

Kathy Liao

The work of Kathy Liao sweeps us away with its thereness. Though her medium is oil painting Liao's work feels and reads like a photographic image, of a moment, and the emotion present within that moment.

In *3AM Kitchen*, we see a simple composition of her grandmother in the kitchen, in the middle of the night. It's mainly two color schemes - a blue half dominated by the refrigerator, while reds and pinks surround everything else except for her grandmother's white hair and blouse. We feel as if we have stepped into this unguarded moment where Liao's grandmother stands over the sink.

We don't even have to know what's she's doing - eating, or cleaning, or preparing something for the next day. She's just there, and with each exquisite stroke of Liao's brush, we're there with her too. The scene suggests a touching relationship with an elder loved one. Liao takes snippets like these of everyday life and makes them almost holy in both their simplicity and reverence.

"I project my thought and my experiences onto the canvas and the image pushes back. The result is an intimate back and forth conversation between myself and the work," Liao said.

And in *Your Space/My Space* Liao, again, through color contrasts and expressive brush strokes brings us completely in the middle, not of a scene, but of the action and emotion of the scene. In this work, we see that boredom and routine and the mental checking out by way of a cell phone exude emotion. The way she does it makes you realize that so much of what we perceive in the world isn't about the detailed precision that, say, an ink drawing would capture. But more that we perceive and judge the world by its impressions than by exacting detail. How Liao captures the loose way someone holds a phone on public transit tells us far more than if we saw a crease in the pants a subject is wearing.

Liao's painting *Float* has a different feel - it evokes something more ephemeral than the other work. The strokes of an upside down male figure floating on an inner tube are broader and coarser causing the edges to be fuzzier. Rather than capturing a realistic scene in soft detail, this painting conjures up the recollection of a dream or distant memory. The combination of dark blue, eerie green, with a sweeping cascade of pink to one side adds to the unreality of the image. The turbulent paint surface hints at something lurking just out of sight.

As the artist explained, "My work is painted from observations, layered with sharp and hazy memories and recorded snap-shot photos." But Liao's memories come through with a force and an emotional clarity that is anything but hazy. Again, she gives us a sense of thereness. Her work reminds us that everything doesn't require spelling out. It's a pointing to, a signaling, a layer. And from there, our eyes and emotions take their own journeys.

- Michelle Tyrene Johnson