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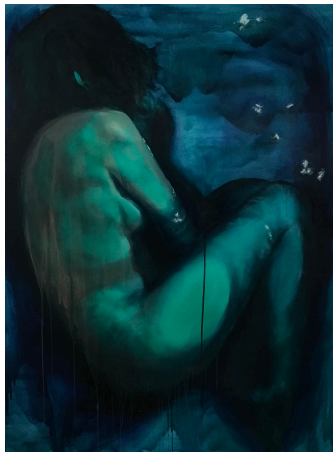
Anguo Ping

## Anxiety of Being: Abstraction, Writing, and the Fragmented Image

Anxiety is both a personal and philosophical condition. It emerges not just from particular events, but from a constant confrontation with uncertainty, unfamiliarity, and the impossibility of resolution. In my art practice, I explore this anxiety as a condition of being—something that is embodied, yet abstract; deeply emotional, yet hard to define. My work traces the transformation of anxiety from physical sensations to visual metaphors, from representation to abstraction. Through this, I draw connections between personal experiences, philosophical thought (particularly Heidegger's idea of existential anxiety), and the expressive power of asemic writing and fragmented images. This writing traces how my painting evolved

into a visual language that engages with the inexpressible, the uncertain, and the act of searching for meaning through the mark.

My first encounter with visualizing anxiety began with depicting an anxious human body. The body is the first medium to sense anxiety by sensing the shortness of breath, a stinging sensation across the skin, sweaty armpits, and a persistent chill in the hands and feet. These physical sensations link me to my first painting about anxiety: a curled-up human figure submerged underwater (see Figure 1). The barely recognizable flesh tone on the skin seems to dissolve in the deep blue of the water and leaves the body an unnatural green. The highlights and shades imply the movement of water and contrast to the curled, motionless figure within it. It is not a realistic depiction, but rather a visual interpretation of inner turbulence—of a psyche trembling beneath the surface. Gradually, I realized I could use analogy or metaphor in painting to depict the anxious feeling without depicting an anxious figure through objects that carry the same emotional weight. Anxiety is not a single moment or a still image, but a lingering presence that seeps into skin and memory. That’s when I turned to painting plastic bags.



(Figure 1)



(Figure 2)

The plastic bag represents a metaphor for personal and collective contemporary identity. In my personal experience, anxiety makes me feel like my skin is a sheet of plastic, thin and

vulnerable, as if needles were pricking under the surface of it, and it creates a sensation of tingling and numbness. It's also as if a thin layer of plastic covers the face, separating me from the rest of the world. This layer dulls perception, isolates sensation, and creates a sense of breathlessness, as I feel when I'm under the attack of anxiety. At the same time, the plastic bag is a common, everyday object, which is about mass production, practicality, assembly line, industrial waste, pollution, toxicity, and overconsumption. In this way, I see a reflection in a plastic bag as modern humanity (see Figure 2).

After I started to express my anxiety through art, I thought about the concept of anxiety more. Because my experiences with it do not always attach to a specific occasion. For example, I might feel anxious about giving a presentation or having an interview. But most of the time, anxiety follows me wherever I go, and whatever happens, it disregards time, location, and occasion. It haunted me. This led me to look for theoretical frameworks, so I can know about it and learn to live with it. I started to learn more about the concept of anxiety through philosophy, and I found Martin Heidegger's interpretation of existential anxiety.

Heidegger mentions that Anxiety(Angst) is different from Fear(Furcht). Anxiety is not about one specific moment and event, instead, it is an emotion without object. It is an unsettling, empty, and diffuse mood where the familiar world starts to break off (wegbrechen). In Heidegger's analysis, leaving one face-to-face with one's own Being(Dasein), which means anxiety, is a state that allows us to withdraw from the everyday world and to confront "our own being" directly.

Inspired by Heidegger's concepts, I began making more deliberate choices in my visual vocabulary. I want to depict how Being is not only thrown into the world, but also inevitably

falls into the mode of everydayness—a state in which Dasein becomes absorbed in the routines, distractions, and anonymous norms of the public world. At the same time, I wish to capture the transformative moment when anxiety arises, disrupting this everyday immersion. In that moment, the familiar world collapses, revealing not objects of fear, but the deeper truth of existence itself. Through this confrontation, Dasein becomes aware of its own Being-towards-death, and thereby discloses its most authentic possibility of Being.

I started to paint purposefully with all the visual elements I chose to depict. In terms of each selected element, the plastic bag in general represents Being. It's floating in the water without any support means fallenness, and the water means everydayness. I use the cold and dark color palette to imply the unknown and death, and the ties or creases on plastic to represent the anxiety and intensity (see Figure 3 and 4).



(Figure 3)



(Figure 4)

However, after painting several plastic bags, I sense the power of an indescribable feeling that has the impulse to break through the solid form of the object. It accumulates every time I paint about it, and the literal imagery of a certain object no longer satisfies me to express it. It's not the plastic bag that makes me feel empathetic, but the elements in the expression I depict that make me feel that I can express what I want to express. I started to seek a breakthrough, a more

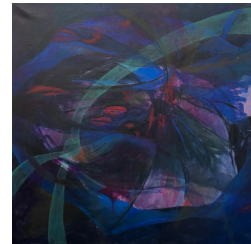
suitable way to express myself. I attempted to use the skills of composition, color, and image distortion and reorganization to experiment with what exactly is the core of the visual expression of the plastic bags I have depicted (See Figure 5, 6, 7)



(Figure 5)

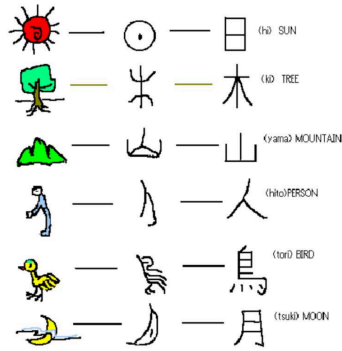


(Figure 6).



(Figure 7)

By visually abstracting the plastic bag based on the concept of existential anxiety, I discovered that abstract painting somehow resonates with Chinese calligraphy. In China, painting and calligraphy are the two sides of one coin. Chinese writing originated from hieroglyphics, where the characters are basically transformed and simplified drawings (see Figure 8). Throughout history, Chinese artists have integrated the concept of painting and calligraphy as one in their artistic creations. For instance, one of the famous literati paintings from the Ming Dynasty is Xu Wei's *Grapes* (see Figure 9). Like most of the literati paintings, Xu Wei writes some calligraphy next to the painting of the grapevine, but this time he chose to write in a way that mimics the form of the grapevine to add more lively interest to the flat surface of the paper. In the history of Chinese calligraphy and painting, not only did words imitate things, but the depictions of things also learned something from calligraphy. For instance, the *Six Persimmons* is a 13th-century Chinese painting by the monk Muqi Fachang (see Figure 10). The sticks of each persimmon in the six persimmons picture are similar to the strokes used in Chinese calligraphy (see Figure 11).



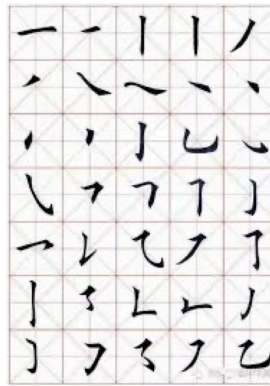
(Figure 8)



(Figure 9)



(Figure 10)

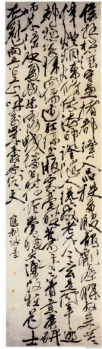


(Figure 11)

Speaking of Zen and Buddhism, Eastern Asian aesthetics has been deeply influenced by it. It had also influenced the very first abstract artist, Kandinsky, and he called it the “fundamental tone, universal sound and spirit of man”. There is always an appreciation in Eastern Asian art for the flow of natural beauty, which symbolizes the emptiness of human existence through the projection of life experience. It is the symbol of fragility and the impermanence of life. It confronts death as Heidegger mentioned about the anxiety of existence.

Moreover, despite the content in Chinese Calligraphy pieces, I noticed the expression of the brush marks can convey emotions and feelings directly. For example, In Xu Wei’s Calligraphy piece (see Figure 12), I can sense the feeling of depression, grief and anguish, which I feel the same in Cy Twombly’s painting about asemic writing (see Figure 13). When writing isn’t all about content, the expressive brush marks becomes vital and it can carry the unspoken

and inexpressible beyond words. I see parallels between Chinese running cursive Calligraphy and asemic writing.



(Figure 12)



(Figure 13)

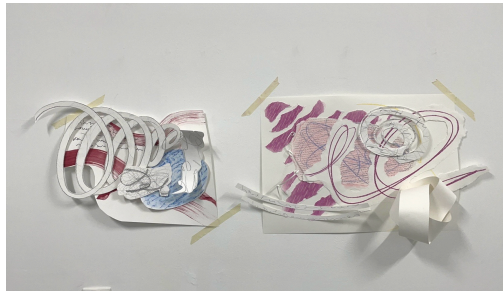
As I learn more about written words and abstract expression, I am reminded that my start in painting is based on the frustration of writing. I was an expressive teenager who wrote a lot of prose and poetry. I used to see writing as a way of resisting the disordered, irrational, non-linear logic, and wanted to impose order on the inexpressible. I used it as a tool for recording, organizing ideas, and avoiding chaotic uncertainties. It was meant to help me ease my anxious mind. But the more I wrote, the more I felt distant from what I wanted to express. I feel like I'm circling around a campfire, and the thing I'm trying to get at is in the campfire pile, never to be touched. So I felt angry and frustrated about it, and started to paint the inexpressible.

Since I noticed how Calligraphy, especially the artistically expressing in the same way abstract art does, I started to combine asemic writing with abstract painting. I want my painting to become a portal for the unrecognizable and inexpressible feeling of existential anxiety. I tried different ways to combine these two main elements. At the same time I tried to pull the essence from the previous plastic bag paintings I painted. Therefore my works at this moment, not only painting, started to have unrecognizable images with asemic writing and cursive marks. I tried to use collage with paper materials to create fragmented and unrecognizable images, and to paint

asemic writing rather in the shape of regular writing form or transform it into expressive painting marks (see Figure 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21). During critiques and studio visits with students, artists, and professors, I received comments on how people react to different forms and materials. For example, people react to writing in painting as difficult to recognize and to understand the cursive lines as writing (see Figure 16 and 20). But in painting, the use of a common writing form invites people to read the asemantic writing with curiosity and interest (see Figure 17). Also about painting, I noticed people are more willing to analyze what the images are about because the shapes and colors give views hints that they can link to their life experiences. People mention bones, desert, waterfall, rainbow when they try to understand this painting (see Figure 19), and they interact more with paintings which have partially recognizable and imaginable images and writing than those which are more abstract.



(Figure 14)



(Figure 15)



(Figure 16)



(Figure 17).



(Figure 18)



(Figure 19).



(Figure 20)



(Figure 21)

I want to invite viewers to engage in the process of interpreting the meaning of a painting and feel the existential anxiety during the process. Therefore with all the attempts and comments I received, I finally nailed my concept of painting down to fragmented images by collages (see Figure 22) and asemic writing with the most common writing form — the left-to-right and top-to-bottom writing. I will cut images from different kinds of magazines, such as fashion magazines, art magazines and science magazin. And I arrange these images with my own vital rule on collage: 1. Never use an recognizable object directly 2. See everything only through the lens of color, shape and composition 3. Arrange cut images with a spatial composition. By applying these three rules, I will get a semi-recognizable final image and space with depth that comes from everyday objects but goes beyond them. I will then do asemic writing, with my own habit of writing combining Chinese, Japanese, English handwriting traces, on top of these images, making it more difficult for the viewer to connect these semi-recognizable images to

their everyday knowledge, thus amplifying that anxious feeling of wanting to be sure but not being able to be sure (see Figure 23).



(Figure 22)



(Figure 23).

To conclude, my works explore existential anxiety, which arises from the fear of limitless uncertainties and possibilities. In response to this uncertainty, I see writing as both an act of recording and a means of resistance—an attempt to impose order on the unknown. Writing, especially in the form of calligraphy, can be understood as an expressive form of mark-making, where the physical gesture itself becomes meaningful beyond the words it conveys. Asemic writing, which means writing lacks specific semantic meaning, embodies this tension. It is intentionally unreadable, existing in a space between language and abstraction. The term “asemic” literally means “without meaning” or “without specific semantic content,” yet it carries emotional and visual significance. In this way, asemic writing aligns with abstract art, focusing on form, movement, and rhythm rather than direct communication.

I want viewers to experience and become aware of anxiety, and how the act of being anxious reflects one’s own existence. I believe semi-abstract, or partially recognizable imagery, can convey this. From my perspective, a fully abstract image often does not look like an inviting interpretation. But images that look familiar but remain unrecognizable can evoke the viewer's attempt to interpret, but only to realize that the image resists clear definition. And each interpretation is different. When viewers try to interpret the painting, what reflects back to them

is themselves. It's just like how asemic writing is. So I choose to combine semi-representational imagery with asemic writing. I want viewers to go through the process of trying to interpret, striving for meaning, only to discover that there is no definitive answer. And within the process, a sense of anxiety toward uncertainty and possibility can be felt. And this feeling is the existential anxiety I want to express. I want my painting to become a mirror that reflects the anxiety of being.

In future works, I will continue to explore existential anxiety through the combination of asemic writing and fragmented collaged imagery, further deepening the dialogue between mark-making and meaning-making.

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