

*Frankie Gao is a Hamburg based, international, visual artist. Born in China, she has exchanged her country for a European base. Her works are composed around themes of astronomy, scientific research, science fiction and philosophy.*

**Thank you for taking the time to speak to us. We are excited to see your upcoming exhibition in The Hague, and would like to provide readers with some background. First of all, who are you and where can we find you?**

I was born and raised in Beijing, where I lived for 24 years. Then I left my home country to pursue my second Master Degree in the Netherlands at the Frank Mohr Institute in Groningen. Currently I am living and working in Hamburg, Germany.

**When did you first start to see yourself as a creative, and how did you express it?**

My mother tells me that around the age of two I started doodling on paper as soon as I learnt how to master pencils. I also do recall the time when I produced series of “abducted princess rescued by prince” stories on a batch of A2 paper while I was still a pre-schooler. Grimms Märchen, and Andersen’s Fairy Tales were wildly popular throughout China.

However, it wasn’t until 22 that I became aware of my creativity, which is fairly late. Years of solid basic training was considered by the majority of art professionals nationwide at the time as essential and fundamental, during which many art students lost the track of what art really was. I was nearly becoming one of them, and I was completely bored.

At the Bachelor degree show in 2005, when most of my peers installed their paintings of landscapes or pretty figures, I brought a set of small-scaled drawings that depicted aerial views of dystopic metropolitan cities which I appropriated from Google Maps and sealed in Praxis glass. I just wanted to be different from others. The introduction of Google Maps in China really opened up a whole new world to me.

Weeks after the show I attended the entrance exam for the master study, at the section of three hours creative exam, I submitted drawings of a number of human figures faced down falling to an urbanized area below. Years after that, a professor still remembered my work simply because no other candidates did anything similar. It was a magic moment, I felt free and blessed.

**What does art mean to you, and what impact does it have on you and your life?**

It brought me freedom, inner happiness as well as excruciation. Sometimes it is like a wild horse: hard to tame, a whip and harness usually don’t work at all. *(laughs)* Over the years, you realize that your mind is the forest or the savannah. The mysterious wild creature hidden in it makes it a wonder. It will approach you, but only if you stop hunting it.

**That's a beautiful description, the imagery of wildness and rawness. Does this reflect in your work? Who are your biggest influences?**

Not really, I would say my work is 'neat, orderly and nuanced' (*laughs*). I can't stand chaos.

Artists like Hieronymus Bosch, Botticelli, Lucian Freud (drawings), Kiki Smith, Otto Dix, astronomy pictures from NASA, sci-fi movies and documentary like Cosmos, influence my style and way of thinking in one way or another.

Recently I have been reading *Parallel Worlds* by Michio Kaku and *The Science of Interstellar* by Kip Thorne, very informative and insightful!

**That is a broad array of influences, but in the end, what does inspire you specifically?**

Inspiration, in my mind, is the result of years of dedication and perseverance as an artist. In a more practical way, reading, making art, strolling in nature or communicating with people. Even everyday things can be inspiring, if you allow yourself to experience it.

**What message does your art carry? What should people understand if they look at your works?**

If I have to condense it in a few sentences:

The universe, that I believe in, cannot be interpreted with human understanding.

The universe has little to do with earthly matters.

And, in the end, no individual human life leaves a trace in this world.

We are nothing but dust compared to the vast infinite universe. But here we are, struggling for a better life, arguing over who is right in a relationship, consuming resources and spending time with other emotionally unconnected people just so that we don't feel lonely. After we perish away one day, they all matter no more.

That is almost every time what reflects on my mind when I am working. That is also the moment when I can jump away from the material aspect of daily life and silently revel in building my own world.

**Which challenges do you face in your art? And what motivates you to be an artist?**

To be an artist is a calling for life, not a job you choose to pay the bills. So I just keep on doing what I do and eventually the way shows itself.

Once I had a spontaneous talk with a girl who also practiced Yoga, she told me that Yoga was more a lifestyle than a sport. I agreed with her. Mastering some difficult poses won't make you a sophisticated Yogi, it is the mind that matters.

It's basically the same with being an artist. Does it make you an artist if you can paint

a flying bird. No, it makes you a qualified craftsman. It is the artistic mind that sets you apart. It is feeling the urge to create new things and to always look out for something that is inspiring and worthy. It is refusing to conform to banality and mediocrity. This frees your mind and gives you reason to be happy. Being yourself or a better self. Even if it is just for an instant.

If it were not for art, I wouldn't start perusing great literature instead of dozing off at boring afternoon classes in school; I wouldn't sneak out to attend courses in Peking University so I could find out how Buddhism evolved in ancient China. I wouldn't wade through theories on parallel universe, quantum mechanics, dark matter, etc..

It might not make me a great artist, but it made me an earnest learner, and changed my life.

**Thank you for your interview. We will be looking forward to the exhibition!**