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Traffic Poles: a Real Abstraction of Nature and Being

Xin Yu

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TRAFFIC POLES: A REAL ABSTRACTION OF NATURE AND BEING

by

Xin Yu

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for graduation with Honors in the Art, Studio

John Dilg
Thesis Mentor

Fall 2017

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the
Art, Studio have been completed.

Lynne Lanning
Art, Studio Honors Advisor

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Xin Yu
Fall 2017
John Dilg
School of Art and Art History

Witnessing climate change and technological revolution while growing up - eating up our time, energy, and environment has been part of my motivation for finding identity through landscape. More importantly, I'm interested in ways that my Chinese heritage of landscape painting can be rethought and remade in the conversation of international contemporary art. In traditional Chinese landscape painting, there is usually a visualization of the Dao concept of nature and being. But, instead of seeking solace and retreat in nature, which is hardly sustainable in the contemporary world, my work examines the world in terms of my being amidst chaos and ways to incorporate Chinese landscape elements with new approaches.

The day I noticed the liveliness of traffic poles I decide to paint them. I follow all of their signals exactly just as if I was driving down the road: trying my best to stay in the lines and only steer away as the pole indicates when and where. They have always been standing at the corner with arms bending and turning; I see them everyday without looking. My image adopts traditional schema: horizon, height, scale, and meticulous line drawing. Experimentation with ink and various surfaces has been a significant process for me, to recreate the traditional atmospheric effects in my landscapes. In addition, I modeled intensely after a group of international artists who have successfully visualized their beings through work without any of the traditional schema by a closer examination of their color and brushwork. To name a few of the major influences: Pierre Bonnard, Vincent Van Gogh, Milton Avery, Author Dove, Eva Hess, Enzo Cucchi, Anselm Kiefer, Georgia O'Keeffe, Hiroshi Yoshida, Chiura Obata, Zhang Daqian, Hsu Kuohuang, Gao Xinjian.

The process of making is meditative. I'm expanding my understanding between the self and the world through series of searching and observation. The labor induced in the meticulous line drawing is essential for my well being in the chaotic contemporary world. It allows me to respond in "real time," focusing on the promise of the nature we now live in. Furthermore, The resulting images lead me to reflect on the amount of authority those poles have on my painting, and on me. Visually and formally, they prop up the sky so the rest of my painting could live in such a space; without them this space would collapse onto the surface. Although the nature referenced in my painting may be familiar to everyone, this sense of the familiar reveals a strange beauty of a dichotomy: living at the intersection of man-made order and the more natural crossing of space as I travel on the roads. If I fail to stay in the lines, one can catch it in my painting, and if a driver fails to stay in the lines, the camera will catch her on the road. Through observing my daily walks in these landscapes I hope to rethink my relationship with nature and to bring this duality of being and nature together in the future of my paintings.