Duality

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In Metal and Jewelry Design

Duality

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Abstract

My inspiration for this project comes from a Chinese novel named from 1947 titled *Fortress Besieged* that refers to marriage as like a city: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out. There are two sides to every marriage—and obviously not only marriage, but everything in the world has more than one face. While this duality is indispensable to humanity, it also brings us serious problems. My work was completed and my thoughts were expressed through sharply contrasting colors and materials. It is said in Tagore’s book *Stray Birds* that “God’s right hand is gentle, but terrible is his left hand.” Nothing is stationary in the world and everything has two sides, satisfactory and barely acceptable.

Leo Tolstoy said “All the variety, all the charm, all the beauty of life is made up of light and shadow.” I agree with him, because shadow is not a necessity for brightness, but you must go through it to understand the brightness. Light and shadow, success and failure, joy and pain, brilliant with dark, peak and trough... There are always two sides to everything.

I want to use opposing colors and materials to create my jewelry and to help me express that everything has two opposite sides. I want to create jewelry that is a combination of metal wire and fabric. I want to use the elements of fashion design to create jewelry. Jewelry is not only for luxury but can be for a part of your body.
There are three reasons that I chose fabric with which to create my jewelry. First, the properties of metal and fabric are opposites, with one being hard and the other being soft, and in combination they express the duality present throughout our world. Second, I want to evoke strong reactions from viewers when they realize that jewelry is not only a kind of metal decoration. Third, I want to use elements of fashion design to create my jewelry.

Also, I have two reasons for using metal wire. The first is that I would like to make some simple jewelry. While “simple” doesn’t mean easy here, it is a kind of a succinct style. Second, the metal wire is not very expensive and I hope my jewelry can be wearable for many people. I hope through my jewelry people will have a feeling that everything has two sides.
Sources and Research

*Fortress Besieged*, the sole full-length novel by Qian Zhongshu, can be called a classic work among contemporary Chinese novels. Under superficial fun and humor conveyed by strong metaphors, it hides a deep emotional component that often leaves the inexperienced reader lost in a deep reverie.

In this novel, Qian writes: “marriage is like a city: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out.” In the book, the phenomenon of a fortress besieged is demonstrated by the author and is mainly associated with marriage and career as an indication that most desires in life are similar. In this statement, the author proposes a question of life philosophy and explains that everything has dual characteristics and that nothing is absolutely right or wrong in the world. As a matter of fact, this invisible “fortress besieged” always exists. In this case, people will never be able to flee endless pressure and shackles and have to live their whole lives within four invisible walls. Although none can escape such a fate, what matters is whether you live contentedly behind the wall. If you always yearn to escape from the fortress besieged, you will live alone in the empty fortress forever and lose the meaning of your life.

As a student from China, I realize two sides of the significance of studying in the United States. On one hand, the environment is different in the US, where I receive a better education and experience exotic customs I have never seen before. On the other hand, I
had to separate from my family to live independently and as an only child in a Chinese family, I had to learn to look after myself. In my view, each environment is a fortress besieged, including schools, families and society. At the same time, everything in the world has dual characteristics such as friendship and competition between classmates, family affection and pressure, light and darkness. Since our birth, various insurmountable fortresses besieged have been constructed within which we constantly strive to keep a positive state to create difference and to enrich our lives. We will not and cannot go beyond this wall, because as long as we live, we will stay in a fortress besieged. If everyone and everything becomes better due to hard work and optimism and everything becomes harmonious, this fortress besieged is no longer a terrible shackle or pressure but a happy paradise.

It is my hope that the theory that everything has dual characteristics can be conveyed through my work in jewelry. In order to completely and fully demonstrate this idea, I look for inspiration from painting. I started to learn painting at the age of 10, much like my most admired artist of minimalism, Donald Judd.

Donald Judd (1928-1994) was born in Missouri, USA. He began to study painting from a private teacher with the support of his parents at age 10, which was the first step on his career in as a “minimalist” sculptor. Minimalism, or minimalist art, emerged and became popular in the 1950s and ’60s as a modern school of art.³

By the 1980s, minimalism in the West had become widespread, influencing far-
reaching design styles and schools that recommended the simplest structures, the most parsimonious materials, the most refined styles and the cleanest surface treatments. It was widely applied to various fields of post-modern art.⁴

From early 1962, Judd began to create geometric abstract sculpture, most of which used non-natural materials such as aluminum alloy, stainless steel, organic glass, etc. However, as these sculptures do not reflect specific content or objects, “Untitled” was the title of most sculptural works by Judd.

Different from passionate and assertive “Abstract Expressionism,” Judd’s work emphasizes its pure and noble qualities. In his works, flat square boxes of the same shape and size are fixed to the ground at the same distances apart, which was Judd’s typical composition of a picture. Nevertheless, each work maintains its characteristics. He created rich and distinct visual effects for monotonous works in order to evoke viewers’ feelings and memory. I am using the same technique, whereby I hope to demonstrate the dual characteristics of objects through simple colors and lines and to make jewelry using unconventional materials.
DONALD JUDD, stamped with the artist’s name, date 84-35 and inscription Lehni AG Switzerland on the reverse.

Donald Judd 1928-1994, Untitled, 1980, Steel, aluminium and Perspex, Object: 229 x 1016 x 787 mm
Critical Analysis

At the initial stage of creating my thesis works, the representative of minimalism, artist Donald Judd, came into my mind. When he started to create geometric graphic sculptures, Judd mostly adopted non-natural materials such as aluminum alloy, stainless steel, organic glass, etc. and those kind of materials are not very expensive. This showed me that jewelry is not just magnificent articles of luxury. Besides diamonds, gemstones and precious metals, which can be made into gorgeous jewelry, any material in the world can be manufactured as jewelry, which can not only be a precious ornament, but also can become a part of your body.

While creating my work, I was deeply captivated by minimalism. This was so meaningful for me because elements without any decoration are unforgettable. “Less is more”\(^7\) is actually the design philosophy proposed by the German architect Mies van der Rohe.

Life is like the process of **sculpting** a work of art whose beauty is determined by how you eliminate the factors hiding its beauty. As Michelangelo said, “beauty is the process of purifying ‘redundancy’.” A wise life is a process from more to less.\(^8\) Those complicated success principles we considered once in our work, life and career are often found to be very simple after many years. Indeed, in my view, “less” means simplification rather than blankness; “more” represents perfection instead of congestion.
The most obvious characteristics of minimalism are “concise” and “explicit,” which leads to pure, simple art without any impurities. The declaration of minimalists is “less is more,” which means that interiorized art feelings are achieved through the simplest forms, the most elementary methods and the most rational design measures. However, “less” does not mean blind reduction; instead, it is complex sublimation which in most cases expresses one’s enthusiasm affording for thought and it represents high-grade quality. In my undergraduate work in China, my major was graphic design, which has had a significant influence on my work. Therefore, I determined to complete my design by applying a composition of points, lines and planes. In my view, points, lines and planes are the foundation of design and also the skeleton of design.

Another characteristic of minimalism, is its simplified method of creation. The artists advocating minimalism process works of art on the principles of “less, less, much less” by using non-natural or industrial material, in simple, clear, extroverted form and pursuing unity without any unnecessary surface decoration, emphasizing integration and rejecting chaos. “All the artistic elements are applied on the basis of “simplicity” to pursue concision and purity of works of art, trying to keep form perfect and avoiding any miscellaneous interference.” Therefore, regarding material selection, fabric traditionally known as a wedding dress fabric was selected to reflect one of my inspirations, a quotation from Fortress Besieged: “Marriage is like a fortress besieged: those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out.” This demonstrates the
dual characteristics of marriage. Meanwhile, my preferred form is expressed in a
combination of metal and fabric. The softness of fabric and the hardness of metal produce
a strong contrast, reflecting the dual aspects of all things. Also, I used colors in sharp
contrast to decorate these two materials at opposite poles.

“The third characteristic of minimalism is its unique forms, and their simple,
clear, extroverted unity without any unnecessary surface decoration, emphasizing
integration and striving to demonstrate a peaceful aesthetic perception by applying a
single color or slight ornament of strong and exaggerated color to highlight the visual
impact of works of art.” During manufacturing, I chose white, which is the color of the
traditional western wedding dress. At the same time, as a student from China, I also chose
red, which represents the Chinese wedding dress. As a Chinese woman who has lived in
the U.S. for four years, I have deeply experienced the differences between West and East
in various aspects such as ideas and culture, which of course includes different concepts
of marriage and love. In western countries, the white wedding dress symbolizes purity
and loyalty. People in the West believe white is connected with innocence. Ancient
Roman brides wore white wedding dresses and orange-yellow veils that symbolized the
flame of enthusiasm. In the tradition of Catholicism in the West, white represents
happiness. However, in Chinese culture, white is the opposite of red. It is a basically
taboo color that represents sorrow and failure. Red is the favorite color of many Chinese
ethnic people, even becoming a Chinese cultural totem and spiritual belief, representing
celebration, happiness and peace. In the West, red has a strong derogatory sense, and is associated with “fire” and “blood,” which symbolizes cruelty and bleeding, radicalness and violent revolution, danger and nervousness. Thus, it can be seen that the same color as used in different cultures has different implications. Hence, I chose to use a large amount of these two colors in my work to elaborate on my design ideas.

Strongly contrasting colors woven with different structures of points, lines and planes form a strong visual impact. I used a great number of water drop shapes. “Women are made from water”\textsuperscript{13} and water has dual characteristics. Water is soft: when you pour water into a container of any shape, water will change its shape to that of the container. At the same time, water is hard: the proverb “water constantly dripping wears holes in stone,” which is popular in China, demonstrates this opposing characteristic of water.
Conclusion

Everything is a unity of contradictions. On one side, they mingle with each other, complement and are interdependent and on the other side, they are mutually opposed and exclusive. Everything has dual characteristics, which makes us think in depth and lets us consider problems from both sides. My reflection towards life is expressed through my Thesis project exploring how life is simple as well as complex. “Those who are outside want to get in, and those who are inside want to get out,” wrote Qian Zhongshu. So, is the present you hate, someone’s future dream or is it someone’s infinite remembrance of the past? If so, why not cherish each moment? As life itself is a fortress besieged, people will never be able to flee endless pressure and shackles and must instead live their whole lives within four invisible walls. Although none can escape such a fate, what matter is whether you live contentedly behind the wall. This gorgeous ideal will live in my heart and in my jewelry forever.
The Work

Duality Wearable Sculpture 1 (Figures 1)

From my point of view, jewelry can be not merely an ornament, but a component of the body. Therefore, this necklace is crafted not following any traditional popular understanding about jewelry. I think it more resembles a wearable sculpture. I chose dark blue fabric and orange metal wires, hoping to bring a strong visual effect by sharply contrasting colors and textures and to present a special feeling with simple shapes created by combining metal wires and drop-shaped fabric. The purpose of winding only to one shoulder with an asymmetrical design is to avoid the piece looking too monotonous.

Duality Wearable Sculpture 2 (Figures 2)

Similarly, by choosing strong contrasting colors and materials with asymmetrical designs, a large area of orange on the shoulders and the top of the silver shape of water droplets produce a sharp contrast effect. A winding form and a large area of metal lines represents contrast in balance.

Duality Ring (Figures 3)

This is a ring for which different possible manners of wearing it have been created. The circular shape with one corner missing conveys the idea that nothing is faultless in the world. Red is exaggerated because it means jubilation in China.
Duality Brooch 1 (Figures 4)

A large area of red fabric is applied to the brooch. My inspiration comes from ancient Chinese weddings where brides wore red fabric on their heads to veil their faces. This fabric is called “Gaitou” in Chinese. A large area of red soft fabric is in stark contrast with the black metal top.

Duality Brooch 2 (Figures 5)

This blue brooch has a three-dimensional semicircle shape, the bottom portion of which can be seen through a light and thin fabric similar to two connected water drops.

Aqua Necklace (Figures 6)

The shape of a white water drop presents both hard and soft water. White symbolizes a traditional wedding dress in the West. It is designed also in the form of a metal water droplet
enclosed by fabric in a compact arrangement on one side while a simple metal line is applied on the other side, creating a contrast by space layering.

**Aqua Brooch (Figures 7)**

In the same series as the works above, this brooch has only one black area in the entire white design. Seen from one side, the long brooch traverses the back as trees on one side of the wall extend their branches outside, symbolizing the emotion of people in a “fortress besieged” who desire to go outside.

**Aqua Earring (Figures 8)**

These are earrings that can be used as hair ornaments. With these, I broke the traditional manner of wearing earrings and also used the outline of trees.

**Light and Shadow Bracelet 1 (Figures 9)**

For this bracelet, I utilized a wedding dress shape. Silver is also a symbol of purity. The semi-circular form represents non-perfection.

**Light and Shadow Bracelet 2 (Figures 10)**

For this bracelet, I also applied wedding dress material chiffon in an asymmetrical design. The crinkle on the fabric can produce shadows under light, creating a sense of flexibility by combining light and shadow.
Figure

Figure 1. Duality Wearable Sculpture 1
stainless steel rod, brass wire, chiffon, string 13” x 15” x 8”  04/2014

Figure 2. Duality Wearable Sculpture 2
stainless steel rod, brass wire, chiffon, silver, string 14” x 20” x 6”  03/2014
Figure 3. Duality Ring

silver, chiffon, string 4” x 4” x 1.5”  03/2014

Figure 4. Duality Brooch 1

brass wire, chiffon, string 5” x 12” x 4”  03/2014
Figure 5. Duality Brooch 2
brass wire, chiffon, string 5.5’’ x 3’’ x 1.5’’ 03/2014

Figure 6. Aqua Necklace
stainless steel rod, copper wire, chiffon, string 15’’ x 11’’ x 8.5’’ 02/2014
Figure 7. Aqua Brooch

copper wire, chiffon, string 15'' x 8.5'' 02/2014

Figure 8. Aqua Earring

copper wire, chiffon, string 5.5'' x 9.5'' x 4'' 01/2014
Figure 9. Light and Shadow Bracelet 1
silver wire, chiffon, string 4” x 4” x 3.5” 11/2013

Figure 10. Light and Shadow Bracelet 2
silver, chiffon, string 5.5” x 4.5” x 0.75” 12/2013
Endnotes

1 “Fortress Besieged” was written by Qian Zhongshu, published in 1947, and is widely considered one of the masterpieces of twentieth-century Chinese literature.

2 “Leo Tolstoy” was a Russian writer who is regarded as one of the greatest authors of all time. Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leo_Tolstoy

3 Donald Judd (June 3, 1928 – February 12, 1994) was an American artist associated with minimalism. Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Donald_Judd

4 Minimalism, in the visual arts and music, minimalism is a style that uses pared-down design elements. Minimalism in the arts began in post-World War II Western Art, most strongly with American visual arts in the 1960s and early 1970s. Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimalism

5 Donald Judd, stamped with the artist’s name, date 84-35 and inscription Lehni AG Switzerland on the reverse 30.2×90.2×30.2cm, Sotheby’s New York Co. Ltd.

6 Donald Judd, Untitled, 1980, sculpture, Steel, aluminum and Perspex, object: 229 x 1016 x 787 mm, © Donald Judd Foundation/VAGA, New York and DACS, London 2016

7 Architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) adopted the motto "Less is more" to describe his aesthetic tactic of arranging the necessary components of a building to create an impression of extreme simplicity Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minimalism#Less_is_more_%28architecture%29

8 Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni (March 1475 – 18 February 1564), was an Italian sculptor, painter, architect, poet, and engineer of the High Renaissance who exerted an unparalleled influence on the development of Western art. Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo


11 “A comparative study of minimalist aesthetics and blank theory”, Lan Lu, Department of art and design, XiangNan University; "Popular literature and art", 2012, China

12 “Gaitou”, ancient Chinese wedding when a bride will cover a red fabric on head to veil her face. This fabric is called Gaitou in Chinese. http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5ec46c91010mb8.html

13 “Dream of the Red Chamber”, also called The Story of the Stone, composed by Cao Xueqin, is one of China's Four Great Classical Novels. It was written sometime in the middle of the 18th century during the Qing Dynasty.