

*I Have No Home But Me*

An Exhibition of Painting, Artist's Book, and Poetry

by

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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## Abstract

*I Have No Home But Me* explores themes of home and duality through personal narratives embedded in my paintings and artists' books. A duality that exists within a body does not necessarily exist as a pair of oppositions. The pair can also be complementary to each other, or live at the same time as coexistence. This paper examines how the idea of duality threads its way through the key themes in my studio practice: painting and colour theory; ambiguity and disconnection created by minimalistic work; and the concept of home and identity. These themes—ambiguity, formal structure, and home—coincide with my personal narrative, which is also present. Examples of artworks by Agnes Barley, Gustav Klimt, and Agnes Martin are discussed in relation to these themes with a focus on architecture and memory, the window as a dualistic spatial device, and how grids influence the physical and mental states of the human body.

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“The subtle hints in his poems were beyond my imaginations. Across that river, at the nib of the bridge, he installs his ride, reluctant to depart, because beyond the weeping willows, amongst the tranquil dwellings, lies his childhood home.” (Yang 142)

— Yang Mu

“他的诗隐约示意的，更不是那天我能想象。他路过那条河，驻车桥头，久久不去，是因为那垂柳后静谧的屋舍当中，有他童年住过的家。”

—杨牧

*The Former Book of Mount Chi-Lai* 奇来前书

Translated by Yantong Li

*“I Have No Home But Me”: A Personal Narrative Embedded with  
Identity Exploration, Architectural Space, and Dualism*



## Identity and Meaning of Home, Femininity, Translation

I was born in China during the period of the One-Child Policy, and as a result, I am the only child of my parents (fig. 1). A lot of discussions and criticisms were conducted regarding how women suffered from this policy over the past two decades, as



Fig. 1 “Daughters are also descendants”

they did not own the autonomy of their bodies and reproductive rights. However, growing up as the only-daughter surrounded by many other females who were also the only children in their families, recently made me realize how I have benefited from this

policy. It made me aware of my privilege. I am the only child of my parents, and consequently my parents gave me all of their resources. I know my parents wanted another child when they were in their 30s, which did not happen. I wonder, if there hadn't been a one-child policy, would I still have had all the benefits? I wonder if they would have treated me differently had my sibling been a boy? Going to school surrounded by almost equal amounts of males and females, I observed that boys and girls are not that different regarding intelligence and even physical abilities. This policy reduced the discrimination for many females from my generation, for example, having equal educational opportunities, in some cases girls were given access to higher degrees when parents could afford expensive tuitions and costs related to studying abroad. Sacrificing reproductive freedoms from one female generation in exchange for the progression of gender equality was, in my opinion, seemingly the only path the Chinese

government could take in order to reduce the myriad stresses related to over-population. I am not saying that gender inequality has been eliminated in China, but this policy certainly gave a lot of girls and women pause—imposed conditions to think about their autonomy and identities as females especially in terms of access to education and its inherent link to financial independence.

My parents and I emigrated to Canada when I was sixteen. We moved frequently during our first two years as we settled in. I also moved once a year when I relocated to Baltimore for undergraduate studies. Every time I move, a cycle of learning new habits is initiated in order to establish a set of domestic habits—all of which requires a lot of physical and mental labour, to adjust not only to the relocation of furniture, but also to the new city. This constant moving has been exhausting and I can't help but wonder what home actually means to me. Recently my father decided to sell the childhood apartment I grew up in Xiamen, China. My aunt who is also my parent's realtor posted the listing along with the floor plan online. Seeing the floorplan and photos prompted a flood of memories from my childhood. However, the situation is complicated because my father is selling the apartment as a way to build capital so that I can purchase a house in Canada. Again, I feel extremely privileged and fortunate to be an only child, since a house has become a difficult commodity to acquire for my generation without parental assistance. Thus my childhood home coupled with my father's decision turns into an ideal home that simultaneously dwells in my past and my future, similar to what Gaston Bachelard describes as houses for dreamers, "... the place in which we have experienced daydreaming reconstitute themselves in a new daydream, and it is because our memories of former dwelling-places are relived as daydreams that these dwelling-places of the past remain in us for all time" (Bachelard 28). There is a kind of duality in

the way that I think about my relationship between the past and the present, the past and the future, between the places I have lived and will live, between China and Canada. It evolves into a hybridity as I get to know Western culture better, as speaking English becomes more natural, and as I evaluate situations utilizing both Eastern and Western thinking and values. South Korean artist Lee Ufan experienced a similar condition of what he calls *nowhereness*, having lived in several places but belonging to none, “I see myself as a ping-pong ball, the man in the middle, always being pushed back and forth with no one willing to accept me as an insider” (Lee 57). This kind of hybridity reflects my identity—I am Chinese, but I live in Canada, and each year I grow more apart from my Chinese friends who still live in China. These friends no longer consider me as fully Chinese, and I can never be a full Canadian no matter how long I have lived and will live here. In my practice, this hybridity is particularly evident, as my works are often described as “lacking Chinese elements”; however, they inherently reveal my Chinese upbringing in that the forms employed distil my childhood experiences. This indirect approach garners a kind of indeterminate authenticity that seems more genuine than an illustration or a direct representational form would. It speaks to the abstraction of memory and experience itself, as well as the ambiguity of Lee Ufan’s *nowhereness*.

Translation is a process that I frequently engage with regularly—being bilingual and living-in-between. It is oral, textual, and visual. An example in visual form is *A Piece of 7” by 7” Paper Torn Apart* series (fig. 2). The first action is to tear a piece of paper into four irregular rectangular shapes with torn edges; I then carefully transcribe the sides of the shapes onto masking tapes, pasting them to the wooden panel that is



Fig. 2 Brubey Hu, *A Piece of 7" by 7" Paper Torn Apart No. 9*, 12" x 9", acrylic on wood panel, 2019

painted with a background colour. Using thick acrylic paint, the shapes are articulated with variations of white to mimic the colour of the paper. In this process of translation, subtle textures are created where the background shows through as organic traces of my hand. Metaphorically, I found this kind of organic trace unavoidable in the process of literal translation as well—there is always something missing, whether it is the original verb and adjective that do not have equivalents in

the other language, or the imagery embedded within an idiom that loses its ability to convey the same message once translated.

This process of translation is pushed further by my textual practice via my self-authored book of poetry, *Returning, Dreaming & Talking* (回与梦呓 in original Chinese), which will be displayed alongside the paintings in my thesis exhibition. The book consists of a collection of texts exploring the themes of home and identity, a sense of drifting, continuously, from place to place, as I enter adulthood, and as a female raised in both China and Canada. I wrote the poems in Chinese, and with the assistance of a translator Sissi Jialu Zheng converted the texts into English. I then invited my Chinese friends and family to collaborate on translating these poems a third time from English to Chinese. Although I can do all of these translations myself, I am interested in

examining how much information, meaning and emotion evaporated through the repeated process. Sophie J. Williamson, the editor of *Translation*, remarks in “Between Languages” that, “untranslatable specificity is built into the fabric of not only language but *being*; [u]nderlying translation therefore is the inherent impossibility of the task” (Williamson 20). Many of my original poems utilize “dreams” as the agency to retrieve memories and connect with my past; however, dreams and memories are personal and untranslatable. The compelling result of the third translation from English to Chinese demonstrates that the literal languages, in this case, become dualistic instruments of precision and ambiguity. On one hand, the precision of translation is delivered by the knowledge of both languages, as well as the combination of words and grammar which are the essential characteristics of languages. On the other hand, the ambiguity is generated contextually from one line to another, from one paragraph to another, which then facilitates an open-ended conversation between the poetry and the translator.

The use of blue grids was inspired by graph paper—a common tool for mathematics and laboratories. In this book, some of the graphs occupy a whole page in the book while others are divided into sections correlating with the texts. Incorporating grids as the underlying rule, I also investigate the rhombus shape as a distortion of the square, which is another nod to translation, to the angled shadows that occur from windows as light streams into an interior space. To me, it is also an equally subtle way of marking my identity and authorship as female, as the rhombus shape symbolically referring to female genitalia (fig. 3). Both of these two notions often suggest logic as well as rationality, and even coldness without any emotions; however, the narrative is built by the way the rhombus shapes coordinate with the grids as well as transfigure the content of texts into visual geometric forms. Moreover, the binding method for this set

of books is singer sewn binding, which uses a sewing machine to stitch the pages and the cover together. Due to its durability and ability to open flat, this binding method is widely employed for passports and thin notebooks which are designed for travelling purposes. The poems are indicated with dates, referring to the format of diary/journal. They record my journey of constant moving and travelling, reflections of my hybrid identity, and retrospections of the past.

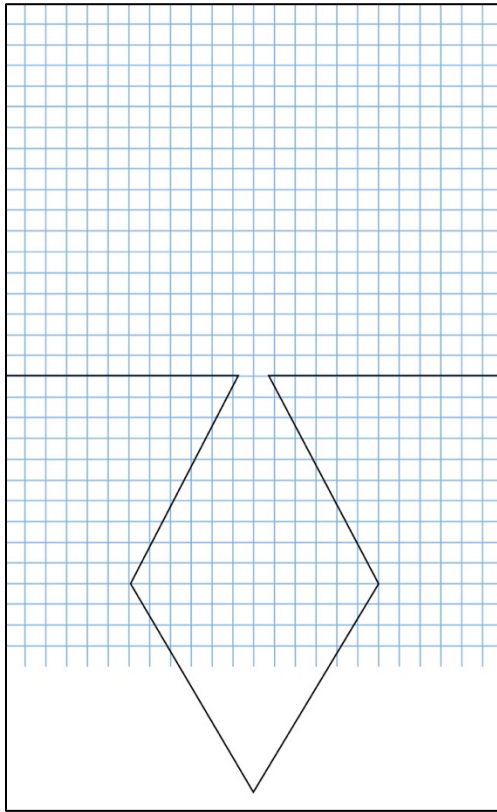


Fig. 3 Brubey Hu, a page from *Returning, Dreaming & Talking*, digital drawing, 2020

## **Ambiguity and Disconnection, Painting and Colour Theory, Minimalistic Approach**

At sixteen, I moved from China to Canada, and then at eighteen moved to the United States. The constant moving made me realize that changing locations, which means changing surroundings and climates, generates disconnections. Disconnections are produced by human interaction with other humans and social environments from the encounter of distinct cultural and social values. Instead of directly confronting the cultural and social conflicts and differences between East and West, I try to find solutions within my work, to reconcile these disagreements, to explain a consensus that is embedded in a mutual image—a painting. Using fundamental and geometric elements that everyone recognizes, such as rectangles, I find commonalities that dodge the conflicts which sometimes are impossible to resolve. By composing basic shapes, the paintings appear to be minimalistic; they appear at first to lack a message. When there is not enough information, disconnection occurs, as well as ambiguity; both notions support a sense of spaciousness—more blank room for the viewers to insert their reality into the artwork. Chinese contemporary artist Hu Xiaoyuan explains this kind of disconnection between the artist and viewers in her interview with Monica Merlin,

No matter how much I see the distance between people and wish it to be different, this is beyond my control. I can spend a lot of time thinking about making an object, but giving it to you does not mean that you will understand it. In fact maybe you will never understand it. It is as though you may hear my words but never understand them. Many things cannot be expressed fully through text, music or art. (Hu)

This ambiguity suggests a kind of consensus. In *Against Interpretation*, Susan Sontag recalls the traditional understanding of abstract painting as “the attempt to have, in the ordinary sense, no content; since there is no content, there can be no interpretation” (Sontag 17). However, in my opinion, minimalist abstract works are neither cold nor indifferent with “no content”, since they have the ability of distilled containment which opens up more possibilities for each viewer’s individual interpretation, whether the shapes remind her of certain past periods, or colours that bring unique resonations. I embrace this ambiguity in my work, as “once it is out of [my] hand the artist has no control over the way a viewer will perceive the work” (LeWitt 21). Each component in a body of work is intentionally placed by the artist, but this does not deliver an exact meaning to the viewers since “everyone is a separate entity in the world” (Hu).

Moreover, minimalist works also suggest a process of distilling. *In the Mood for Love* is a romantic film created by Hong Kong film director Wong Kar-Wai who is famous for his slow but profound storytelling approach, interlacing the plot with elements such as light and shadow as well as background music (fig. 4). My interest in this film is not the protagonists’ romance but Wong’s use of ambiguity, conceived by the flat and insipid plot which leaves room for the audience to imagine what actually happens. The ambiguity guides the audience to concentrate on the overall atmosphere and mood. The film does not appear to relate to Minimalism formally, nor does it have a strong connection to my paintings in terms of colour schemes. However, the plot of the released film version is condensed by cutting redundant scenes off; the remaining scenes comprised of a minimalist plot that explains a simple, intimate and sentimental



story about two brokenhearted individuals with the capacity for the audience to recollect and imagine.

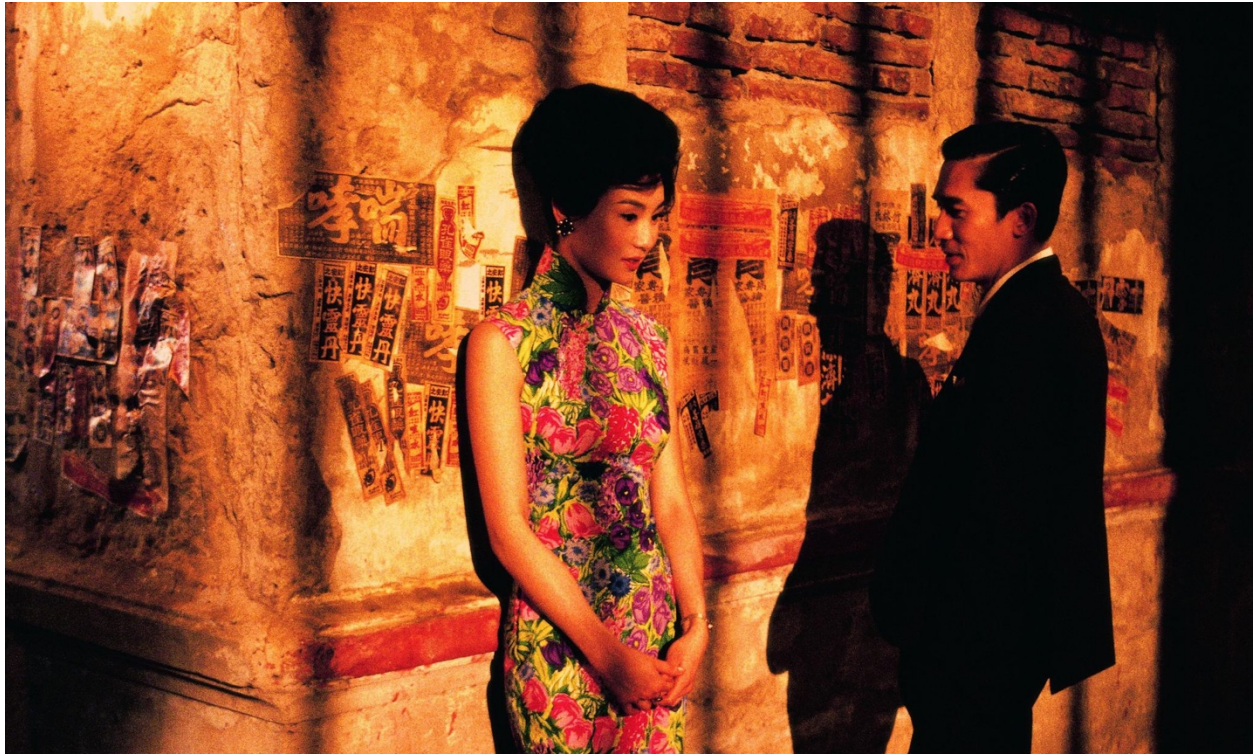


Fig. 4 A shot from *In the Mood for Love* by Wong Kar-Wai, 2000

Furthermore, duality has developed in several aspects of my practice. In my paintings, I often integrate the properties of light and shadow by combining two panels or canvases. The space in between these pairings is activated because the colours and shapes extend from the front of the paintings to the sides which creates coloured reflections and shadows on the walls or surfaces on which they are displayed. A visual duality is constructed—what exists on the surfaces are not only the opaque paints but also these more breathable reflections in contrast. Integrating two separate panels into one body of painting physically echoes the concept of disconnection and connection, as well as the number of two. Both panels are still seen as one unified piece, despite their discrete physicality and differing contents with the illuminating reflections connecting

ambiguously in between. For instance, *3 or 4 or 5?* (fig. 5) is an acrylic painting that consists of two wooden panels, with four painted yellow vertical rectangles and one illuminating rectangle all in one scale. Three of the painted rectangles are in semi-transparent yellow, and one rectangle is in solid opaque yellow. Sections of the inner two sides are both painted yellow with the same length as the opaque rectangle at the same height. Continuity and disconnection coexist with each other like a pair of dualities in my paintings, which is underscored by the vague connection made by the distinct separation of both panels.

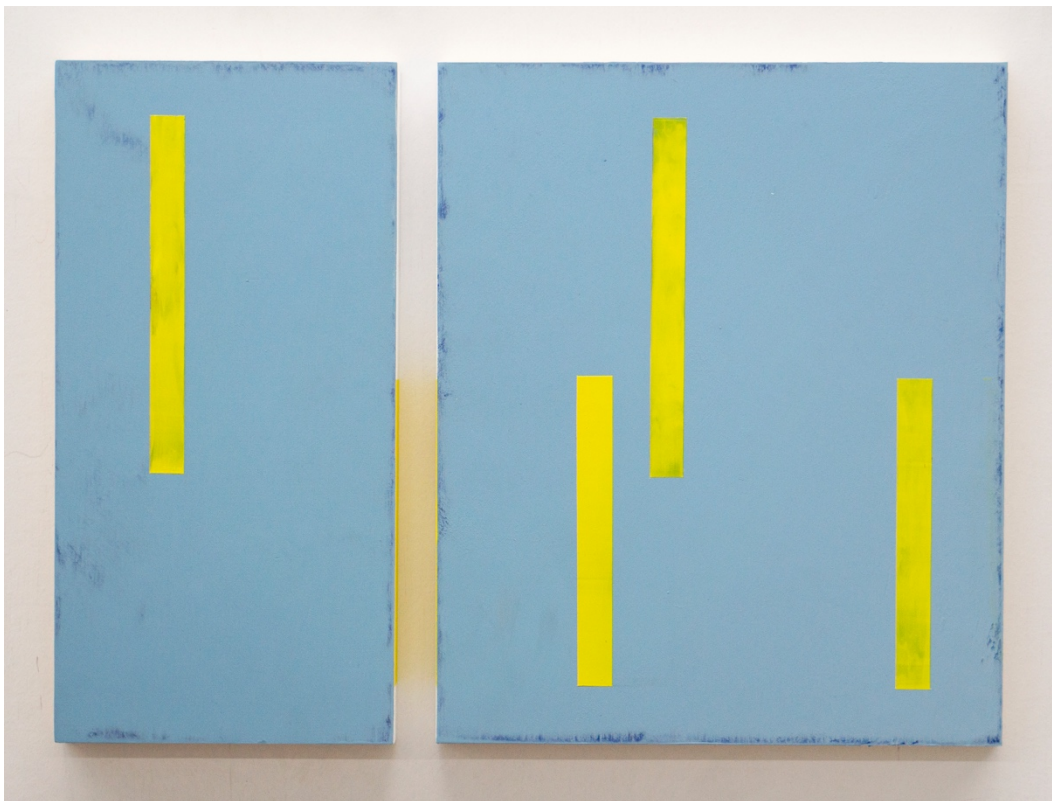


Fig. 5 Brubey Hu, *3 or 4 or 5?*, 12" x 6" and 12" x 10", acrylic on wood panels, 2019

Besides the paintings, I have collected the used tapes and transparent film sheets, residues from the process of masking out hard-edged shapes. The same kind of paint was applied to both surfaces, yet the material and aesthetic outcomes are distinct—one is the rigorous and defined shape on the front of the wooden panel, while the other is a

loose and organic gesture on the masking tapes. They are two opposite representations of the same action, a duality of my hand as the artist that is simultaneously controlling and free. They were born from the same process, and coexist with each other. The tapes also serve as a memory or residue of how the paintings are made.



Fig. 6 Agnes Barley, *Untitled Collage*, 22" x 30", acrylic on cut paper, 2009, *Grids and Rivers* series

During my summer internship with New-York-based artist Agnes Barley, I was inspired by her drawings, wherein she collages painted paper to construct architectural forms associated with memories and imagery (i.e. waves). I formally borrowed this methodology with my recent tape series, *Landscape Structures*, to reconstitute the tapes which are usually discarded by artists, turning them into more meaningful compositions. More specifically, in her *Grids and Rivers* series, Barley generates

harmonious forms made up of hard-edged geometric shapes and organic brushstrokes that contain some imperfections (fig. 6). The juxtaposition of rigidity in shapes and looseness of gestures brings together a sense of balance and playfulness. By

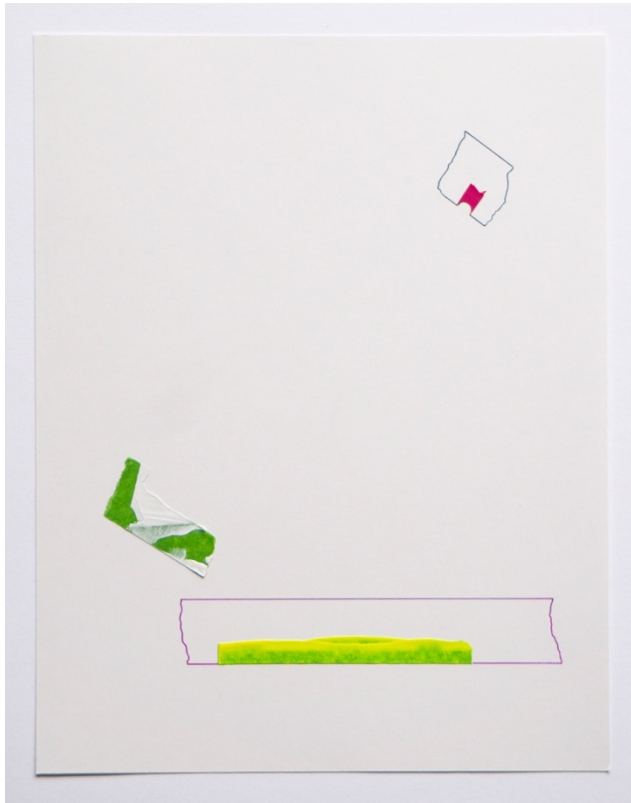


Fig. 7 Brubey Hu, *Absence No. 1*, tapes, acrylic, and pen on paper, 11" x 8.5", 2020

intentionally arranging the tapes I have collected, based on their textures and colours, their original identities as processed-based tools are metamorphosed. They are at once archive, artist sketch and formal abstraction (a confluence of line, shape and gesture)—their meanings are inverted and altered both collectively and individually, by the ways they combine with each other and by the specific position of each one on the paper (fig. 7).

These tape compositions are displayed in book form as a subtle indication to the artist sketchbook, which invites the viewers to touch the textures on the tapes and interact with the narrative happening from page to page.

“But why painting?” I am often asked this question. Lee Ufan defines a painter as someone “who clearly conceives of the subject matter or idea that is to be painted, and faithfully transfers and gives form to that concept” (Lee 138). Making paintings is the most sincere and natural way for me to respond to my surroundings rationally and subconsciously. In making abstract paintings, I explore relations and interactions

between colours and shapes with reference and inspiration from architectural spaces that I experience daily. Each piece captures architectural details set within the ephemeral properties of light and shadow. My paintings transcend flat images and/or physical objects, through subtractive simplification in support of contemplation that documents introspective moments. In my paintings, I seek perfection in making smooth surfaces, and yet I embrace the small unpredictable imperfections. What I mean by unpredictable is that even though I know what kind of general surfaces I will get by utilizing tools, such as the taping knife and the foam roller, I cannot foresee exactly what kind of marks will be left on the surface. The mark, which I earlier referred to as the imperfection generated by the hand, is the reason why each painting is unique because the textures can never be reproduced identically, which also demonstrates the “impression that the artist has been ‘in touch’ with it—a quality missing in the copy” and “the living labo[u]r of the artist” (Graw 97). The scale I have been examining in my paintings is relatively small, as I hope to imbue a sense of intimacy between my work and the viewers. Bachelard interprets the relationship between reality and refined representation, between the human body and our perception of scale:

Representation becomes nothing but a body of expressions with which to communicate our own images to as a basic faculty, one could say, in the manner of Schopenhauer: ‘the world is my imagination.’ The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it. But in doing this, it must be understood that values become condensed and enriched in miniature. Platonic dialectics of large and small do not suffice for us to become cognizant of the dynamic virtues of miniature thinking. One must go beyond logic in order to experience what is large in what is small. (Bachelard, 169)

My paintings are the products responding to “the world and events that fly off from it like sparks” (Lee 141). My recent research references childhood memories that become less and less reliable, the more time passes. I revisit distant childhood memories, which I then attempt to implant into the paintings. For example, *Listen to the Silent Rain* (fig. 8) reconstitutes a vague memory about my parents’ room in my childhood home. I do



Fig. 8 Brubey Hu, *Listen to the Silent Rain*, 18” x 36” and 12” x 36”, acrylic on wood panels, 2019

not remember the exact details of the room but some specific architectural elements retain visual clarity that is often correlated to familial interactions. As a girl, I slept in

my parents' room with my mother by my side. One night, we were lying on the bed listening to my mother's MP3 player, and one of the songs called *the Silent Rain* played while it was raining heavily outside. In this painting, I depict both the physical structure of the room's window and the sense of security felt staying indoors, as we looked outdoors at the rain falling on the evergreen scenery. The narrative is embedded in this painting; however, the viewer will not receive the same message, just like how Hu Xiaoyuan claims, "[e]ven if I describe my work to you down to the last detail, you can never ever go through that path from the same entrance to achieve what I did" (Hu). Graw paraphrases Hegel's lecture on painting by saying that "we see in painting that which is active in us and drives us" (Graw 95). I intend to create paintings with my own narration and traces of my hand, yet again, leave plenty of room for the viewers to insert their reality based on what they observe.

Most of the colours I use in my work have grey as part of their ingredients. Grey is made from a combination of black and white, which can be thought of as a pairing of two binaries, but grey lies somewhere in between. It is "no longer white but not yet black" (Batchelor 64). In my opinion, black and white are not opposed to each other since they are both extreme and defined notions (extremely dark and bright); grey is their opposite, because of its neutral and ambiguous characteristics and is "the irregular path between the imagined absolutes of white and black" (Batchelor 74). There are endless variations of grey, "red-grey, yellow-grey, blue-grey, green-grey, orange grey, violet-grey" (Batchelor 74). If we single one of the greys out, it seems like a normal grey; however, having a variety kind of greys together is the way to subtly show their true identities (fig. 9). The ambiguity of grey is demonstrated not only through the word "grey areas" as "we tend to imagine" but also the difficulty of "imagin[ing] a pure grey"

(Batchelor 74). Artist Lee Ufan considers grey as a colour with “a weak sense of existence”, yet “is well-suited to expressing a vague, ephemeral, and uncertain world”

(Lee 64).



Fig. 9 Grey variations



## Grids, Architecture (home, floorplan, window), Light and Shadow



Fig. 10 Agnes Martin, *On a Clear Day* series, installation view at Guggenheim Museum in New York



Fig. 11 Agnes Martin, selected pieces from *On a Clear Day* series, Museum of Modern Art

The grid is a universal form that has been widely used in many artists' works throughout art histories such as Piet Mondrian's *Composition* paintings and stacking of

televisions in Nam June Paik's *Internet Dreams*. As a product of human civilization, it possesses the dualistic nature of being both explicit and ambiguous. In her essay "Grids", Rosalind Krauss declares that grids are "[f]lattened, geometricized, ordered", and "antinatural, antimimetic, antireal" (Krauss 50). In drafting my ideas, I rely heavily on grids, perhaps also because of my training in graphic design. This fundamental visual language is utilized in many of Agnes Martin's work such as *On a Clear Day* series, in which she employs screen-printing to make perfectly straight lines. A grid within a grid, the screen-prints amount to thirty versions based on the same matrices (fig. 10). None of them look the same; there are open and closed grids; there are different amounts of rectangles and lines, however they all consist of the simplest form—a straight line that is repeated. In the documentary *On a Clear Day*, Martin comments, "Everything is needed, as contributed, and so everybody is as important as everybody else"; her insights about the equality of life and happiness are demonstrated in this series as a set of prints orderly and profoundly, unique but also the same. Looking at the prints serially, it is as if the grids have lives and are breathing rhythmically, or like an animated elastic band being tightened and loosened (fig. 11). Krauss argues that "the grid portends the centrifugal or centripetal existence of the work of art", which demonstrates the dualistic nature of grids (Krauss 60). Martin's grids are divided into two different kinds—ones with lines in both directions that extend beyond the borders are centrifugal, while those with edged borders are centripetal. They all have distinct orders, composing different kinds of characters within. Next, I will discuss more specifically how some of the grids function relating to architecture.

A floorplan is a form of grids that articulates the structure of a house “with striking efficiency”, and also recalls scenes and memories from the house (Krauss 50). Miniaturized and flattened, the floorplan is a two-dimensional translated image of three-dimensional architectural space with details of spatial orientation and dimensions. Because of the accuracy, the individual who has been to the architectural space will be able to remember her activities in the space by reading the floorplan that

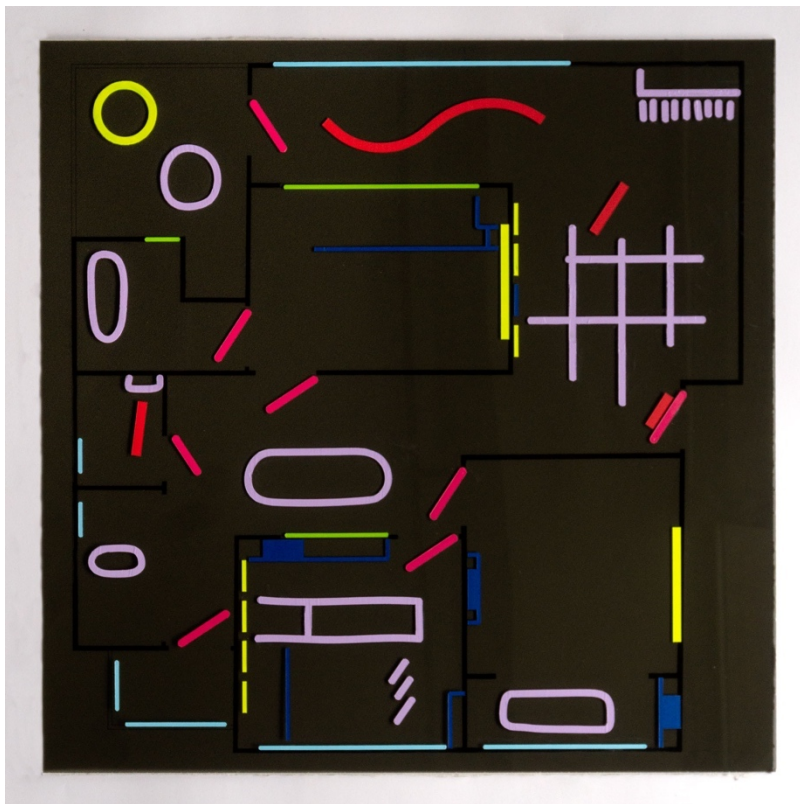


Fig.12 Brubey Hu, *To Retrieve*, acrylic on grey Plexiglas and ink on paper, 24” x 24”, 2020

triggers an imagined movement through the interior space. The floorplan activates one’s mind entering the three-dimensional space provisionally, whether one has been to the space physically or not. In most floorplans, there is usually a border between the house itself and the outside, “a mapping of the space inside the frame onto itself” (Krauss 61). This border

restrains the exterior forces coming into the house unless invited by inside forces (i.e. opening the doors and/or windows). Being a centripetal grid, the floorplan illustrates the house’s ability to shield and protect, like what Bachelard specifies as a relation to animals’ nature, “...whenever life seeks to shelter, protect, cover to hide itself, the imagination sympathizes with the being that inhabits the protected space” (Bachelard

151). I integrated the floorplan of my childhood home with my memories living in that apartment to compose the artwork, *To Retrieve*, depicting not only the movable structures (i.e. doors and windows) but also referencing the activities and feelings I experienced in different areas of the apartment (fig. 12). I first drew the floorplan on paper by hand, and then I digitally rendered the shapes that were laser engraved to a piece of grey Plexiglas. The shapes are colour-coded; some are quadrilateral while others are loose and rounded. They symbolize the retrospection of my interaction with family and the architectural space. More exactly, the purple shapes in organic gestures represent my joyous playtime as a child, while rectangles and curvy shapes in red portray my bitter memories with family members. The dark blue hard-edged shapes indicate the physical structures of my experiences, studying and using digital technologies. Windows are depicted in two colours based on their positions—the ones that link outdoors and indoors are in pale blue, while the ones that connect one room to another are in yellow-green.

The window functions as a physical grid and an essential device in architectural space. It embodies the dualistic nature of both connecting and dividing interior and exterior spaces, being “simultaneously transparent and opaque” (Krauss 58). In the prose “Window” by Chinese author Qian Zhong-Shu, he discusses the window as an accessory to the house while the door is a necessity, “With the door, we can go out; with the window, we don’t need to go out” (Qian). The window frames our view, but an interior perspective versus an exterior perspective changes the viewer’s perception and orientation with the knowledge that there is an implicit dialectic nature of inside and outside. An individual in the outdoors does not have access to the inside of a house, unless a window is opened or fully transparent, which allows limited visual admittance.

“There are two endless directions. In and out” (Martin 18). Gazing through the window from outside, the interior space becomes infinite because of the uncertainty and vagueness initiated by the barrier. What one perceives from the interior is no longer limited to the exact interior space but is constructed from a combination of what one sees from the exterior coupled with assumptions pertaining to inside and outside in reference to our understanding of pictorial space. Looking at the outdoors from indoors through the window, the outside world turns into an abstract and subjective image that reveals one’s introspection. The outdoor scenery is filtered by the glass and the physical grid, which enables one to lengthen the look into infinity, incorporating the viewer’s contemplation. Therefore, the window is both centrifugal and centripetal, because it grants the outside and the inside to merge, as well as letting forces in and out, yet produces distinct results of looking and feeling.

An example to explain the window from an outsider’s perspective is *The House of Guardaboschi* (1912), a painting by Gustav Klimt shown at the Neue Galerie in New York (fig. 13). Klimt portrays a house covered in green plants with five windows in different colours and states, both opened and closed. Overall, this painting consists of shades of greens ranging from very bright yellow-green on the lawn, to dark blue-green on the roof as well as inside the house. The plants on the exterior wall are a sophisticated mix of both greens. With such dense and organic textures, it sets off the geometric shapes and straight-lined five windows as the focal point of the painting. The window frames, or the grids, are similar, yet they are all in distinct gestures. Klimt constructs a mystery for the viewer to guess who lives here and what tastes they have, by creating one window fully closed, three windows camouflaged with flowers where the viewer does not have visual access to the interior, and the top right window wide open

with a vague indication of the house's interiors, as well as the natural setting behind the house. The tiny area showing the landscape behind the house has the same kind of bright yellow-green hue as the lawn in the foreground. This formally indicates not only an effective balance of individual formal elements to the whole, but also that the view

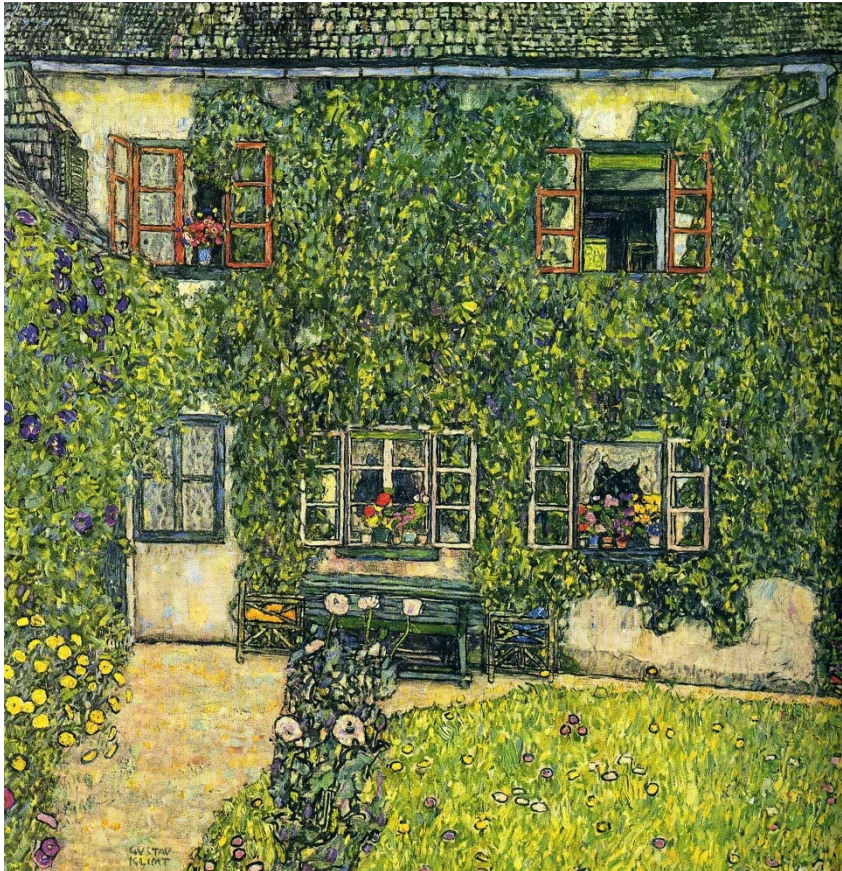


Fig.13 Gustav Klimt, *The House of Guardaboschi*, 1912, Neue Galerie

from the interior looking out is just as extraordinary as the front yard. The top right window seems more profound than the open foreground, due to the contrast between the dark and light colours within a decidedly small area on the painting, which functions as an eye gazing back to the viewer.

“Closing windows is equal

to closing the eyes”, as described by Qian Zhong-Shu, “to close the eyes searching in the dream, therefore you get up and close the windows” (Qian). The closed windows in the painting are like hiding from the outer world, and seeking to find the true self and dreams as “many sceneries in the universe only appear when eyes are closed” (Qian).

The yellow-green is still the most appealing section, as though the viewers' gaze can pass through the house from the front yard flying to the back of the house, to the unknown

and ambiguous nature in the back which leaves an endless potential for further imagination.



Fig. 14 Uta Barth, *...and of time. (00.5)*, colour photographs in artist's frames, 2000

A window's key function is to transmit light and shadow into the interior. In most architectural spaces, light and shadow are an important pair that adds a temporal layer of dimension and mood. In his *In Praise of Shadow*, Junichiro Tanizaki introduces an example of how light and shadow transform lacquerware's quality in different situations. "Darkness is an indispensable element of the beauty of lacquerware", Tanizaki states, "the lacquerware of the past was finished in black, brown or red, colours built up of countless layers of darkness, the inevitable product of the darkness in which life was lived" (Tanizaki 13). Lacquerware is "unsettlingly garnish and altogether vulgar...in a brilliant light"; it should be "left in the dark, a part here and a part there picked up by a faint light" (Tanizaki 13-14). Light and shadow have the ability to transcend the physical objects into a sensorial experience. Another example of this concept is the photography of artist Uta Barth. In Barth's work, the light and shadow play a significant role in the plain and non-changing domestic space (fig. 14). Her images, composed of light and shadow, reflect on the wall as though the interior space has spirits; they are continuously changing from one gesture to another in very slow and

quiet moves. The walls and furniture are the exact same, as are the locations, yet the atmosphere in the room changes as the light and shadow shifts and softens. In my work, I apply thick paint with taping and palette knives to create smooth but unpredictable surfaces, in order to mimic the behaviour of light and shadow in architectural space. The reason why I choose to include actual reflections in my work is that no matter how proficient I am at painting, the light and shadow still remains an illusion, not the actual presence.

Home, by definition, is “the place where one lives permanently, especially as a member of a family or household” (New Oxford American Dictionary). Different from the “house” that only defines the physical existence of an architectural structure, the home is a personalized furnished place for storing intimate memories and “objects of our greatest affections” that “bring a sense of history with them” (Busch 21). In *Geography of Home*, Akiko Busch argues that “the presence of places and the people who inhabit them tends to merge” (Busch 16). An ideal home is a place wherein one should feel comfortable living, with functional furniture in the right locations, windows and doors bringing in the right amount of air and light, and personal items organized in the right places ready for one to use. In this ideal home, one is surrounded by the familiarity that stimulates reverie inside oneself. Protected under the shield, one can process what is received from the outer world and have a dialogue with oneself, like how a clam is able to turn a grain of sand into a pearl. “[T]he house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (Bachelard 28). Moreover, the ideal home mutes the commotion of the outdoors; all the suppressed chaos converts to the imagination in one’s mind. An example Gaston Bachelard gives is how snow modifies the outside world and enhances one’s self-reflection at home:



The house derives reserves and refinements of intimacy from winter; while in the outside world, snow covers all tracks, blurs the road, muffles every sound, conceals all colors. As a result of this universal whiteness, we feel a form of cosmic negation in action. The dreamer of houses knows and senses this, and because of the diminished entity of the outside world, experiences all the qualities of intimacy with increased intensity (Bachelard 61-62).

It is the house's essential ability to distinguish the in from the out and to shield us from intrusions, but with the home, in addition to the protection, we feel extra secure because of the familiarity and attachment.

## Exhibition Installation Plan & Conclusion

The 2020 MFA thesis exhibitions were suspended due to the COVID19 pandemic. My original plan was to display all the paintings on the wall, and the books of tapes as



Fig.15 Brubey Hu, *In the Bath*, acrylic and paper on wood panels, 18" x 24" and 12" x 24", 2019

well as the poetry on a low round table. More specifically, the paintings would have been hung at different heights based on the structure that is depicted. For instance, *In the Bath* is a painting that consists of two wooden panels, illustrating a section of the bathroom from my childhood home (fig. 15). The cabinet is painted on the upper panel and a bathtub of water is partially painted on the lower panel. The upper panel is displayed at approximately the same height as the cabinet was in my childhood home based on my memory, while the lower panel is displayed on the floor with two supporting wooden bars to mimic the

physical location and orientation of the bathtub (i.e. looking down). Although the painting is exhibited on the walls, the object quality of the painting invites the audience to walk around it in order to receive the full content and narrative. Furthermore, the round table is set on the ground with sitting cushions for the viewers to read the books (fig. 16). The round table references traditional Chinese dining which allows people to have equal distance to the food, and the low position is meant to imitate my childhood



Fig.16 Brubey Hu, installation view, the Artery Gallery

experience where most activities happened on the ground.

Resonating with the paintings on the wall, the side of the table is painted with a blue-violet colour that is similar to the poetry book. In addition to the books of tapes displayed on the table, I had planned to integrate the tapes as an installation to the somewhat hidden wall in the gallery space that resembles the way they were

randomly pasted to the wall in my studio for drying (fig. 17). This inclusion of the tapes is also another nod to translation, in this case from the studio space to the gallery space. The element of duality is created by the looseness of the tapes' gestures on the wall juxtaposing the rigidity of shapes in the painting, which also demonstrates how the paintings are made, and how the tapes serve equal aesthetic value as the paintings.

The title, *I Have No Home But Me*, a line I borrowed from Anne Truitt's *Daybook*, describes my experience of continuous moving and my attempt to recapture imagery in my mind from the home that I never can go back to. Qian Zhong-Shu illustrates how memory plays a significant role in making art, "When we are doing creative works, our imaginations are often thin and poor; however, when it comes to *memory*, no matter it was days or years ago, no matter it was oneself or someone else, our imaginations become surprisingly, happily, and even terribly, fertilized" (Qian). The

title also explains the *nowhereness* (by Lee Ufan), having no physical site to fully belong to but always living in between. Being in the constant domestic flux, in between different physical locations, cultures, as well as climates, makes it difficult to define what my identity and where my home is, leading to the undetermined and ambiguous nature of my work. The lack of explicit information is apparent as there are only fundamental shapes in the paintings. Yet, the sentiments and stories are communicated through the inevitable imperfections done by my hands. This combination is my honest attempt to express my hybrid identity and to pacify the tension between Eastern and Western values. Home as a dualistic notion suggests both personal and shared experiences, meaning everyone has a place in their minds called home but everyone's home is different. Employing geometry and abstraction not only refer to the architectural space that I involve with daily, but also the fragmentary and dubious quality of memory. The indirect and minimalistic approach is a process of reconciling, which grants more space for the audience to define their own notion of home. Ultimately, what is extraordinary about home is not necessarily the physical structure of the home, but what dwells within oneself.



Fig. 17 Brubey Hu, painted tapes on the wall in the studio, 2020

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