Design Concept: My Amalgamation Of Eastern And Western Cultures

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DESIGN CONCEPT: MY AMALGAMATION OF EASTERN AND WESTERN CULTURES

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts in the Department of Art in the College of Arts and Humanities at the University of Central Florida Orlando, Florida

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ABSTRACT

While exploring various subjects in multiple techniques in multiple mediums, I create abstract images that illustrate high technology, urban life, and personal feelings. My work is influenced by Eastern and Western culture. Media, publication, and fashion are derived from Western culture, and design elements are derived from Eastern culture. In doing this, my goal is to achieve more opportunities, greater depth, and a wider audience for my work by cross-utilizing these diverse culture aspects.
For Mom & Dad
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who not only helped me complete my thesis, but who supported me these past years in the U.S. I am deeply indebted to my main advisor, Scott F. Hall, who has been a supportive, encouraging mentor throughout my MFA study. I am grateful for the support of E. Brady Robinson who provided approbatory and critical suggestions during our meetings. I also greatly appreciate Chuck Abraham for being an enthusiastic advisor with his comments on my thesis and useful information for my future employment. Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention David Haxton, whose support and guidance throughout my graduate career has been invaluable.

I also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank my peers whom I studied with these three years: Sooki Martinsen, Shaun Wightman, Juan Lopez, Matt Dombrowski, Bonnie Ebner, Brian Kulbaba, Michael Kappers. They helped me a lot with my language problems and gave me many valuable comments on my art work. I’m happy to have known them these three years.

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INTRODUCTION

I come from Beijing, China. The three years of my graduate study have been a time of learning, creativity, and self-discovery. It has also been a time of frustration, resistance, and self-doubt for me. I was a graphic designer and interface designer before my M.F.A study. Seldom had my work approached the field of international contemporary art after my bachelor's degree. I simply followed into a routine of work. Gradually, I found that I have to reach out for something new to avoid entrapment within exhausted ideas. Going into this program, I was exposed to the contemporary art world and a variety of artists and works, many of whom I had never heard of before. I even got to learn how to create a sculpture in both the real world and in the virtual 3D modeling space of the computer. All of these new directions and others proved to be so helpful in the expansion of my artistic creativity and my ideas.

I love design, visually, conceptually, technically, interpersonally. My art is a synthesis of my personal feelings and aesthetics. Post-modernity appears to me to be like a tin bucket in which every possible style has been poured and mixed and used and abused in search of self-expression. The borderlines dividing language, science, common sense, and the arts are disappearing gradually. I see convergence bringing about an integrated cultural world; my work is an attempt to present such a vision.

My ultimate goal, even for just a moment, is to have someone that I have had no
previous contact with enjoy my art work. My objective is to break the boundaries between different cultures, different language with my design. Through my art, I want to be able to reach out and touch people while I simultaneously define myself. For me, art is my life, even if some people don’t think that design is Art.

I approach this thesis as a monograph of sorts, chronicling my time and work in the graduate program. I will highlight some of the works I created as a graduate student and explore the choices I made along with the reasoning behind them. Hopefully, this will give the reader and myself a glimpse into my development as an artist, contemporary or otherwise.
INFLUENCES AND INSPIRATIONS

When I was as a child, I studied a lot of pictorial fashion magazines due to family involvement in that industry. I was captivated by the beautiful dresses and models I observed. From then on, I spent most of my childhood and teen years drawing various colorful dresses. I was interested in the combination of color use; it was then that my sense of colors developed. I found that I was able to freely interpret and incorporate color in my work more and more. To date, color is the most important theme in my art.

Since I come from China and yet have been trained in America, I have been influenced a lot by both Eastern culture and Western design elements. I like to practise Chinese calligraphy in my leisure time. The liquidity of strokes provides me with a rich source of the ideas to employ when I create my design work. Design elements from Western culture are quite different with those of the East. The longer I stayed in U.S., the more I succeeded in combining these two styles.

I Have a strong background in web art and design, but the largest sources of my inspiration are several contemporary artists, for example: Paul Jenkins, Albert Paley, and Sam Gilliam. Paul Jenkins, an abstract expressionist painter based in New York and working on canvas, watercolor on paper, collage, and graphics. Most of his works focus on space, color, and light. Albert Paley, is the first metal sculptor to receive the coveted Lifetime Achievement Award from the American Institute of Architects, the AIA's highest award to a
non-architect. His works include site specific, sculpture, decorative arts, and graphics. He does very well in creating abstract geometrical figures and applies them into each field. Sam Gilliam, an African-American abstract painter, since the early sixties, has been recognized as an original and innovative color field painter. He has advanced the inventions associated with the Washington Color School and Abstract Expressionism to a new level. All of them serve as great sources of inspiration to me.
EARLY GRADUATE WORK

Publication Art: includes magazine cover, book jacket designs, custom illustrations, photography for books or periodicals, and technical illustration.

After my graduation I joined China Information World, the largest IT publisher in China. While working on this publication I worked closely collaborating with the clients and with their commercial advertisement and publication design such as IBM, AT&T, Founder, E.F.P. from Germany, Xteam linux. I was involved in art design of corporate identity for government departments and different companies such as Ministry of Information Industry, China Education Electronic Company.

In addition, I worked on advertisement design for many commerce summits and exhibitions such as The 4th China International Electronic Commerce Summit, 2000 COMDEX China. Working hard on every single piece of artwork, our team was awarded the Best Department of the company from 1999 to 2003. From all these projects, I obtained invaluable experience on research work: how to bridge the gap between idea and practice, how to learn new techniques by myself, how to communicate with my teammates and clients to know what they exactly want, and how to cooperate with others, especially people from other cultures. Such experiences served as a springboard for most of my graduate work that followed.
Figure 1: Poster (Digital; 2002)

Figure 2: Poster (Digital; 2002)
Figure 3: Editorial Design (Digital; 2003)

Figure 4: Book Cover Design (Digital; 2003)
ILLUSTRATION

As the visual element in an advertisement, illustration is an efficient way to represent an idea that works in concert with the headline to attract the reader to the advertisement. It is the image that helps to make the copy believable.

Today, there is a growing interest in collecting and admiring original art work that was used as illustrations in books, magazines, posters, etc. Various museum exhibitions, magazines and art galleries have devoted space to the illustrators of the past.

In the visual art world, illustrators have sometimes been considered less important in comparison with fine artists and graphic designers. But as the result of computer game and comic industry growth, illustrations are becoming valued as popular and profitable art works that can acquire a wider market than the other two, especially in Korea, Japan, Hong Kong and USA.
Figure 5: Creative (Digital; 2006)

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GRAPHIC DESIGN

Graphic design is the process of communicating visually using typography and images to present information. Graphic design practice embraces a range of cognitive skills, aesthetics and crafts, including typography, visual arts and page layout. Like other forms of design, graphic design often refers to both the process (designing) by which the communication is created and the products (designs) which are generated.

Graphic design is used whenever visual intricacy and creativity are applied to the presentation of text and imagery. Contemporary design practice has been extended to the modern computer, in particular WYSIWYG user interfaces, often referred to as interactive design, or multimedia design.

Anywhere there is a need to communicate visually, there is potential enhancement of communications through graphic design.

Figure 10: Conflict (Digital; 2007)
Figure 11: Comments (Digital; 2005)

Figure 12: Unknown (Digital; 2007)
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INTERFACE DESIGN

User interface design or user interface engineering is the design of computers, appliances, machines, mobile communication devices, software applications, and websites with the focus on the user's experience and interaction. Where traditional graphic design seeks to make the object or application physically attractive, the goal of user interface design is to make the user's interaction as intuitive as possible—what is often called user-centered design. Where good graphic/industrial design is bold and eye catching, good user interface design is intended to facilitate finishing the task at hand over drawing attention to itself. Graphic design may be utilized to apply a theme or style to the interface without compromising its intuitive usability. The intuitiveness of an interface may depend on symbology from an artistic and cultural perspective as much as functionality from a technical engineering perspective.

User interface design is involved in a wide range of projects from computer systems, to cars, to commercial planes; all of these projects involve much of the same basic human interaction yet also require some unique skills and knowledge. As a result, user interface designers tend to specialize in certain types of projects and have skills centered around their expertise, whether that be software design, user research, web design, or industrial design.
Figure 17: Interface 1 (Digital; 2006)

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Figure 28: Interface 12 (Digital; 2007)
CONCLUSION

Finally, I am so close to the completion my MFA study. I’m excited and proud that I was able to stick to it and see it through. I have learned a lot about different aspects of the art world that has enabled my work to expand beyond its original vision. I have also been able to study with great artists, both teachers and students, and have had the opportunity to see them in action working on their art.

As a Chinese student in U.S., language is always the hardest part for me first. But the lucky thing is, I’m in an art department. Art can be a visual language. People can communicate through art visually. All design happens across culture boundaries. For me, this is the communicable element which is the creative will in all of us.
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