
My Dear Friend, Time

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Abstract

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Photomedia

I like thinking that my work instigates performance; it encourages viewers to perform in a multivalent emotional collaboration with it. I create immersive, site-specific installations in all media—painting, drawing, sculpture, architecture, furniture, murals, video, et al—that create dreamlike, fictional spaces that disrupt reality and present more questions than they answer. While I turn to art as a means of resolving my own identity—allowing my very private inner thoughts and questions to become public—I hope that the humble, honest manner of sharing the work serves viewers by opening up similar opportunities for reverie.

I believe that if something exists in the mind, it exists in the world, the trouble seems to only come when we try to reify it. Apparently I like making trouble.

Dear friend, time;

Thank you for your generosity,

You gave me everything I have now.

I know,

From the very beginning, I came here with nothing,

Finally I will also leave here with nothing.

Sometime I really wish you weren't so much like an immature child,

So easily angered and changing your mind;

Taking away from my side the emotion and life I cherished.

But I know,

If you weren't so childish and immature,

I wouldn't get your generous protection.

If I was given one chance to go back to the past

Maybe I will choose to never come to the earth

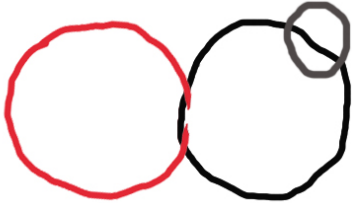
Yet even so I am already so lucky

It is just that I am still unsure,

Facing everything in life,

I really am ready.

(One)



I silently stand behind you, I nervously look at you mechanically draw a life size drawing. Xiao Mao is sitting in the corner of the sofa; very alert looking to all four sides.

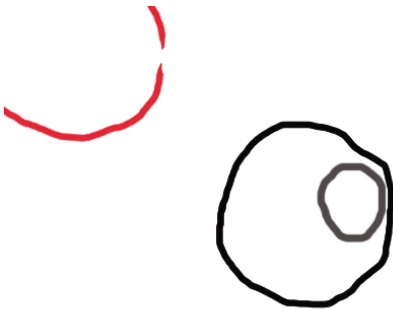
Its very obvious: you and her are alike; feeling foreign around everything, not sure about understanding of the situation. I can guess your purpose for drawing the drawing; you use the method you are familiar with to help you flatly feel familiar with everything. Because other than your dog that is called Xiao Mao (little cat), you have the drawing you are working on now, the environment around is all foreign; even more bizarre is you have to get used to your new name: Ellen.

It is a boring and rigid academic drawing. You even didn't think about why and just started. Even though you didn't finish it, I know it will not be that interesting. I know even though you are trying to forget the dissection, structure, space relationship and different techniques you had training with. You were trying so hard to be creative but no matter what you are worried it is not perfect and not whole enough.

But, in the corner of the drawing where you don't really notice it, where a lot of hands cannot cover- it reveals a lot of circles and dots like biology cells, it makes me think of Yayoi Kusama, yet I am not sure, I only know that you are full of confusion and feel unsafe. Because other than your dog called Xiao Mao (little cat) you don't know anything. You are

excited yet happy. You are ready to prepare for your new life, even though you don't know what will happen next.

I look at the little circles in the drawing and the Xiao Mao in the corner, silently left.



(Two)

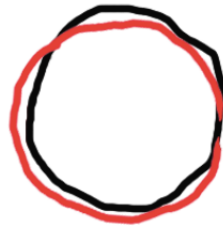
“This is my friend, friend” “don't be scared, it's okay”
no matter how many times you repeat it, Xiao Mao is still barking at everyone around. This awkward situation lasts almost 3 quarters. Very obviously, other than you, she doesn't want to be friends with any humans or dogs. From how I see it; its lucky that it is so small only around 5 pounds. Also it has a seemingly cute face or no one will want to be next to it. I am sure, this is the most annoying dog in earth.

But I have to admit; it makes your life different. Maybe from the beginning, you and she will have miraculous things happen. Or else, you wouldn't bring her to America.

When you met her, she hasn't opened her eyes yet and was abandoned by people. Maybe out of compassion, pity, or curiosity and love, but without any preparation you started to take care of the dog. In the last 3 years, no matter what changes in your life, the only thing that doesn't change is her: she is always cared for by you. So at some level it means that she is surveillance, she records everything about you. On one hand, it is a lot of unnecessary trouble to take care of the dog, especially its annoying bad mood. But on the other hand you enjoy that it is really special, it makes you proud of yourself, because not everyone can raise a little dog with milk powder. And also, I know, even though you are worried about his unfriendliness, a lot of times, you are still very pleased, because of pride, you think you are very special, because she only trusts you, this trust makes you feel good.



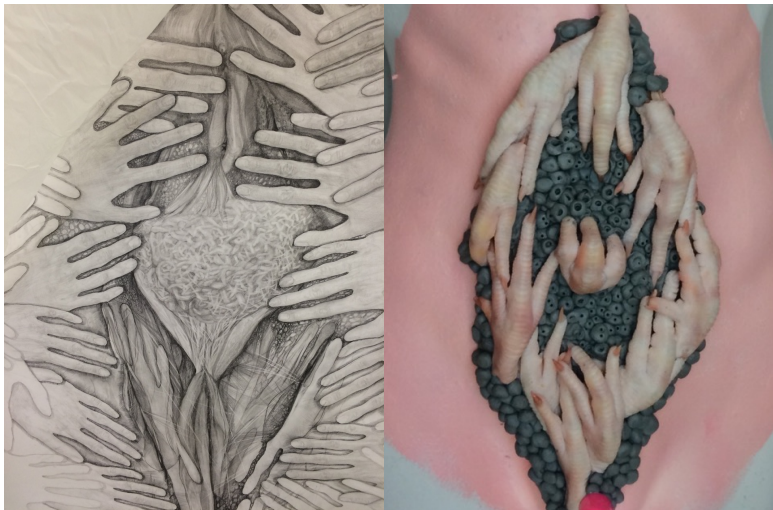
(Three)



I remember the interesting conversation between us.

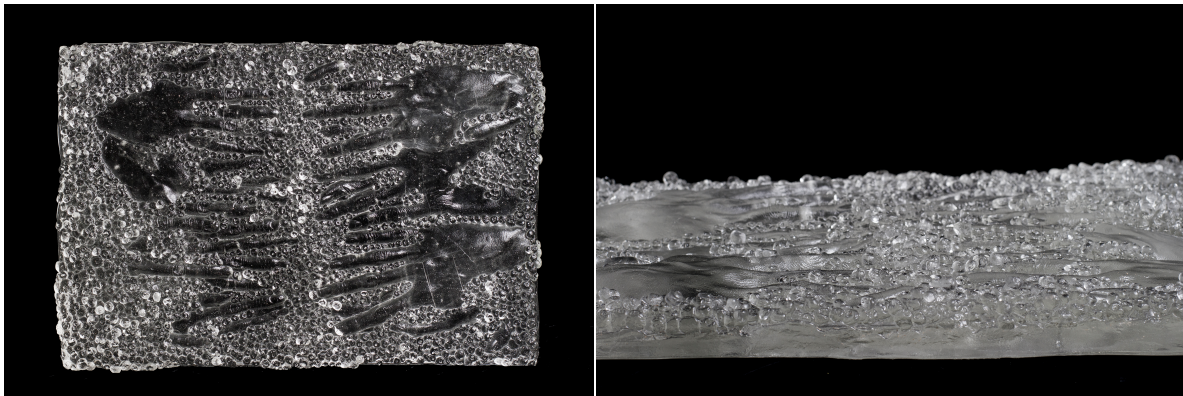
“Why do you use chicken feet and clay?” I look at the sculpture in the middle, wondering curiously.

“I think I am still more interested in the first drawing I made at UW, I think there is some content in it that makes me interested” you haltingly tell me. You are trying to express a contradiction with the drawing, a contradiction between revealing and showing.



“Why do you use chicken feet and clay?” I look at the sculpture in the middle, wondering curiously.

“Because before I have used the medium of glass to try to express the same theme, I want to try another material” you look at the clear glass made sculpture continuing to answer, “Glass as a material feels better than drawing to express the subject. Glass can move yet the sculpture will stop at the form when the glass stays still. At same time glass is clear. This shows: I cannot hide no matter what, because even though in the sculpture there are a lot of hands covering the small circles and dots, in here I think of the circles and dots as my confusion with my identity. Yet you are thinking, what can the clear glass hide, there is no truth that can be hidden”



“Why do you use chicken feet and clay?” I look at the sculpture in the middle, wondering curiously.

“If the form the only the concept, then maybe if the concept stays the same, the medium can change into many different things. Like water can be flowing or can be an ice cube. My hand

can represent holding or hiding, and maybe chicken feet can represent that as well.

Because at from the form level they are pretty similar”

“I think my head is full of circles and dots, I can’t connect them, they are like cells, they exist individually. I really want to know what they are exactly. I want to touch them, to finish them. Yet at this point I can’t do either.” You are hopeless yet protesting; you talk as you use the clay to continue to make many little balls.



“Why do you use chicken feet and clay?” I look at the sculpture in the middle, wondering curiously.

“You know, I don’t really know what I am doing now, pursuing what? What shape? What final effect? My head doesn’t have any image; this makes me feel unsafe and scared, yet it is also because of this uncertainty that I am really excited. I think I need to be faster, to just keep doing,

or maybe faster and keep making then I will find my answer.”

“Why do you use chicken feet and clay?” I look at the sculpture in the middle, wondering curiously.

“Can you say something else? Why do you always ask this stupid question, also keep on repeating the same one, when you know I don’t know the answer”

This conversation ended at the same time as this style by you. In the end the work was not made with chicken feet and clay, but plaster, googley eyes, cushion and rug material.



(Four)



You alone are sitting next to the grave of Xiao Mao, a plane passed through the sky, only the long sound remains. In front of your eyes everything is so beautiful, there are wild birds, grass and water. But I don't know if you are really enjoying this beautiful scenery. If I didn't remember wrong, this is your 5th time coming here this

week.

"We have to have a good talk. This is enough, you can not be stupid like this anymore, other than wasting time, you haven't done anything meaningful." I tell you very strictly.

"When familiarity and habit are no longer out of necessity, I realize a lot of small things that I complained about have slowly shaped my life. From now on I never have to worry about how I can walk my dog during class. But I have a new problem: the time I spent with her

before, how should I spend it now: I

suddenly feel like my heart is empty."

You say as you touch the wood stick that shows where Xiao Mao is buried.

"Firstly, the person that before had said that having a dog is a waste of time is

actually you, yet now you say you can't live properly without Xiao Mao Every time before



finals, you complained about tests, homework and artwork. There is only one thing that makes my head hurt, I have to walk the dog at least twice everyday. Xiao Mao is not really a real cat because cats can go to the bathroom by themselves, dogs have to be walked.”

“You always think no matter what you are not satisfied. You are so contradictory. If so you are like this, do you dare to use Xiao Mao as the subject of your work?”

I try to use your work to help you heal. Other than accepting reality, what can we do in front of death? I know Xiao Mao’s meaning to you, yet the fact that you have lost Xiao Mao doesn’t mean you also lose the ability to continue living happily. You can’t always keep on hiding or even not going to class, this just shows you are immature.

“I think what you said is right, you know, recently I am continuously thinking about the subject of time. If time is like a ruler, then how long is that ruler? What are at the ends of the two rulers? Will this ruler change shape like chewy candy? If so what will happen if you connect the two ends into a cylinder shape? Will this create time travelling?...etc.”



“Wait, What are you talking about? Aren’t we talking about your work?” I confusingly ask you.

“I am talking about my work, what I mean is, time changed my life. What if Xiao Mao didn’t die of acute renal failure, she would of gradually die of old age. The pain experienced with the loss of her by nature won’t be that much different.”

“I think I’m starting to understand, but I think there are two things that you should think



about, firstly, the way you talk about time is too vague, it is not concrete, even though I think I understand what you mean, how can you express this through your work?

Secondly, I don’t think you have to have Xiao Mao as your subject, because other than you, I don’t think anyone will keep on caring about a dog. I promise you, you don’t need to wait long, your emotions

will lessen. Work is not only

therapy, perhaps you should also think about what you want to communicate through this work.”

“I want my work to be touched by others, used by others, and even be a cushion for others” “Cushion? Do you mean you spend half a month everyday sanding a wooden

sculpture?” I am a bit surprised, you continue to say “But that is your first wood sculpture, you loved it so much, it symbolizes Xiao Mao, will you give it up? Will you allow strangers

to touch it or even sit on it?” “Actually I feel a bit uncomfortable about that idea in my heart,



but I think, maybe because humans always try to avoid discomfort and maximize their benefit, maybe that causes other people or things so much inconvenience. I don't know, I don't have the right to intrude on other people and their lives, but I stand by my view."

You say this while you take out your notebook from your backpack and write:

1. In the 4 years I have been with Xiao Mao, most of the times I am very happy. Even though she has a bad temper but she is very honest not fake. She always displays her trust and optimism even to the very end of her life; she showed the highest level of patience. I hope my work can give other happiness; I don't need other people to understand my story that is not important. Xiao Mao taught me optimism, now my most important job is to pass on this happiness.
2. I think humans are hubris, always crazing sex and food, never content with the joys in front of them. Let us continue to better the world, there is nothing wrong with this, but in my heart I have a thread of doubt.
3. How can I show all my emotions in a piece of work? How do I break through the constraints of the mediums and materials?" I really don't like using mediums to categorize my work. I don't understand, we are in this century, how do we even categorize art." I start to complain to myself again.

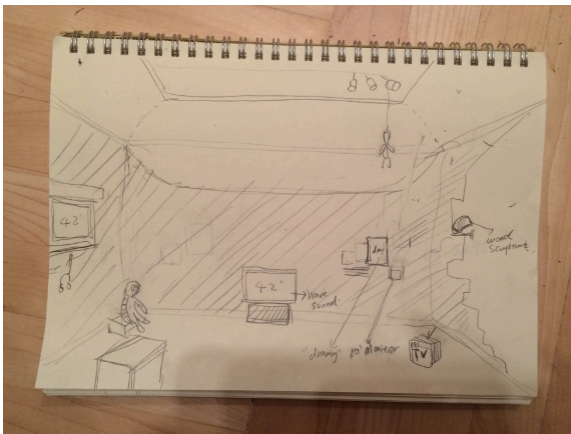
(Five)



“Don’t ask me what my final work will be in life, I only have this draft here in front of you, it is only when I can certainly know that my work is filled with uncertainty, that I start producing confidence” What can I say, you know me too well, you know I am always worried for you and doubting you. You see my doubtful look and you stopped me.

“Hey, can you calm down, I didn’t say anything okay?” I said.

“Humph, other than ask me the same question, what else do you know how to do? You are



always doubting me, asking me questions I can’t answer and then you feel very proud. Can’t you just stop being a critic? This is my thesis; I am going to see it as a party. I’m going to do everything I want because I don’t have any reason, I am just going to live without

reason! At least just this one time.”

“Hey, can you calm down, look at your previous work, it is all related to sexuality, aren’t you tired of it, repeating the color pink then red then orange, I feel like you almost lost your creativity.”

“I am very honestly making my work, I am more afraid and worried about me than you, I am worried the audience will be bored but the most important thing is my work must follow my heart. If I don’t have creativity, I can only admit it, I am lost. Being the real me is very important to me, this is the source of my joy, it is only in art that I can have the most freedom.”

“Look at your draft, even the monitor has a pair of spread open legs, why?”

“I am talking about ‘trust’, I am trying to give different lifeless things life, and then let them have a human quality, trust” “Only when you feel secure, do you spread your legs, yet at that time, often you are talking about a relationship, a communication, this relationship is based on trust. Look around you, the monitor is not the only thing that is spreading its legs it is just the most obvious one.”

“I want to create a seemingly private space, in the Henry Art Museum public space. I am trying to let the audience have a dialogue with this truly private space, let the work express a trust and security. In private spaces is it easier to feel secure and relaxed. Only in the face of trust do we show our real side, our real self both good and bad. The evidence of lust if an example.” “Also, I don’t think the entire work is about pornography, I didn’t show you porn videos. Everything you said is what you imagined. My work triggered your memory. Made you think about your experience. What it is specifically, I don’t know” I listened to your self-righteous speech, I didn’t ask any questions. Obviously this doesn’t

mean that I agree with you I just think, no matter good or bad I should stop you from trying.

I walk close to you we hug tightly.

