

Rochester Institute of Technology

## RIT Scholar Works

---

Theses

---

7-27-2016

### Milieu

Rachel Simonson  
rs4773@rit.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.rit.edu/theses>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Simonson, Rachel, "Milieu" (2016). Thesis. Rochester Institute of Technology. Accessed from

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by RIT Scholar Works. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses by an authorized administrator of RIT Scholar Works. For more information, please contact [ritscholarworks@rit.edu](mailto:ritscholarworks@rit.edu).

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of  
The College of Imaging Arts and Sciences  
School of Art  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
MASTER OF FINE ARTS in Fine Arts Studio

MILIEU

by

Rachel Simonson

07-27-2016

## List of Committee Members

Thesis Title: Milieu

Thesis Author: Rachel Simonson

Chief Advisor Luvon Sheppard

Associate Advisor Carole Woodlock

Associate Advisor Peter Byrne

Chair, School of Art Glen Hintz

## Abstract

I am a Korean American. This is not unique, but my exploration of how I fit into the world is unique. I strive to represent both cultures equally and to fit into each one in all aspects of my life. Through my practice of art, I explore the emotional challenges I face in being a cross-cultural individual, of losing one culture, and in needing to adjust to new and different culture.

My educational experience at the Rochester Institute of Technology has been a time to explore what it means to try to fit into two different cultures and to address the challenges I face by not fitting into either one. I am drawn to the idea of physical space and belonging, thus I utilize landscape as a way to create my own environment. This is evolving to be an abstract self-portrait. I create chaos and use many visual influences through color, texture, and form.

The thesis work that I have created was part of a process of discovery of how I fit into two cultures. The work is a way for me to address the loss I have experienced, as well as the gift I have gained in joining a forever family. Through this thesis exhibition, I have created a sense of acceptance as a cross-cultural human being.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
Introduction .....	1
Section I: Context .....	3
Section II: Evolution .....	12
Section III: Body of Work .....	15
Conclusion.....	23
Bibliography.....	25

## List of Illustrations

<i>Margaret</i> .....	5
<i>Edinburgh</i> .....	12
<i>Encompass</i> .....	15
<i>Embrace</i> .....	16
<i>Circumstance</i> .....	17
<i>Rift</i> .....	19
<i>France</i> .....	21
<i>Tivoli</i> .....	22

## Introduction

Through creating paintings and prints, I have explored who I am and how I fit into a cross-cultural world. I was born into one culture and raised in another culture. As I am situated in both, and neither at the same time, my examination of personal identity led to the manifestation of non-traditional landscapes in my painting and printmaking practice. As part of my thesis inquiry, I wanted to continue exploring the environment in which we live and how it influences us, as we influence it. I also continued to explore how alterations to our environment create a transactional feed back/feed forward system. We alter the environment, as it alters us. My goal for this series of work was to visually describe what was this struggle and what I have learned from it. I hope those who view my work can see parts of their own lives through the visual language I have created.

My *Cityscapes* create an integrated emotional milieu from disparate sources that have meaning to me, but my goal is for others to develop their own synthesis of meaning and emotion from these works. The work of Julie Mehretu<sup>1</sup> is an inspiration for me, in that she creates a landscape that captures chaos, but at the same time, presents a coherent landscape. The mark making of Pia Fries<sup>2</sup> and the textures she creates to give depth to a painting have also provided me with inspiration. I gravitate towards artists who are confident in their mark making, and I have been exploring the work of Willem de Kooning<sup>3</sup>, among other artists who create work with strong, deliberate marks. These three artists have provided me with inspiration and have helped me develop a more complex visual inquiry. I intend to further my research of who I am and the

---

<sup>1</sup> Mehretu 2016

<sup>2</sup> Grimes Gallery 2016

<sup>3</sup> Stevens 2011

milieu by reflecting on the visual language I am creating through mark making in my paintings, prints, and drawings.



## Section I: Context

I was born in Ulsan, South Korea, to a mother who was unable to keep me. Before I was aware of the world around me, I was put up for international adoption. On my birthday, I lost a family and a culture. I had no identity. Five and a half months after I was born, an American family in Upstate New York adopted me. My adoptive parents were aware of how different cultures could impact a person. They moved from Minneapolis, MN, to Rochester, NY, and adjusted to a different culture.

My culture shift was a much greater change than they experienced, as I came from a very different country and ethnic group, and did not look like anyone around me. As I grew up, I struggled to understand who I was and how I fit into the world. I did not belong to the American Midwestern/Upstate New York culture. Because I am not Caucasian, I did not know what my lineage was, other than that of my adopted family. I am more comfortable with my Scandinavian heritage and the American lifestyle in which I was raised. However, I was not fully accepted into the American culture. Even at a young age, I would encounter people who would comment on my proficiency with the English language, or ask if I was going to find my real family, or ask, "What are you?" My response ranged from anger to frustration to apathy to humor. Over time, I did not care what people thought I was, how I spoke, or who my parents were. It did not change the fact that I was different, that I did not fit the American mold.

I am constantly expected to fit into one culture, one binary. I tried my best growing up to fit into one culture, and my parents did their best to help me fit in. I was always the only Asian kid in my class and usually the smallest. I was unable to struggle privately with my cultural disillusionment. I was keenly aware of the differences between my peers and me. I was never

comfortable saying I was Korean or that I was Swedish and Norwegian. It seemed wrong to pick one cultural background over another -- to me, it was a lie. For many years, until I started exploring this struggle in painting, I did not understand how important cultural identity is to who I am. As an adopted person I live in two different worlds, the one into which I was born and the one into which I was adopted.

Unable to verbalize the frustration with my identity, I turned to painting to delve into the two lives I live -- the one before I was adopted and the one after I was adopted. I am most comfortable with my adopted family, but on milestones, I am dragged back to living in two worlds. My birthday is a bittersweet day. I was given a life to live and make a difference in the world, but at the same time, it is a day that was difficult for a whole other family. I was a burden, and they had to make a decision to strip me of my cultural identity and give me a new one. The greatest gift my birthmother gave me was a chance to live in a world with opportunity. What she did not understand was that, with that gift, I would lose who I was when I was born. We would both give up being part of each other. She would lose part of herself, and I would lose a family. I was lucky. I was matched with a family that would love me and give me every opportunity available. I do not know what happened to my birthmother. Some days I think about her or about the family that I lost. These thoughts and my forays into thinking about the “what ifs” force me to create work that I can go back to and consider from many perspectives.

I tried to conform into the more Eurocentric stereotype that I associated with being an American painter. This meant that I studied the Baroque painters like Rembrandt<sup>4</sup>. I thought the style is what I should learn to be a stereotypical young American painter. I could get by in the world creating paintings that were influenced by well-known European artists and hide behind

---

<sup>4</sup> van Rijn 1929

my American name. I was awful at doing that, there was no soul in my work, and I struggled with techniques. Everything came out muddy and desperate.

During a sophomore painting class, I discovered the tool that would push me to move past classical painting ideals. During an assignment to paint a pile of uncooked meat in Plein Air, I was forced to use my palette knives and paint wet-on-wet. The experience was a rush. I did not have time to overthink my mark making. Instead, I needed to work with the thick impasto quality of the paint. It was another building block for me, for figuring out my identity.



*Margaret (2010)*

My first work that addressed identity was *Margaret*, a black-and-white oil painting of my cousin who was also adopted from Korea. The reference photo I used was of her sitting on the ground in an orphanage. It was an announcement card her parents sent out when they adopted her. I never had much in common with Margaret. She was older and a little more reserved than I was, and our families lived far enough away that our interactions were limited. Those factors did not change the bond I had formed with her. When our families did get together, we were reminded that we were not so different, that we were not alone. When Margaret died at the age of twenty-eight, I was once again faced with being one of a kind, a bit lonely and out of place. The portrait of Margaret reminded me that I struggle to find a sense of belonging. I started painting more portraits after *Margaret* in hopes of building relationships with people and finding commonalities with others through painting them.

At a certain point, portraits were no longer a way for me to explore identity; I was not a portrait painter. I could not build the interpersonal relationships I was looking for with my subject. This was disappointing and unsettling, as I felt that developing such a relationship with the subject was key to a successful portrait. I could not, and cannot yet, understand this lack of connection with the subject, even with a portrait like *Margaret*.

Unsure of where to go next, I began a new series of paintings, the *Cityscapes*. At the time of this transition from portraiture, I did not know that I was exploring identity, as the paintings started as a purely technical challenge combining photos and painting. I created a work that would bring my painting and photography together. I used photographs I had taken of different places and cultures, and started to collage them, building landscapes within the canvas and adding paint to give a sense of place. Those pieces demonstrated the imagery and physical space I was limited to work with, as well as the space I had to create a place that was solely individual

to who I am. I would eventually eliminate the collage aspect of the painting, as the incorporation of photos had served its purpose as a trigger to the next phase. I have developed as a stronger artist, and I no longer need the photograph to help me articulate paintings. The side effect of eliminating the photographic image was the ability to fully focus on the exploration into my own cultural identity.

Early *Cityscapes* gave me the freedom to create a place of belonging for myself. The result was aesthetically pleasing to me, but it was the process of creation that was most forceful, most meaningful, most satisfying. I was in control, I knew how I fit into the space, and I created places of rest for myself. I created my own environment and, for the first time, I found a space that did not force me into one culture or another. There was a freedom in my paintings that I had been looking for my whole life. This was my own space. I owned it, fit into it completely without doubt or conflict, and equally important, it was my process of creation.

The landscapes I create are ever-evolving. They now have taken on a non-binary representation of land. Technically, the work is grounded in the school of landscapes, through the twentieth century concept of exploring ways people relate to places, where we live, and the impact individuals have on the environment.<sup>5</sup> However, the work now represents who I am, and it has become more of a self-portrait. Through creating my paintings, I am in control, I create my own environment, and I am able to find a place of belonging.

The exploration that my work deals with forces me to take a philosophical approach. I came into this body of work knowing that the subject matter was difficult for me. I was not only struggling with my identity, but I also faced the mental and emotional struggle of deciding whether to continue or give up. The biggest challenge was deciding to push through and see a

---

<sup>5</sup> Tate Modern 2016

body of work about which I had doubts. At the heart of my paintings and prints, I worked through personal struggles, but to the outside viewer, my work is sociological.

Sociologically, my work focuses on questions about culture and environment that impact my understanding of “who I am as a person”. It broadens a bit when I invite the viewer to experience the work. I ask the viewer to question their place in the world culturally and physically in paintings or prints. I am conscious of the sociological aspects of my work. I push the boundaries of how a person is organized into a society, and what they believe is a landscape or self-portrait. Each piece I create questions how I am organized into society. In turn, I ask the viewer to question how they fit. Through exploration and inquiry, my landscapes have become less about visual cues of one’s place, but more of a sense of belonging and creating their own land markers in space. My paintings are unconventional self-portraits in that you do not see my face; I do not believe you need to. The viewer sees my thought process and the emotions I am experiencing. To me, that is much more powerful than mapping every nuance for the viewer.

This questioning comes from my background and the fact that I straddle two very different societies. I also explored the duality of cultural backgrounds, and how being part of two very different worlds affects me. Through painting or printmaking, I create a visual language that expresses my confusion and desire to fit into one culture. I always wanted to belong to just one society, to know my place, and to have a sense of belonging. There is a sense of certainty and pride with belonging. You are certain you belong to one place where you were born and where you will die. If you choose to relocate and join another society, you chose that life and the adjustments that go along with becoming part of that world. When a person is adopted as I was, they have no choice in where they go, and they have to adapt to their new environment to survive. I question if it is right to still have connections, albeit flimsy at best, to the country that

gave me up. Is it okay for me to claim the American culture as my own? I did not choose it, so am I lying to myself?

Part of my work is about evolution, asking questions about society and myself. Once I answer a question that I am exploring, it does not mean that I am done. In order for me to continue creating, I have to ask more questions and create a more complex visual language with each new piece. It is about creating work that has concrete meaning through abstract images. I make my viewer work hard, and sometimes I give them hints or guiding marks. I want them to see where I am coming from and the inquiry I have, and in turn, I want them to question their place and how they fit into society.

I am exploring so many ideas and theories that defining just one is difficult and ever-changing. I look at the work of many artists and their studio practice and the way they explore their subjects, so that I can learn how best to explore who I am and my subject matter. I hesitate to ever focus on an Asian artist because I do not want to be too influenced by them. I work to broaden my scope of who I look at, so that I may solidify my confidence in not fitting into any one cultural binary. I look for diversity. I want the viewer to be drawn to the work before they find out anything about me. My personal goal in my work is an exploration of my cross-cultural, dual identity, but my goal for the viewer is somewhat different. I want them to learn more about themselves than about me.

This search has led me to artists like Julie Mehretu<sup>6</sup>, an Ethiopian artist who is living and working in the United States. Mehretu<sup>7</sup> explores sociological issues or places of historical events, such as Kabul. In Mehretu's<sup>8</sup> work, I have seen the layers of acrylic paint, ink, and graphite create a map of historical points in time. It is readable to a person who was not part of that event,

---

<sup>6</sup> Mehretu 2016

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

yet it is personal to the artist. This helps me to organize and see my work through the extensive mark making that I have adopted and the idea of layering that I use.

Willem de Kooning<sup>9</sup> is another artist who has influenced me. His free mark making and creation of layers through adding paint and scraping away, has inspired me to push my mark making. Before really looking at de Kooning's<sup>10</sup> work, I had a tendency to stop short. By exploring his strength in layering, I have gained a certain confidence in moving the paint.

The third artist that I referenced in my thesis proposal is Pia Fries<sup>11</sup>. I approach her work from a purely mark making standpoint. Her marks are so thick and saturated that the body of the paint creates its own space in which to exist.

I believe to a certain extent, however, that the approaches and mark making of these three artists have pushed me into a more complex visual language. I relate to these artists' experience more than the imagery they create. Now that my thesis work is finished, I need to start exploring other artists that will aid in my visual inquiry. My work is constantly evolving; thus it is difficult for me to restrict myself to look at one set of artists for inspiration. In order for me to keep growing, I need to take the artists to whom I have looked for inspiration and expand upon them. As I continue to grow as an artist, I look for influences that explore identity, both personal and cultural.

Artists influencing me at this stage are Hung Liu, Peter Doig, Yun Fei Ji, and Gerhard Richter. Liu<sup>12</sup> creates paintings that uncover a person's cultural narrative. My explorations are similar and reflect an awareness of identity -- personal or cultural -- in contemporary art. Doig<sup>13</sup> explores his own cultural duality through paintings that utilize the idea of resonance. While I do

---

<sup>9</sup> Stevens 2011

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Grimes Gallery 2016

<sup>12</sup> Liu 2016

<sup>13</sup> Miro 2013



not relate to Doig's style, his approach to a duality of cultural identity, as well as how he is able to honor and articulate both aspects of the duality in his work, are of great interest and import to me. I am also influenced by the way that Yun Fei Ji<sup>14</sup> addresses the building of the *Three Gorges Dam*<sup>15</sup> via traditional Chinese printmaking. Yun's focus on cultural history and global changes are keys to addressing cultural identity in his work. These cultural and environmental changes influence how I create work. I stress, as Yun does, the importance of the emotional connection to a physical place. Richter<sup>16</sup> influences me by his strengths in his persistence in working through problems, and in his mastering the paint and not letting the paint master him.

---

<sup>14</sup> Museum of Modern Art 2009

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Richter 2016

## Section II: Evolution

When I started the thesis process, I had a clear understanding of what I wanted to express through my paintings. I still follow the path I started on, which is an exploration of self and environment. I am growing, as one should be when pursuing a Master's degree. When I arrived at Rochester Institute of Technology, I considered myself a painter. I had tried many other mediums throughout my undergraduate education.

However, coming to an interdisciplinary graduate program, I took classes outside of my comfort zone. One of them was Non-Toxic Printmaking with Prof. Keith Howard. He pushed me to try things in printmaking that I would not have done otherwise. I became Prof. Howard's Teaching Assistant and was able to grow as a printmaker. I gained printmaking skills that helped me evolve and become a stronger painter. Through his mentorship, I learned how to do a four-color print and was experimenting with the process when, unfortunately, Prof. Howard died.



*Edinburgh (2015)*

The last print of mine that Prof. Howard saw was the four-color print, *Edinburgh*. I had photographed a small *Cityscape* painting, then overlaid it with a photograph I had taken of the Scottish landscape. It was the first time I was able to give my photographs and paintings equal space within the picture surface. While my paintings remain abstract, the four-color prints have become an anchor point for me. The prints offer a sense of reality, and they help guide me to understand what I am doing with my paintings. For the viewer, the prints ground them in reality and offer them a smoother transition into my paintings. I also developed a more complex color palette.

When I started my paintings at the beginning of my thesis exploration, they were muted and de-saturated. Over time, they have become stronger, more vibrant, and there is more diversity within the color. I now use color to create a push-pull dialog with the paint and to offer either a resting place for the eye or a sense of chaos. My mark making has changed, as well. The marks I make are more confident, and I have a willingness to change them. I am no longer afraid to paint over something that I like, as I know I can get that mark back if I want to.

On a philosophical level, I have created a stronger and more complex body of work. By using layers, I am more willing to let the viewer go deeper into the painting. On a personal level, I understand myself more as a human being and trust myself as an artist. When I paint or create a print, it is a time for me to reflect and to be at peace with things about which I find difficult to talk about. Through this time of reflection, I have become more open to talking about what I explore when I paint. My goals in creating work have also evolved. I am more focused on exploring personal and cultural identity. Visually, I am striving to create and explore emotions, and to describe the struggles that accompany the sense of loss I have explored.

### Section III: Body of Work

I have been steadily growing through my thesis and the exploration I set out for myself. In terms of techniques in painting, I am taking more risks with my mark making. I am able to confidently add a mark or alter an existing form. I am less delicate in my painting style, and I take more control and ownership over the painting. The complexity of my color keeps growing and becoming stronger. In turn, the language and overall mood of my paintings and prints are richer and have a stronger dialog, which is more inviting to the viewer.

With my techniques and skill growing, I am able to communicate with more strength the sense of emotion, loss, and duality of personal and cultural identity. The work is more coherent, making it easier to write and express myself in ways I found too difficult to do at the beginning of the thesis process. I trust myself more, and I trust my paintings and my prints to communicate to the viewer my struggles and successes in understanding who I am as an artist and a human being. I am still growing and understanding what it means to be a person with different cultural identities. The thesis process has helped me to explore that even further.



*Encompass (2016)*

In *Encompass*, I focused on creating a more literal landscape painting. It is also the most straightforward representation of the struggle I explore in my work. The concept of frustration of understanding and mediating the duality of being a cross-cultural human being encourages me to use much more saturated and brighter colors than I have previously worked with. The work was much larger than my previous painting. It never fully resolved itself to be one cohesive painting, as there were many elements through color and mark making that created a variety of smaller paintings within a large surface. This work offered one perspective into the creation of a painting using disparate images. Through the act of painting on a large surface, I retrained my brain to go from small canvases to large and intimidating canvases. At the beginning, it was just a matter of

covering the surface with paint; the biggest challenge was creating a cohesive painting. The result has many different paintings within one canvas. The struggle was getting the visual languages to work together, even if they are different. As I painted, it became apparent to me that my painting is a representation of my daily struggle. The idea of taking all the different cultural elements and making sense of them in one confined area has to make sense to me, but be accessible for others to understand.



*Embrace (2016)*

*Embrace* is similar to *Encompass*. They are the same size, and the color palette is similar. I painted them together, with the occasional focus on one or the other. *Embrace* is much

more organic in the forms I created with the paint. It is not as literal as *Encompass*. It also starts to show the growth of what I learned about myself through painting. My mark making became more complex. It is less about giving the viewer a verbatim explanation and more about the emotional struggle. It still has the structure of a landscape, but it starts to take on the self-portrait ideals. *Embrace* is a turning point in the complexity of my paintings. Instead of adding a clear depiction of a building, I start to give hints, the window outlines, and the loose free form of a building. The depth is more complex as well; there is more rest throughout the painting for the viewer. In *Embrace*, I start to welcome viewers through ambiguous marks and softer lines.



*Circumstance (2016)*

When I painted my smaller painting, *Circumstance*, it became a much freer painting. I started with a canvas that I had used in the previous semester which had a painting on it. Even though I considered it extremely well developed, I decided to get rid of everything on the canvas to see if I could get back any of the painting underneath. It took on a new life, and a much darker and less structured piece appeared. I did not have any expectations for this piece, so the pressure to create a representational work was alleviated. Instead, the work became more about emotion and how far I could push the painting and myself, furthering my research of how visual language helps me to understand who I am.

*Circumstance* is harder for me to justify keeping in my thesis work, because it is so interpretive and less representational. I cannot ground myself in logical aspects of the painting, as it has no literal representation. The colors are jarring and, at times, combative with each other on the canvas. At times, I lose myself in the painting. However, the piece represents the struggle I was going through to understand how I fit into the world, globally, artistically, and personally. I worked on this piece for the shortest amount of time, but resolved it more than *Embrace* or *Encompass*. There are still elements that I could push. Having my committee nudge me further and further past my comfort zone, I was forced to be decisive and trust that I could do more, while taking a calculated risk that it could destroy the painting.





*Rift (2016)*

My final painting, *Rift*, is an angry piece. I was lost and fearing that I was losing focus in my goals for thesis. There was less meaning and more emotion in this work. I was piling on paint to the point the mark was not my own. I was losing who I am as an artist. I was finally being told where I fit into the world. I decided that after all these years, the ambiguity I faced as a cross-cultural person was so important to who I am. In working on *Rift*, I felt I was being forced into one binary, which nearly broke me. My color palette became rudimentary and dark, with very little push and pull. The paint sat hard on the surface, not working with the background. The colors were contrasting and not creating a dialog. I was not learning or growing. I needed permission to break free from the confines of technique and pleasing an outside source.

Once I overcame this challenge, I found the individuality of the work. I added a green line that broke the painting into two pieces; it was the most cathartic mark I had made in my thesis series. That mark severely unbalanced my painting, thus I felt constantly encouraged to somehow get rid of the green mark. Instead, I added another one and created depth with transparency. By breaking it down and building it back up, I found myself as a whole person through this smaller piece. The final visual language I created is the most complex of all the paintings in this series, and I was able to do the most personal research through this piece. *Rift* is the heaviest painting in proportion to the other paintings. It holds more marks and scrapes than the other works. It explores erasing and how that can add to a work.

My final pieces are four-color prints. *France* was done immediately after the passing of Prof. Howard, and *Tivoli* was done later the same year. Both works are much more literal representations of what I set out to explore. I created my own visual language with my prints because I no longer had a mentor guiding me. These prints combine the imagery of a concrete image through photography and are overlaid with an image of my own painting. It is a different kind of visual language I am exploring. The painting I overlaid is of my own making; my photograph is my own perspective of my world at the time.

Both pieces offer a neutral ground viewpoint of my environment. I was not physically in the United States or Korea. When I took the photograph, I was a visitor in another culture, and I knew my time was limited. The struggle to fit into the world was much different when I created these pieces. I struggled to fit into a world without a mentor, and I was still teaching myself a process that was so foreign to me. At the same time, I had boundless freedom, but no guidance. I did not know when I made a mistake. Much like when I was in France, I was a visitor, the expectations culturally were similar. I was an American or Korean; I had ambiguity on my side.



*France (2015)*

In my print, *France*, I offer myself a clear perspective and literal depth. It is clear that there is a building and I am looking down an alleyway. The ambiguity lies in the painting overlaid with the photograph. At the time I created this piece, I was struggling to make sense of losing a mentor and exploring a new technical skill. It also grounded me in reality. I had the comfort of an actual place, and I was simplifying the synthesis I wanted by adding my painting over the photograph. When placing the prints next to the paintings, my goal for the viewer is clearer and more attainable. My struggle to learn from the duality of being cross-cultural becomes more literal when one views the struggle of painting and printmaking in the same picture plane. It was also the first time I expressed the struggle so clearly and concisely.



*Tivoli (2015)*

*Tivoli* suspends reality a bit more than *France* does. I worked harder to understand the language I created between the painting and the print. It pushes the mark making further, and I am left to reflect on the struggle to convince the viewer of the reality that is within the image. One suggestion was that the prints made the paintings too clear and did not make the viewer work hard enough. By adding the prints, I am able to reach a more literal audience.

## Conclusion

Up until the last day of installation, I questioned if the work I chose to put into my show was the right work. Did I articulate the subject that I had been exploring for two years? I believe I have done so, albeit with reservations.

I discovered that I am mentally tough and that I address challenges in a logical manner, to the point that my work sometimes becomes too much about process over content. I learned that I can push my limits academically and artistically to gain control of a painting, to touch the whole surface of the canvas, and to create a visual dialog that speaks to diverse groups of people.

*Encompass* and *Embrace* are complex, in that I created paintings that fit within the context of my proposal. I used disparate images to create a visual explanation of the struggles of being cross-cultural. The aspect common to both works (that for me is a weak point) is that I see each painting as a set of smaller paintings within the canvas, rather than as a cohesive single painting. Each mark exists independently of one another. *Circumstance* and *Rift* have more developed mark making, and they explore the emotional struggles better than *Encompass* and *Embrace* do. Still, each of these paintings delves into the subject matter I have been studying for the past two years.

The prints I have done are different. I needed *Tivoli* and *France* to be included in the show. The two prints demonstrate growth and loss on a new level. Intaglio printmaking was new to me when I arrived at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I learned a tremendous amount in a short time. I did experience the loss of a trusted mentor, thus my growth in that medium was cut short.

In the end, I do not believe the work I put into my show was a full visual exploration of what I discovered about myself and what I learned at the Rochester Institute of Technology. My show does not demonstrate the complete journey I have taken to complete my education. However, this feeling that there is a lack of completeness, of missing a full representation of the visual exploration, is not indicative of a failure. I see it more as an impetus to continue to explore in this area.

I need to push the limits of how I explore loss and cultural duality. It is important for me to express that this is my exploration and that I need to take ownership of my identity. My investigation will lead me to exploring trust in my own work and my own artistic strengths. My future work will explore how to communicate these new ideas of inquiry.

## Bibliography

- Christopher Grimes Gallery. *Pia Fries*. 2016. <http://www.cgrimes.com/artists/fries-pia/bio/> (accessed April 20, 2016).
- Liu, Hung. *Hung Liu: Bio*. 2016. <http://www.hungliu.com/bio.html> (accessed April 24, 2016).
- Mehretu, Julie. *White Cube*. 2016. [http://whitecube.com/artists/julie\\_mehretu/](http://whitecube.com/artists/julie_mehretu/) (accessed April 20, 2016).
- Miro, Victoria. *Peter Doig*. 2013. <http://www.victoria-miro.com/artists/30-peter-doig/> (accessed April 24, 2016).
- Museum of Modern Art. *Yun-Fei Ji, The Three Gorges Dam*. 2009. <http://www.moma.org/learn/resources/library/council/ji> (accessed March 20, 2015).
- Richter, Gerhard. *Gerhard Richter, Art >> Gerhard Richter*. 2016. <https://www.gerhard-richter.com/en/art> (accessed April 15, 2016).
- Stevens, Mark. "Willem de Kooning Still Dazzles." *Smithsonian Magazine*. October 2011. <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/willem-de-kooning-still-dazzles-74063391> (accessed May 5, 2016).
- Tate Modern. *Glossary of Online Terms*. 2016. <http://www.tate.org.uk/learn/online-resources/glossary/l/landscape> (accessed May 24, 2016).
- van Rijn, Rembrandt Harmenz. *Portrait of a Man*. 1929. The Metropolitan Museum of Art: H.O. Havemeyer Collection.