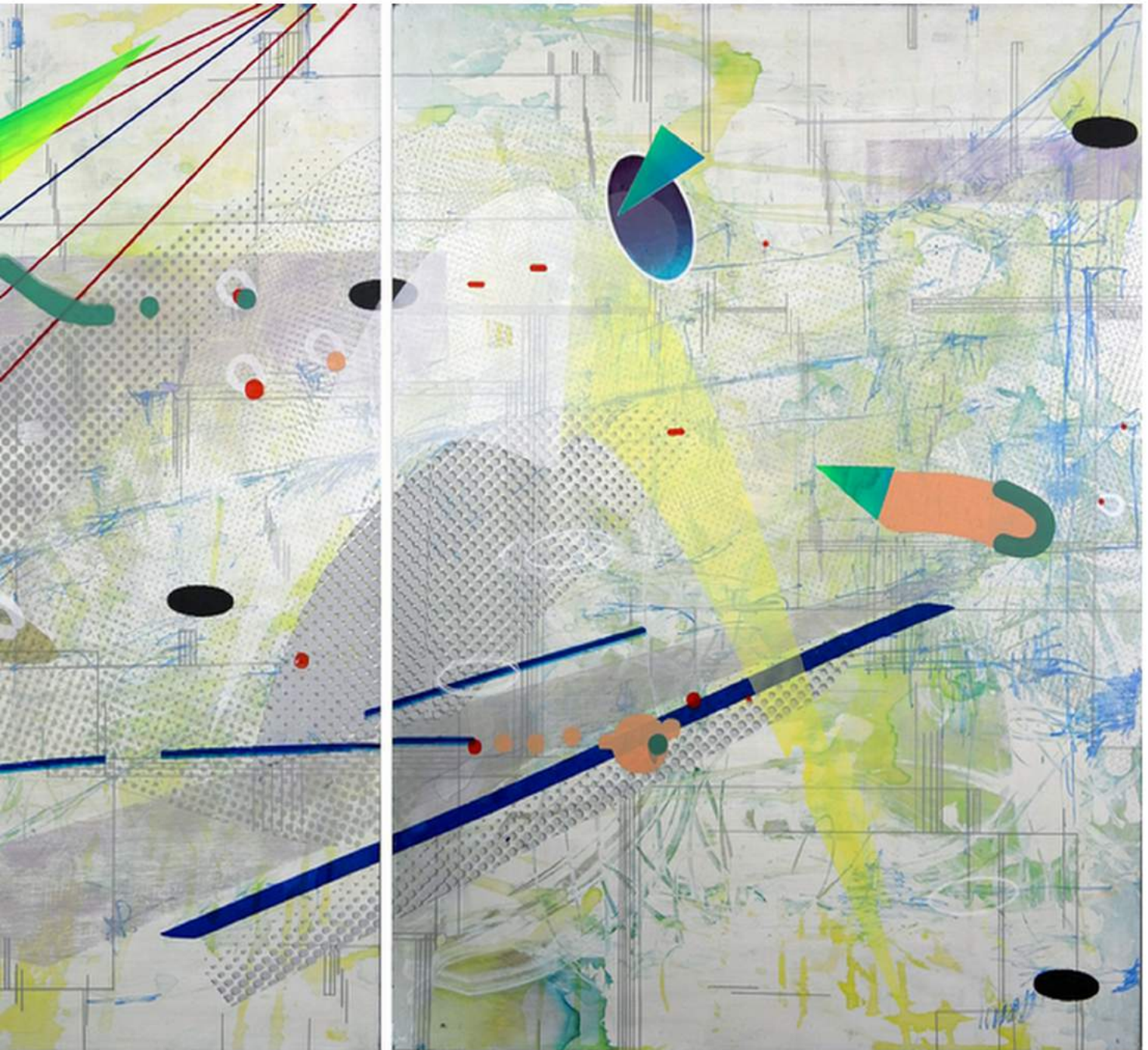
experience in technology/science and further understood the importance of stimulating communication between people.

I moved to Boston two years ago to pursue my second master degree in Arts Administration. The program is great in terms of offering an all-rounded



insights of the nonprofit art organizations in the US. I am able to understand and observe the operations of many well-known art organizations as well as small-scale one. To be honest it is not a satisfying experience by my measure. It is the point that the moment you realize the art ecosystem runs as a mature industry, which is determined by power and

capital. It follows every specific rules made by people who have the right to speak- no different from any political games. I feel sad about it because artists and art students have to fit themselves into the institution's criticism. While it is not a new observation, I do see a lot of my peers still consider

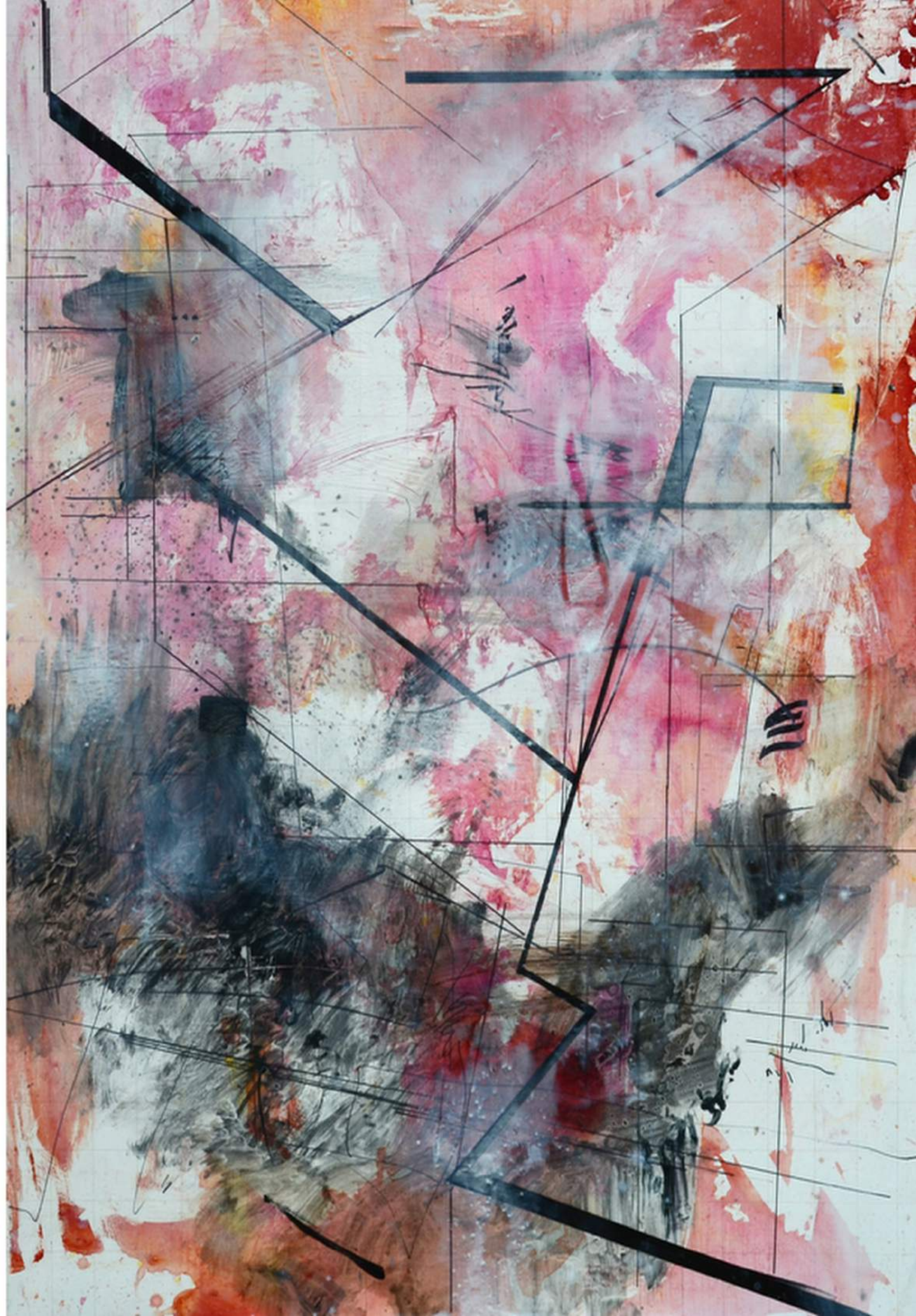


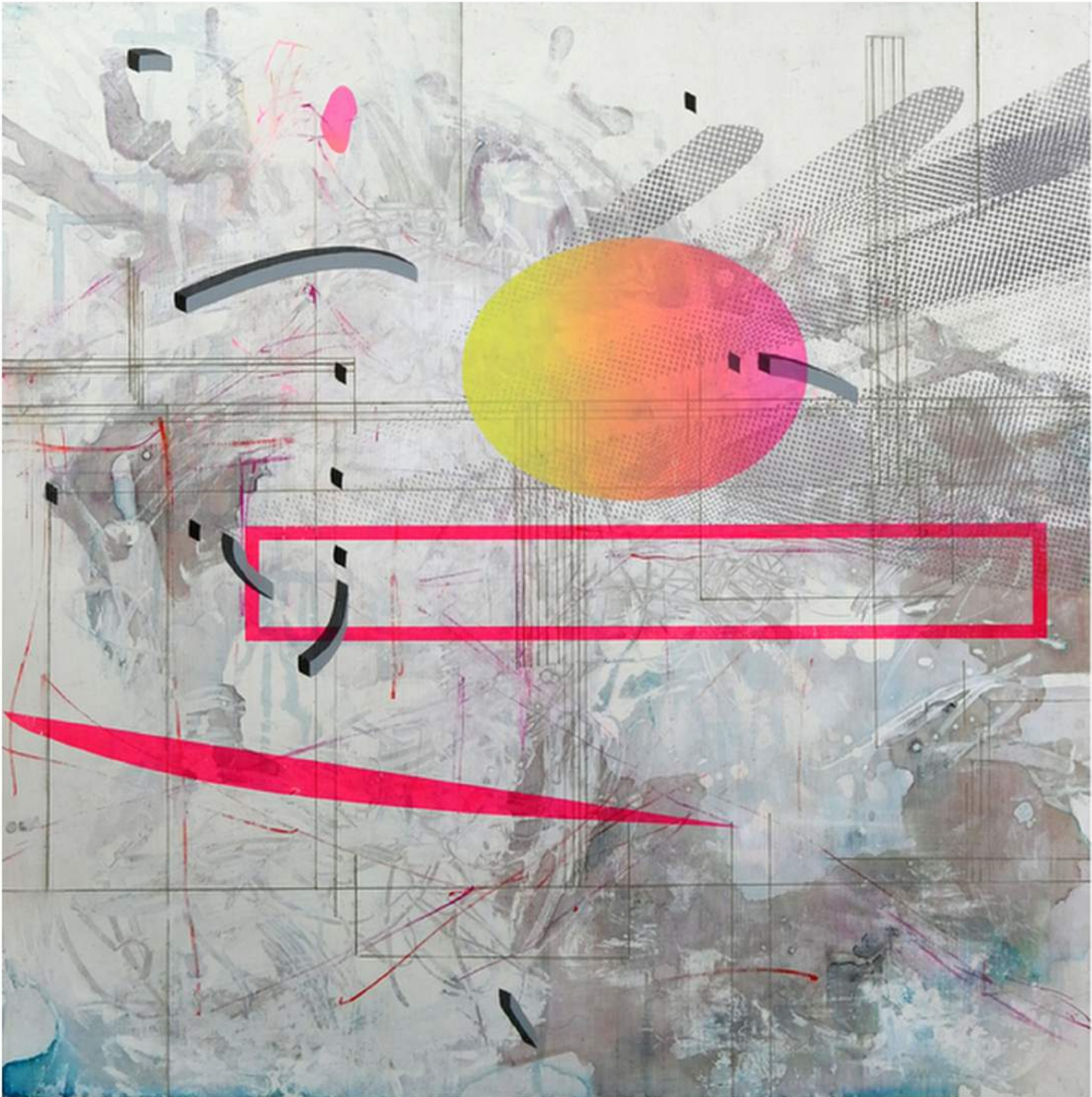
those institutions/galleries as sacred niches and altars.

I have been living in the US for almost eight years since my early 20's. The American cultural influences definitely rub off on me such as free expression, independence and creativity. For quite a

while I don't have a sense of belonging due to my relocation experience and/or my natural detachments. My whole family is still living in China but it seems like my life is here in the States (study, work, relationships..). I think the physical experience of moving away from my roots inspire me to ponder deeply on my childhood experience







as well as family influences and how those memory fragments shape who I am and the decisions I have made. And I always wonder what kind of life and person I would be if I didn't come to the US because. In short, my intercultural experience does

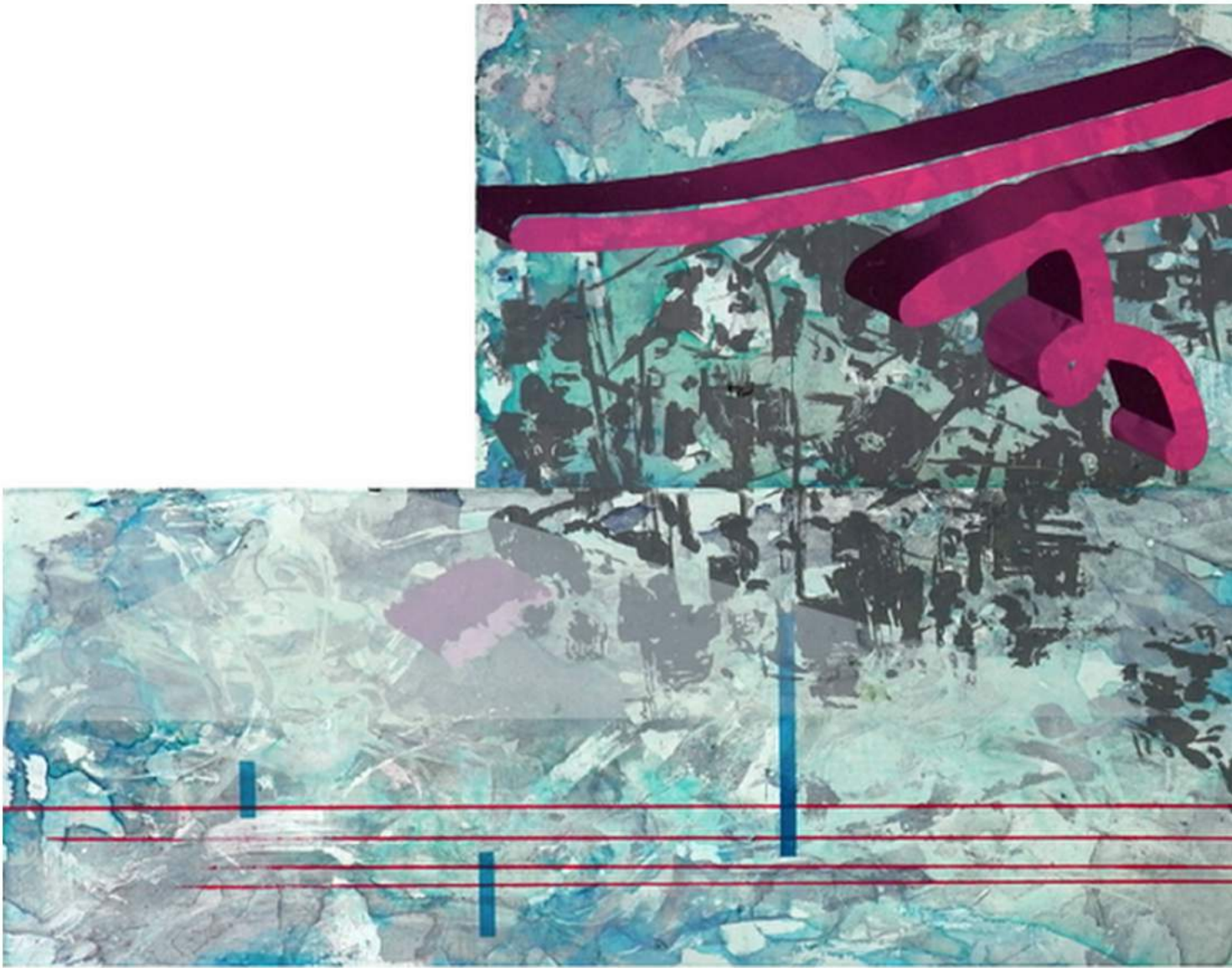
not specifically direct my artistic style (it is something unforeseeable) but slowly change the way I think, perform.

The body of works that we have selected for this



special edition of *LandEscape* and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article has at once captured our attention for the way you provided your insightful inquiry into *the idea of musical*

score into work as a way to see the architectural rhythm with such autonomous aesthetics: before starting to elaborate about your production, we would suggest to our readers to visit <https://www.wen-yu.org> in order to get a synoptic

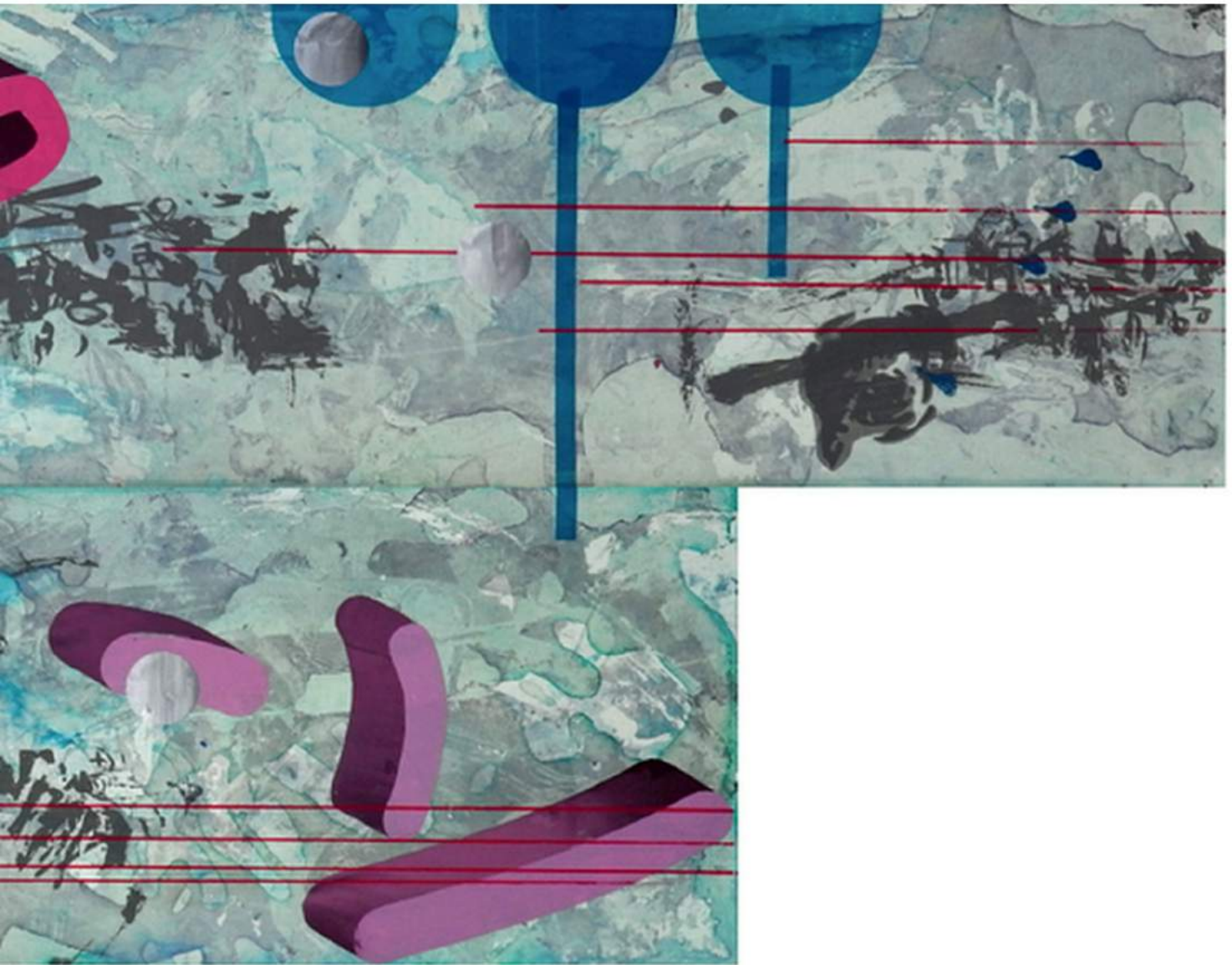


view of your work. In the meanwhile, we would like to ask you if do you think that there are any *central ideas* that connect all of your work as an artist.

Coming from the background of a multimedia artist, my goal is to create projects that integrate art, story-telling and tangible material to evoke sensation through physical interaction. My works explore the line between mediums, the difference between mechanical and handcraft and the transition between 2D surfaces and 3D spaces. As a nonimmigrant visa holder who has been trying to

navigate through a new culture, language and place, my intention is to present the “manifold” through exploring physical and theatrical dimensions. I enjoy trying out new materials, languages and forms to express my concepts.

Your approach seems to be very analytical, but although your whole process is strictly controlled, you have remarked that you paint *with an empty mind*: how much importance does play improvisation in your process? In particular, once you have started to work to a piece do you like *spontaneity* or do you later schedule the details?



I make a rough plan before I start each piece and in between every procedure. I guess the habit is inherited from my dad who is a surgeon as well as my design background. However, I think a piece of painting (include the subsequent process) is way too subtle and sensitive that won't be able to follow the plan strictly.

My plan serves as an instruction/ direction of my art-making methodology, although I do go back to the drawing board to review my original ideas often. It is like when you are listening to a classical music piece, you don't care so much about the

structures and techniques, but rather let the music follows into you.

Painting is a way of working in a system where every painting contains numerous layers that are carefully applied. For my large-scale silk-screen pieces, I design the geometric patterns ahead of time in computer software, transfer onto screens and make hundreds of registration marks on panels. The laborious process ensures me to have the close enough design for my pieces. But sometimes I have let the controlling mindset go in order to allow the unexpected beauty of the handcrafts (errors and mistakes).

We have really appreciated the relationship between such *thoughtful nuances* and *rigorous sense of geometry* :that marks out your artworks, that also show that *vivacious tones* are not strictly indispensable to create tension and dynamics. How did you come about settling on your color palette? And how much does your own psychological make-up determine the nuances of tones you decide to use in a piece and in particular, how do you develop a painting's texture?

Actually, I like dark tones in my real life especially the gloomy color palettes. My photography is usually colorless. I go for a boarder range of palettes for my paintings because I simply like the freedom to choose between colors, to explore different combinations. I consider switching palette as a methodical game to challenge myself in order to come up with new solutions. In a way, it is totally random, in another way force myself to use the color I am not comfortable with. I also feel a strange satisfaction to go for the opposites just like similar situations I encounter in real life.

Textures are key factors to blend spectators into my works. I have a notebook with all kinds of textures I made as a way to practice. A notebook is a dictionary of textures. This is my way of learning technics of making marks and I imagine myself as a machine that is taught by a database. The process of developing marks/textures onto a specific piece is compatible with playing GO. You have to arrange your chess pieces in the overall layout with vision, instinct and care. Sometimes it is painstakingly to develop a mark with respect to the aesthetic quality, position and materials.

We daresay that your art practice also challenges an inner cultural debate between heritage from the past and traditions that carry on to this day: we like the way your approach creates such insightful synergy between Western and Eastern cultural heritages: as you have remarked once, your original inspiration was a combination of *Bach's fugues*, *traditional Chinese gardens in Suzhou* and *structural elements of post-modern architectures*. Do you think that there's still a contrast between Tradition and Contemporariness? Or there's an interstitial area









where these apparently opposite elements could produce such a proficient synergy?

I don't think there is much difference between those elements and since they are equally important for my pieces. The ideas of tradition and contemporary are concepts defined by the linear history. They are defined in such way for the reason that it is close to our tradition of tightening knots to calculate the length of time. I believe the two seemingly opposite ideas are "spots" exist in different dimensions and potentially they could have limitless possibilities to pose effects on each other ($1+1>2$, $1+1=2$, $1+1<2$, $1-1<2\dots$). What I am trying to clarify here is to reject the idea of "opposite" for the reason that it is taking the meanings too literally. I suggest we think about the two concepts as spheres of a manifold that have the ultimate likelihoods to intersect, dwindle and/or grow.

***You Must Build A Boat* is a successful attempt to juxtapose the ideas of nonviolence protest and the tentative freedom: Mexican artist Gabriel Orozco once stated, "the artist's role differs depending on which part of the world you're in. It depends on the political system you're living under". Not to mention that almost everything, ranging from Caravaggio's Inspiration of Saint Matthew to Joep van Lieshout's works, could be considered political, do you think that your works is *political*, in a certain sense? what could be in your opinion the role of Art in order to sensitize the viewers in our unstable contemporary age? In particular, would you tell us if you think that your being woman provides your artistic research with some *special value*?**

I hesitate to use the word "political" because it sounds an overused works to me. There are a lot of artists working with political subject matters in China because of the influence of radical social-political changes of the country. Without a real understanding of "politic", I consider those works as weak images. What I truly care about is the methodology and ability to convey an idea under a specific context.

It is political in the sense of being truthful. I am not denying the overwhelming political power imposing on everyone living in the society, but I do think there are many other perspectives to carve around, for example, individuality and commonality, I think the role of art







should be criticizing. Nowadays, art becomes a fancy lifestyle, a business and an adventurous experience that continuously be replaced. The value of art is diminishing and it becomes a type of craftsmanship please viewers. However art is a serious activity because it reflects the human society, it keeps us to be awake in the world without standards.

No, I think it is the same for all genders. Nothing special, everyone has their different personal approaches.

We like the ambivalent quality of *You Must Build A Boat*, a project inspired from your everyday observations while visiting and living in the city of Barcelona, that walks your spectatorship through the liminal area where the concepts of reality and



the sphere of imagination: how do you view *the relationship between reality and imagination* playing within your works? In particular, how much *everyday life's experience* does fuel your creativity?

I observe my life and soundings intentionally. I am sensitive to the details of people, architectures and natural environments. There is a Chinese saying,

leave it open-ended, which describes a person expresses himself/herself in an ambiguous style. I am that kind of person in life.

So it is natural for me to transform my life experience into something different in order to avoid the direct translation. I also believe there is a universal sensibility in great works regardless the change forms. I would like my work to be at that point.



But what is “everyday life’s experience”? To me, it relates to physiological activities and philosophical reflections, not so much about the immediate emotion and circumstances. I am looking at the residues remains on the filter paper.

We like the way, rather than attempting to establish any *univocal sense*, you seem to address the viewers to elaborate *personal associations*:

would you tell us how much important is for you that the spectatorship elaborate personal meanings?

I care a lot whether they could feel the way I feel, response to the feeling I am offering. Although it is such an individual experience, as I talked previously, I believe the universal sensibility exists in art which is deliverable. For instance, sex, in general, is a

good feeling to everyone. But everyone has different preferences to make the experience individual to them. That is what the spectators should build upon in addition to what I strive to convey.

Over the years your works have been showcased in several occasions and you are going to have a solo at the Piano Craft Gallery, in Boston. One of the hallmarks of your practice is the capability to create *direct involvement* with the viewers, who are urged to evolve from a condition of mere spectatorship. So before leaving this conversation we would like to pose a question about the nature of the relationship of your art with your audience. Do you consider the issue of audience reception as being a crucial component of your decision-making process, in terms of what type of language is used in a particular context?

I contemplate about the reaction of my audiences in different phases of my process. Nonetheless, there is an unavoidable gap between you and the spectators. In general, I am not giving up the opportunity to explore methods to engage people. Somehow the process is similar to teaching- help them gauge a new logical system they are not aware yet. And language is just the carrier of information.

In terms of the language itself, I get the influence from my mom, who is a professor in English literature. I was underexposed to western context and narrative from an early age because of my mom was always trying to teach me not only the language, but also the history, culture and custom. What fascinates me from early on is the orthography of the English language, which you can spell words by the sounds pronounced. Doing such thing in Chinese is impossible. The languages I am using in my art is a modular construction method that put essential fragments of information together to reach an developed concept. In such way, my approach is closer to the western rhetoric tradition. In addition, my Chinese background provokes me to embed "Chi" as intangible element, which is a flow of spirit that enhances the state of mind, within my work.

Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Wen. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How

do you see your work evolving?

I am working on a photography and drawing project called "Killed by Jupiter", which is an observation of life, sexuality and potential research on astronomical phenomenons. I enjoy the title of the project because it feels so tragic, erotic and mysterious. There are many interesting scientific facts of the planet Jupiter, for example, it is a gas giant doesn't have a true surface to be landed and the composition is similar to that of the Sun. In Mythology, Jupiter is the supreme god of the Roman pantheon, who distributes laws, controls the realm and makes his will known through oracles. The masculinity and vulnerability appear at the same time that intrigue me to interpret the scientific phenomenon into artistic imagination.

I am also doing some mixed media works with stones. The project shows the trajectory of what "I" picked out from my cognitive system and how much of them get translated and be allowed spectators to enter. It comes from three pieces of information: the artificial rock hills in Classical Chinese gardens, the visceral visual experience of eating surrey videos with my dad in my early childhood and the coexisting detentions. The project is a combination of 2D works and installation that reflects the microscopic human body, erosion of time and subtle transitions of different dimensions. The project shows my interest in natural elements, mythology and topology, which is demonstrated through the drawings, collages and personal photographs and further connected by shades, lines, grids and dots.

My residency in Spain this August will be an interactive project that offers a blending experience of computer programming, story-telling and puppet design collaborate with kids and adults in finding opposing ideas/forces in daily life and twisting the fixed thinking path. I am going to involve the project with artists and engineers in the US and hopefully with people around the world.

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