

CHLOE ZHOU

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CANVAS

This past year, I have appreciated being able to work with different mediums that push me to explore my art and express myself in various ways. I mainly work with acrylic paints as my primary medium in which I enjoy the freedom and opportunity that a fresh white canvas provides. The harsh strokes, earth tones, complementary colors, and lack of a specific structure allows me to paint however and whatever I want. Painting has been a therapeutic outlet for me to unleash my creativity, especially how I am feeling in the moment, and also how I may have felt at a specific moment in time in the past when I try to recreate that feeling or place. I relish in the agency I have to put my brush to canvas and see what happens when I let myself go, which is why abstract art is my go-to genre. My self portrait was an exploration between



flat and harsh surfaces. I struggle with painting realism and this project was a welcome challenge for me. On the contrary, tattooing people requires a different kind of focus; one that is detailed and meticulous. The stakes are higher, since I am altering someone's body permanently, and these

people come to me for something very specific. I change my approach to my art when it comes to tattooing because it doesn't just involve me and my brushes, for example. It involves other people and it becomes a collaborative process with the person I am tattooing to ensure that this

is what they want. I practice tattooing with informed consent, meaning that I ask questions throughout the session to check in and ensure that there is clear communication throughout before putting anything on or touch one's body.

Q: How did you start tattooing?

A: I got a stick and poke in July during quarantine. 2020 was the year of ‘yes’ for me- the year before, I left school, went home, and went on a mental health journey. I realized that our time is limited so I’ve been trying to be more open in saying ‘Yes’ to everything. Covid limited a lot of things we could do so I really wanted to take advantage of the things I did have control over - like getting a stick and poke!!” When I came back to school in August, I started practicing on grapefruit from lower, ha. I actually got some business inspiration from TikTok- I found a girl on there who was willing to give me some advice which was very helpful and then I started the process: buying materials, doing research, setting up appointments. I tried to do it a couple times a week for practice.

Q: Who were your main ‘customers’ when you first started?

A: The people most willing to get stick and pokes were mostly queer POC’s, actually. I found them to be more open and receptive to the idea than other people generally were. Something that’s really interesting actually is that ink heals differently on different people and tattooing needs to be more intersectional than people realize. I had been practicing on various different shades without noticing and was happy that people trusted me to tattoo them. Now, I have been able to meet and tattoo a bunch of new people. It’s definitely an intimate experience and different than the usual “hang out.” I’m with people for longer periods of time because I like to make sure they’re comfortable and like what’s going on in their body for everyone to have a good experience. I’ve also been able to make connections with people outside of the BC community.

Q: Tattoos aren’t your only form of expression; can you tell me more about your painting “Anguish”?

A: It was inspired by another hate crime turned into people’s own benefit. I didn’t know how to react to the news of the crimes committed against the Asian American women in Atlanta other than really wanting to paint something for myself; I wanted to respond to this for me. I didn’t know how to talk about it because it had *just* happened. The process for this painting was really important to me: I had a sketch and wanted to finish it in one go. I went into the studio at 8 and finished around 10. I’m usually a perfectionist when it comes to art but this time I just developed it as I went. As a queer Asian woman, this very much so represents how I was feeling at the time. I was affected by the heartbreaking news and needed an outlet for myself to process. At first, I wasn’t going to share this with anyone but I then thought this would be a good opportunity to create a platform for conversation. I called it ‘Anguish’ because of how powerful of an emotion and word it is. I came up with it as I was painting: a word to reflect the deep sorrow and hope I was feeling at the time. The eight arms represent the eight women (*Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Delaina Ashley Yuan Gonzalez, Paul Andre Michels, Soon Chung Park, Hyun Grant, Suncha Kim, and Yong Ae Yue*) with a yellow background representing hope. I usually paint activist paintings and this isn’t my usual abstract style, but this was very personal to me. I am Asian American. I am a woman. I am a queer Asian American woman. I just kept on adding on the layers of my identity.



“Anguish”

