

A Self-Analysis of My Artistic Journey: Passions and Introspections

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Abstract

My research topic is essentially an extended artist statement, specifically how other artists have impacted my artistic development and what my objectives in art entail. This project relies on personal introspection to recognize what I revere about these set of artists. In this paper, I will examine a variety of literature behind the artists from whom I draw inspiration, thereby providing further knowledge about them. More importantly, I seek to identify the factors in their existence that enhanced their artistic growth. Or rather, how did they become a master in their craft? I also discuss several art pieces and elaborate on how such deliberation impacts my own approach to artistic creation. I additionally explain how my thesis mentor, Christian Fagerlund, critiqued my ideas and artmaking process. The results I expect to find entails a heightened proficiency in drawing/painting and a strengthened knowledge of art history, all of which will be applied in my ongoing art practice.

I. Introduction

Ever since I was a child, I have always had a keen interest in the arts, specifically via my wonder and passion for drawing. There is an appeal about developing a sharp eye for details, training my hands to be more precise, appreciating the world we live in, and being able to illustrate a sense of moment onto paper. Currently, I am attracted to figurative work and human portraiture. I seek to capture the essence of humanity in its most honest form, while doing more than just replicating my subjects.

Due to my introverted nature, I take satisfaction in showing people my works to elicit their self-expression, conversation, and collaboration. As for my current drawing and painting skills, I do not, yet, have a personal style, let alone a robust expertise in this field. Furthermore, my preferred mediums of choice as of late are charcoal and graphite. I would like to experiment and learn more about other magnificent artists and mediums to improve my dexterity, proficiency in a host of mediums, and creative thoughts.

II. Artists Who Have Inspired Me

We are currently living in the digital age, where many works of art are now created in state-of-the-art computer software. Although digitally rendered art is alluring and well made, I have always had a deep interest in traditional art (art made using a physical medium). While I was contemplating what artists have left an imprint in my memories, three people came into mind: Tran Thieu Quang, Katsushika Hokusai, and Claude Monet. The rationale for these masters entails personal sentiment and aesthetic choices. I shall examine each artists' background to grasp how they became a virtuoso, as well as gather insight about their occupied time period.

III. Tran Thieu Quang

First, I chose Quang as one of my artists to research due to his work being one of my earliest exposures to art. Having emigrated from Vietnam, my parents decorated our home with traditional Vietnamese artworks to ensure that we maintained ties to our cultural roots. I believe that it is important for me as an Asian American to include a Vietnamese artist in my thesis proposal to pay homage to my heritage and identity. A copy of Quang's art graced a wall in my childhood home, and for some reason his imagery left an imprint in my memory. Quang's *Untitled* tastefully shows lively everyday life, much to my aesthetic appreciation. From my perspective, his imagery has an almost child-like quality to it. He validates his experience by rendering a value range from light to dark, showing a sensibility for form, and plays with color harmony.

Tran Thieu Quang was born in Hanoi in 1941 and later graduated from the Hanoi College of Applied Arts (Asia Art Archive, n.d.). He worked in different media (gouache and woodblock prints) with an artistic style that was ambiguous- ranging from realism to abstraction (Asia Art Archive, n.d.). Based on my research findings, there is sparse literature about the artist himself. However, there is a clarification that he went to school for art. One can speculate that art school is what helped him develop his skills in drawing and painting. I relate to Quang in a way since I do not have a definite style and I try to experiment in both realism and abstraction.

Due to the lack of further information about Quang, I sought out literature about his place of origin (Hanoi), consulting, as well, perspectives on his environment suggested by the lens of other painters. I thus sought to fill in the gaps between Quang and the environment in which he created his imagery. *Untitled* highlights the aesthetics of architecture and a sense of place with its arching bridge and subject matter of women wearing traditional dresses (áo dài).

Since painting is an effective form of expression, the paintings of Hanoi's landscape provide the viewer a visual context in North Vietnam. "The study of paintings of Hanoi's architecture may contribute to the understanding of Hanoi's sense of place by bringing to consciousness details that might otherwise be repressed or simply go unnoticed" (Phuong & Groves, 2011, p.1). Hanoi's sense of place has shifted in response to socioeconomic/political changes caused by foreign interventions, and it can be argued that local painters selected certain visual reminders of the past embedded in the landscape (Phuong & Groves, 2011, p. 141). I think that it is fascinating to see how painters perceived their home and the way they authentically portray their residence, despite the changes in the system and history. A parallel that I would like to make is my parents came to America during the Vietnam War as refugees. Even though neither of my parents make art, I cannot help but wonder how they would have drawn or painted their former homeland.

Alas, throughout my entire research for Vietnamese art, it was alarming to find that there was not an abundance of resources for Vietnamese art in comparison to the coverage for Japanese art. Personally, I have never learned about Vietnamese art in any of my art history classes at the University of North Texas. "The process of identifying and locating art from a place like Vietnam that rarely figures in art history tells us something about how art history is written" (Taylor 2005, p.149). Because of this, I want to advocate for reform in textbooks and pedagogy to give Vietnam a fair place in the art historical canon.

IV. Katsushika Hokusai

Second, I selected Hokusai due to his brilliant execution of Japanese landscapes through woodblock prints. He played a part in my artistic development by instilling a desire to create fine-tuned, narrative works. Apprenticed to master woodblock artist Shunsho of the Katsukawa

school (Chiappa), Hokusai was eventually able to become a master of Japanese woodblock print during the Edo period. This answered my question of whether Hokusai was self-taught or had a mentor. The Edo period featured a time of peace because of Japan's conservative military government (Department of Asian Art 2004). To maintain stability, the Tokugawa regime divided society into four classes: warriors, farmers, artisans, and merchants (Department of Asian Art 2004). Rich merchants and artisans used their wealth for entertainment, which resulted in a huge impact on the Edo period's culture (Department of Asian Art 2004).

The exploitation of actors, women, and visitors in entertainment districts allowed the topic of ukiyo-e (the transitory nature of life and floating world) paintings and woodblock prints to flourish (Department of Asian Art 2004). Specifically, ukiyo-e paintings were fixated on enjoyable activities against a landscape, close ups, and fashion (Department of Asian Art 2004). However, the popularity of actors and women as subjects declined, and Hokusai brought the focus of ukiyo-e back to landscape views with a seasonal theme (Department of Asian Art 2004).

As an ukiyo-e artist, Hokusai based his exploration of the outside world on his subjective identification with his surroundings, rather than on a scientific/technical approach (Carelli 2018). His landscape images reminded viewers that man is within nature and yet separate from it (King 2010, p. 5). Hokusai's work became a part of himself, in a sense; and in reflecting on his subjectivity, he thus raises emotional, psychological, and spiritual issues created in the ukiyo-e style (King 2010, p.6). Furthermore, ukiyo-e (floating world) prints emphasized the ascendancy of nature and the short-lived character of a moment (Abou-Jaoude 2016, p. 59). I am interested in Hokusai's work because the concept and meaning of a transient, fleeting world

intrigues me. What is more, the preciseness of his woodblock prints puts me in awe. He clearly exhibited excellent craftsmanship and eye for design.

V. Claude Monet

Third, I designated Claude Monet as one of my favorite artists due to his distinct manner in painting. I admire how he handles color and loose method of showing forms, which sparked my desire to practice in oil painting. Monet was a prominent artist during the Impressionist movement, where he focused on landscape and leisure activities as his subjects (Auricchio 2004). He was introduced to a plein-air painting by Eugene Boudin and later joined Pierre Auguste Renoir, Edgar Degas, Édouard Manet and Camille Pissarro in an independent exhibition (Auricchio 2004). Although Monet used his surroundings for the subjects in his paintings and committed to close observation and naturalistic representation (Auricchio 2004), his unfinished, sketch-like appearance was met with criticism (Samu 2004). Monet also rejected European standards of composition, color, and perspective (Auricchio 2004).

Inversely, his progressive approach was also praised for its representation of modern life (Samu 2004). He was drawn to vibrant colors instead of dark grounds (a frequent theme in traditional painting). More pigments were available to use due to development of paint technology, which enabled Monet to work in bright colors (Snider, 2001, p. 91). The application of a brighter color palette coincides with an evident emphasis in showing the effect of light in the subject (Snider, 2001, p. 92). Alternatively, traditional paintings were constrained to biblical, historical, or mythological subjects; however, Impressionists were interested in portraying modern life (Snider, 2001, p. 90). They truly wanted to capture a feeling of moment on canvas, in a manner akin to camera impressions (Snider, 2001, p. 92).

Indeed, Monet utilized unexpected, unbalanced compositions from a camera and would blur/crop off at strange places to create a sense of movement (Snider, 2001, p. 92).

VI. Intersection Between Japanese and Impressionist Art

Interestingly, some cross pollination did take place between Japanese art and Impressionist artists. When Japanese ports reopened to trade with the West in 1853, the introduction of ukiyo-e woodcut prints made an impact on Impressionist/Post-Impressionist art (Ives 2004). This form of art demonstrated that simple, everyday subjects from the “floating world” could be depicted in an aesthetically pleasing manner (Ives 2004). When Hokusai’s work reached Europe, it positively affected Impressionists (Chiappa, n.d.). This was the case with Monet, who initially encountered Japanese prints in a Holland spice shop (Ives 2004). Consequently, Japanese woodblock prints reaffirmed Monet’s Impressionist convictions (Abou-Jaoude, 2016, p. 61). Critics called this fascination with the Far East “Japonisme” (Abou-Jaoude 2016, p. 58).

VII. Methodology

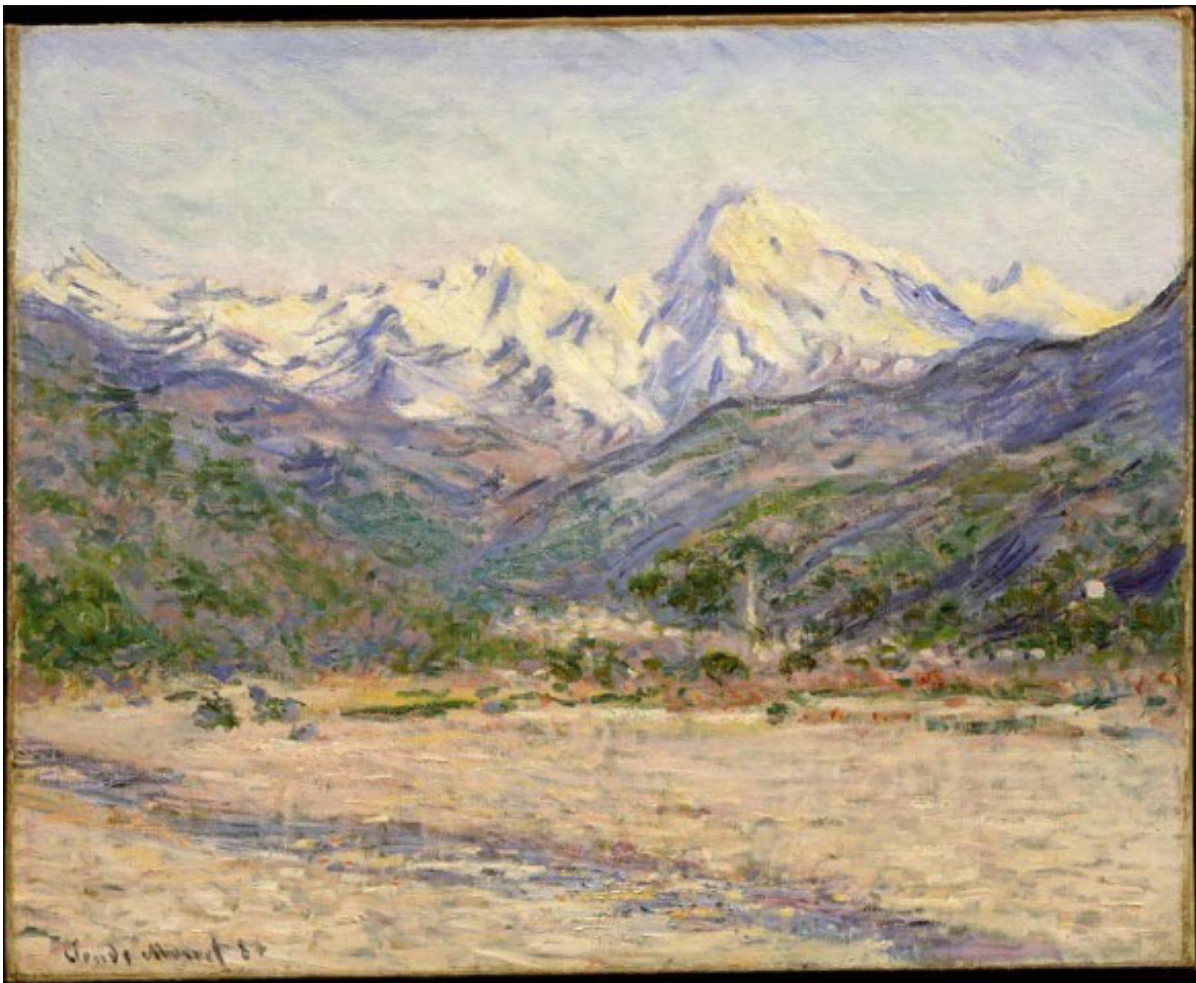


Quang, T. (1992). Untitled.



Hokusai, K. (1839). Poem by Sarumaru Dayū, from the series One Hundred Poems

Explained by the Nurse (Hyakunin issyu uba ga etoki)



Monet, C. (1884). The Valley of the Nervia

For my methodology, I will merge the visual iconography from the works of Tran Thieu Quang, Katsushika Hokusai, and Claude Monet to produce several works of art that resemble their style and imagery. I will use pen and watercolor to make several small studies and combine two artists' work at a time. The reason for this is to generate these studies quickly with watercolor (fast drying speed) and "knocking two birds with one stone" through the synthesis of two artists in each composition. For example, I will zoom in on Quang's and Hokusai's works. Next, I will imitate the high detail of the people's faces and clothing from Hokusai's work and apply it to Quang's subjects. I will further implement Monet's sense of color, layering, and values of light and dark into Hokusai's mountains in my watercolor study.

For my final piece, I will create an oil painting that merges elements from Quang's and Hokusai's art for further practice in this medium. The purpose of these studies is to help me learn from master artists and push my experience in drawing and painting. After finishing these works, I will display the products for critique by Christian Fagerlund. Moreover, I will discuss how these examinations have helped me grow as an artist and how I can use my lessons from this project to accomplish my future goals.

VIII. Conclusions from the Literature

To conclude, the research gatherings broadened my knowledge of my favorite artists and affirmed my personal admiration for them. It was captivating to learn that there is a sense of collaboration (specifically between Monet and Hokusai) and I acquired a better sense of how all my chosen artists came to become experts in their respective time periods. I was unaware of how Monet utilized cameras as a tool in his paintings; the literature deepened my fondness for his rebellious nature, energetic palette, and ability to appreciate his impact on art history.

Additionally, the literature reinforced my admiration for Hokusai's refined style and curiosity about spiritual concepts. Because Hokusai "fervently believed that his skills as an artist would continue to improve the older he got" (Carelli, 2018), his mindset assured my belief that I, too, will improve with time. In that vein, I remind myself that Quang's attentiveness to Vietnamese society is an approach that I would like to adopt as well in terms of portraying my experiences in America. My personal growth as an artist will benefit from locating more information on the history of Vietnamese art as I believe that the past informs the present.

IX. Results



Figure 1: Quang and Hokusai

Because I have not practiced in watercolor and pen in years, I had some difficulty in controlling my tools. My intent was to mimic the detail and simplicity of ukiyo-e and Quang's color palette. For one thing, I believe that I got a similar feel to Quang's choice of colors. According to Fagerlund's feedback, I was too stiff in trying to replicate the human subjects—to the point where they were anatomically and proportionally incorrect. There was a general deficiency in capturing the human form, and a lack of clarity due to the lack of control with watercolor. I learned that I need to observe more closely, and truly watch how watercolor flows on paper.



Figure 2: Hokusai and Monet

As an illustration, I intended to show the color range from Monet's works and aimed to exhibit line weight in Hokusai's art with a calligraphy pen. Admittedly, there were some successes and failures due to my inexperience with calligraphy pens. Hence, Fagerlund's feedback called attention the production of colors in accord with Impressionist art, specifically the layering in colors, broken brush strokes, and an attempt of presenting light against a form. Even so, I failed in emulating the atmosphere of Monet and Hokusai's works by drawing a distracting outline that was too thick and uniform. At least I discovered that I need self-training in other mediums and must enhance my ability to notice.

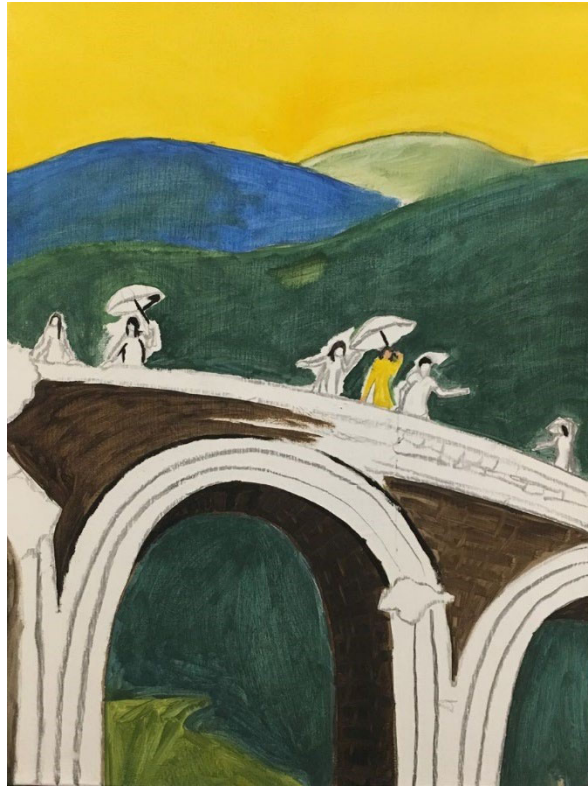


Figure 3: Quang and Hokusai



Figure 4

In my most successful piece, I was able to overcome the sense of awkwardness and learn from some of my visual hiccups in my watercolor studies. I attained a better sense of defining forms, proportions, shape, and line stability while referencing Quang's artwork. In addition, I enjoyed how the cherry blossoms in Hokusai's piece came out. Speaking about the process in Figure 3, I used vine charcoal to sketch out the composition onto the canvas. In the early stages, I was too afraid of being assertive in my color choices and would merely glaze the canvas with the pigment. Thankfully, Fagerlund eased my worries and encouraged me to be more decisive and mix more paint. Also, he suggested that I be more inventive with the sky; he believed that it would be a good opportunity to experiment and stray away from a typical sunset. Regarding Figure 4, I do need to push for a wider range in the value scale (lights and shadows). Even though I still need to refine the areas in the bridge, I was content with the results of the overall painting.

X. Directions for Future Research

For future research, I would like my thesis to investigate Vietnamese art history and how the Western world intersects with Southeast Asian art. This line of inquiry generated my newfound interest to create an exhibition that will educate people about Vietnamese heritage and highlight my Asian American status. My name is Julie Do, an example of the duality in my cultural identity. What does it mean to be an Asian American? I wish to answer this soon. Moreover, I believe that Southeast Asian art (especially that of Vietnam) is relatively unaddressed in American public schools.

Throughout my education, the Asian countries that were included in art history classes primarily focused on China, Japan, and India. This is not to imply that these countries do not deserve our attention, and I understand that it is difficult to teach everything in a limited amount of time. As a lifelong learner, I would like to be able to access upcoming curriculum and scholarly research that places Southeast Asian art more at the forefront.

XI. Conclusion



Figure 5: Self-portrait in Mirror

Based on my findings to date, I was able to expand my knowledge on Impressionism and ukiyo-e art. By understanding these art movements, I was able to make sense of the time and place in which Monet, Quang, and Hokusai worked for their livelihoods as artists. Working closely with these artists' productions, I achieved insight into areas in which I need to improve. This includes mark making, craftsmanship, range in values, sensibility for human anatomy, color theory, and originality (shift from blatant copying). I did realize that my selected artists were all male and would like to cover other gender identities in the future.

These lessons fit into my own approach of art by reminding myself to make multiple thumbnail sketches, patiently work in layers, train for a more observant eye and nimble hand, and experiment with compelling backgrounds and subjects. Ultimately, my long-term goals include my wish to become a top-notch artist, take risks, continue to learn from my triumphs and blunders, develop my own style, and incorporate cultural meaning in my art.

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