My Experience Manifesto

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My Experience Manifesto

By

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Fine Art in Visual Communication Design

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College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology
Rochester, NY
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Committee Approval:

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| School of Art Professor/College of Art and Design Professor/Freelancer Artist/Observer/Project Advisor |
Abstract

In contemporary society, people tend to judge and evaluate the growth and development status of others to different degrees. Also, people are easily persuaded by others' judgments, gossip, and appraisement. However, people ignore the importance of both their backstories and those of others; thus, a person may make subjective and incomplete value judgements.

The first approach of my project included an illustration of a typical story of a Chinese woman at turning points of her life: childhood, puberty, teenage rebellion, marriage, and menopause. The purpose of this illustration is to make the audience imagine and resonate with the different turning points but common to everyone by these scenes. To enrich the project with technology, the 2D illustration was changed to the 3D interactive model to engage further the audience and reveal the things that are not visible on 2D image. The parallax art is designed by coding, which creates the 3D effect and gives viewers the ability to rotate the model and view different angles. My project reveals that each person's backstories are different, and the life choices they make in the future would be different. Hoping the project can enhance people's self-knowledge, awareness and understanding of others by reminding us of our experiences that can drive our choices. Helping to realize the importance of people's backstory and experience rather than blindly and quickly judge whether others' choices are right or not, means we need to learn to respect our backstories.

Keywords: self-understanding, self-concept, experience, backstories

Dedication

My artwork has been shown in the Imagine RIT Festival, and thanks to my significant alumni Xuan Huang’s best efforts for his help.

1 Parallax is a muti-layered 3D model that provides a new method for the audience to interact with artwork.
Introduction

My works are inspired by people in current society, who tend to rely too much on the feedback of others and then make different choices for themselves. There are 95% of respondents agree that they are easily influenced or change their real decisions based on the opinions of others, and over 98% agree that their past experiences are changing their future decisions. However, in many cases, they are not making choices for themselves. Because of the environment where I grew up in China, many women tend to limit their future academic and career development. Although they may have other pursuits, many of them are easily compromised to real life.

I have found that people tend to ignore the stories they have experienced. However, each person's personal judgement and perception will become different because of these different stories. It means that different people will have different choices in the future, which means others' unquestioning and quick judgments and deductions maybe wrong. Some of these experiences are beautiful, some are dark, some are dull, and it is the interweaving of these different stories that make our lives more meaningful. I hope my works can convey to the audience the charm of the stories behind our own lives. We should learn to accept them, tolerate them, and believe in the value and significance of their existence. In this way, we can understand that our past experiences shape our behavior and personality.

My artwork will explore the life of contemporary ordinary Chinese women through researching, starting from the female perspective, depicting her childhood, adolescence (revolutionary period), her love experience, marriage, and her menopause in these five independent images. From another point of view, my artwork is also like speculation of my future, what type of person I would want to be and whom I don't want to be as my future-me. The beautiful and not so beautiful experiences are mixed to build existing-me. Maybe the stories are not always happening ideally, that is a part of our life, and we should face up to them.
Section I: Context

A. Research and Personal Background

“Researchers at Cornell University estimate we make 226.7 decisions each day on food alone. And as your level of responsibility increases, so does the multitude of choices you have to make. It’s estimated that the average adult makes about 35,000 remotely conscious decisions each day.”

According to this data, I began to think about current social phenomenon. Starting with myself, I put aside the trivial decisions and chose the turning points in my life, such as "whether I want to study abroad", "what major to choose", "why I want to change my major", "whether I want to fall in love with this guy", "whether I want to give up returning to China and stay in the United States for further study", etc. Too many decisions are not made from the bottom of my heart. Instead, I choose to ask my parents, friends, teachers, and rely on others to make choices for me. So, what kind of decision is right for me? Who can choose for me? The answer is just me. Then, I surveyed my friends, teachers, classmates, and strangers around me. They are in their 20s, 30s, 40s, and 70s. Fortunately, most of these surveyors agree with my opinion, and they have experienced similar situations that others quickly judge them without thinking of giving their opinions to others.

After confirming the theme, what design form will I use to show idea? After my discussions with Professor Adam Smith and Professor Alan Singer, I decided to communicate my design ideas through the combination of three ways. The first is a marketing video, which quickly conveys my concept to the audience through the combination of video and motion graphics. Second, there is a physical interaction based on ten large pieces of illustration, festival to show to the audience who are able to come to the Imagine RIT Festival. Third, the interactive experience of users is enhanced through the combination of art and code to achieve a more exciting 3D effect.

B. Artist Influence

When I studied at RIT, I chose Professor Alan Singer's illustration course as an independent study. I explored many different illustration styles through Instagram and other social media. Although a designer

and artist needs to focus on his or her work, I study-related works of other artists with similar styles. As an illustration beginner, I think it is also necessary to see what other artists, illustrators, are doing in different styles.

Cheng Gong is a contemporary, freelance illustrator from China. In his paintings, I saw many characters without facial features, which inspired my next style of character creation. From his artwork, it is easy to know that there is a series of stories that the lead character is experiencing. Although his works do not have a direct influence on my choice of subject matter, the similarity could be found in some of the subjects from my thesis artwork. In the painting by Cheng Gong, there is a combination of bright and dark colors, which are used to enhance the sense of age within the whole picture, and this is similar to my key words "past", "experience" and "story". Therefore, the color matching of this painting also gives my work a lot of possibilities and reference value. In this sequential scenario, it is matched with the use of a few delicate crayon textures, just right for the author to describe or express the feeling of the stories.

In my works, there are also various stories. I once wondered about how my lead character would look if they did not include features of her face. Are they able to look as vibrant as Cheng Gong’s works, which include the whole body? Is this ambiguous drawing a way to suit my project and communicate with people? Seeing his work makes me recall familiar stories that everyone experienced where and how we live our everyday lives.

Another contemporary artist I found was Jarom Vogel, who was a freelance illustrator, one who occasionally dabbles in motion, design, and development. I was amazed at how he made the illustration move through the screen, all the layers, one by one, moving in an orderly way. So, by interaction, people can see the detail of the lower layers which are hidden by the upper layers. It sparked my curiosity, and in the comments, I found a link to the tutorials he shared. The parallax illustration technique is using layers and code to add a new dimension to my artwork.

This interactive expression increases the enjoyment of viewing. People can touch the screen and rotate the device to see details from different angles. In the modern digital age, people are gradually tending to accept what new technology can bring to our life. What our designers can help with is to enhance the sense of interactive entertainment, to make the user have the desire to explore art and visualization, increasing their engagement. Fortunately, I learned JavaScript in a Programming for designers course in my first year at RIT, so I am no stranger to code. Therefore, I am very excited and looking forward to learning this online course and applying this skill to my thesis. Based on the research I learned, I would like to bring what I experienced, what I learned, and explored this society under different cultures to the people. The illustration style, the character outfit, and the interaction way are the most need to be considered.

SECTION II: Method

A. Character Design (the Front side)

As I grew up in China, and I found there are countless of women who are judging or judged by around people. That is also why I decided to design a traditional Chinese female as the prototype for the initial formation of the role. Initially, the result I envisioned was seven different ages' story that generalized the first half of this woman's life, at the ages of 5, 10, 15, 21, 27, 35, and 47. Some of the details of the prototype would have been designed to be more relevant to my own real-life experiences. Such as the 10-year-old girl's low-grade transcript, or the 15-year-old girl's clothing, which was my high school uniform. When exploring the sketches, I designed based on their clothing, body shape. Expanding their age difference to make the character encourage visitor's desire for exploration. It's different from generally graphic posters. It contained more emotional expression details. As shown below:
For each character, I customize a personal information data table, which is derived from the stereotype, and is easy to be accepted by the outside world. It contains her age, height, weight, health status, family members, character, hobby, and short term wish, which are easy to be judged by others. My design intention is to give visitors a quick stereotype towards every different year.

For me it is an exciting research process to convey a girl's different physiological characteristics and mentality in different growth periods. Based on interviews with various girls, it is not hard to find that the younger people are, the more willing they are to reveal their true stories to others. When people are getting older, the more things they will experience, the more secrets they will have. It means they are more likely to keep their feelings to themselves rather than to show them to the public. As a result, the way these seven characters stand in my poster as designed, the younger they are, the more they face the audience. Every 30 degrees, the characters gradually turn with their back to us. With the creation of the characters, I went to the printing club to ask if I could print the paintings as long as 925 "350", but they replied that I could not. So I started to wonder if I should cut one of the characters. After a discussion with Professor Alan Singer, we believe that the fifth and sixth female perspectives are too similar, and the removal of the sixth character does
not affect the continuity of character growth. So, after tweaking the text treatment, the work will be printed as a large poster on both sides. On this page, a typical Asian woman is illustrated during her five different ages, which combined others’ stereotype, as shown below:

![Illustration of a typical Asian woman at different ages](image)

Figure 3, Xuechun Wu, *My Experience Manifesto - character*, 2019, 875" ×350", Drawing.

B. Story Design  (the Backside of the art)

In terms of how to convey the experience behind each character, first it should be emotional and make the audience gradually recall their own past experiences. Professor Adam Smith first suggested to me to let the audience directly feel that the backstory of this character is interwoven with thousands of other stories through the painting form. Also, he pointed out "where is Wally" as an example.

I started experimenting, sketching out what I could think of as the most important things a woman could go through during her adolescence, rebellious period, marriage, and even divorce. These included good memories, such as being proposed, the sad memories such as domestic violence. Here is My Experience Manifesto Sketch 2 (Figure 4):
Through my sketching, I tried to combine scenes with photos according to the timeline as a quick-test (Figure 5). At this time, I found it difficult for me to integrate these story scenes like “Where is Wally”. Because the background of “Where is Wally” does not change much, and because the characters are crowded, it is better to supplement the incomplete background and create dense beauty. In my scenes, the background of the characters in each scene is different, so it is more difficult to grasp the visual effect, which means I should change the composition/layout.

Figure 5. Xuechun Wu. Testing the idea on the big canvas, sketches and process.
Based on what I illustrated, these seven characters, I drew the other side of them. To make the viewers can understand what they saw is various hidden and unknown stories from the girl.

Figure 6, Xuechun Wu. Physical testing by small size paper, matt coated paper,

In the process of deciding how to compose the layout of the character's backstories, I first referred to the poster style below (Figure 7). Reveal your inner self by hollowing out and disintegrating parts of the character's body. I believe this is a good inspiration for my work. So my final visual expression is according to the body shape by hollowing out the other side of the person and create the feeling of a deep cave. And each cave is filled in with many stories, experiences, which are only known by this lead character.

Figure 7, Poster references combo, drawing, 2019
In this way, the audience can turn to the other side of the poster and see a completely different and colorful life experience after they finish reading the stereotype illustration.

Figure 8, Xuechun Wu. *My Experience Manifesto - backstories*, 2019, 875" × 350".

So, let me tell you some of the secret stories in each age group and why these stories are important.

**Childhood (Figure 9):**

As for me, I agree with the concept that is in the flavor of the connection between childhood and future behavior: “Early childhood is a period of rapid physical and mental growth and change. Children learn to move, communicate, and interact with the world and develop a sense of personal and cultural identity.”

In my view, at the initial growth stage, whatever the child saw and experienced, impressed them, which is going to construct their fundamental social aspect of the world. These perceptions are not likely to be complete, but they are capable of making reasoned judgments about future decisions as well.

In this painting, I conveyed five stories. Such as I learned to dance with my friends, played hide-and-seek with my childhood playmates, had my mother at the bedside to take care of me when I was sick and learned drawing for the first time. I was praised by my teacher for my talent, but was tired of learning piano and had to continue. Those experiences that happened at around the age of five may likely influence the direction of a career, or the unforgettable bond between the mother and daughter, your best friend for life, and so on.

This period is provided with various opportunities for positive human development, but it is also a time when children are most at risk. The negative influences on a child’s development during early childhood can be irreversible.

Adolescence (Figure 10):

Rebellion could be divided into 3 periods. The rebellion in early adolescence is between 9-13 years old, the rebellion in mid-adolescence is between 13-15 years old, and the rebellion in late adolescence is between 15-18. The last period is between 18-23, which is called “trial adolescence.” The thing that stimulated me to focus on rebellion I attribute to this statement in Carl Pickhardt’s Rebel with a Cause: Rebellion in Adolescence: “In mid adolescence, during the late middle-school and early high-school years, most rebellion is about creating needed differentiation to experiment with identity and needed opposition to gather power of self-determination.”

In my painting, in order to considerably summarize the stories of these rebellious periods, I selected mid-adolescence as an example to depict junior high school students. Six stories were told. Students laughed

at her for her poor grades; the first award; parents quarrel and even fight, and celebrate the Chinese New Year; my family celebrated my birthday; get a watch as a souvenir...

Figure 10, Xuechun Wu. Backstories- Adolescence, 2019.

This painting was the first one I drew, so after it was finished, I printed it separately as a test to see if its size was appropriate for viewers (Figure 11).

Figure 11, Xuechun Wu. Printed out to test the size as visitors’ viewpoint, 2019, 175”×350”, Kodak professional lustre paper.
Adulthood (Figure 12):

The typical age of attaining legal adulthood is 18; and in this period, most people have experienced love. What Jovi Casie pointed out in *How love changes you* supports this view: “It can bring us to some very dark places in our life, but it can also lead us onto an even better path. When I’ve fallen in love, it’s always been this overwhelming feeling of bliss and freedom. The feeling of freedom is in the person I am and in my potential in life.” She mentioned the bad lover who would take advantage of you and destroy you, this allows me to recall my previous experience with my ex-boyfriends. Some are cute, some are horrible, some are disgusting to me.

To further narrow down the concept of young people in love, I decided to pay attention to early-adulthood, which is around 17-25 years old. The stories covered in this painting are her first love; Shopping with girlfriends; Meeting her soul mate; Staying up late to work overtime. It is hoped that readers will be able to see that these scenes reflect on the past partner, their presence and departure, and whether the choice of your next partner will change. Is your promotion due to your hard-work in the past? I hope everyone can resonate, learn to face up to, cherish every part of the good or bad experience.

Figure 12, Xuechun Wu. Backstories-Adulthood, 2019.

Tricenarian (Figure 13):

The next turning point came around 30. So what does 30 mean for a woman? My friends and I are currently wrestling with the big pre-30 crisis. I wonder if we'll carry on feeling this way as we grow ever-older. So, will we experience similar anxieties at the turn of every decade? "The rise of anxiety among millennials is no secret – one in six young people will now experience an anxiety condition at some point in their lives. And, according to psychotherapist Hilda Burke, milestone birthdays such as 30 can turn even the most chilled among us into quivering wrecks thanks to the significance our culture has placed on them."

Jessica Bateman explained on the Why we are so scared of turning 30? in 2016.

At such an untrivial turning point in my life, meanwhile I have recorded a lot of scenes as below: romantic weddings, pregnancy checkups, living with my son and husband, picking up the children from school, and so on. Reveal maternal love, shed the past tender and youthful, which is also a common choice for Chinese women in this age group, some even earlier. Hoping that readers can get to know the living situation of the early middle age in China, and Chinese women are encouraged not to conform to rules and regulations, blindly follow the direction of social development and ignore their pursuit.

Figure 13, Xuechun Wu. Backstories- Tricenarian, 2019.

Menopause (Figure 14):

When women are aging, their health, skin, and body shape are confronted with enormous challenges inevitably. Even if many studies have assessed the risk of anxiety and health disorder during the perimenopausal transition. But is there nowhere to find systematically investing the relationship between menopause and anxiety? As many as 51% of women aged 40 to 55 years report occasional tension, nervousness, or irritability, and 25% report frequent irritability or nervousness.

My paintings conclude some not positive stories, such as husbands cheating, at same time, caring for elderly relatives, getting tired of preparing dinner for family, social phobias are mentioned. From the innocent girl turned into a worried and worn housewife. They are under enormous strains but have no way to get rid of the current predicament. These series reflect the vivid portrayal of contemporary Chinese women in the same light.

Figure 14, Xuechun Wu. Backstories- Menopause, 2019.


Based on this, when visitors go around to the back of the work, they will see this character's implicit stories, and her body is filling with memories of each year. Some are good, and some are awful and she does not want to be reminded. These backstories allow viewers to travel between the outside of the character and what she experienced inside these years — helping visitors to imagine whether the decision she made in different situations is excusable.

C. Marketing Video (Figure 15)

Before people make a thorough inquiry into my illustration posters, I will primarily play a marketing video (Figure 15), in this way, they will be quickly attracted by my project concept and understand my original design intention. Before starting to design animation, I think about the video style board that best fits my thesis is the Apple event video11. These videos all express the theme of products which they want to serve in a concise and fast way, with exciting music background so as to strike people's hearts, so this is what I tend to try.

![Figure 15, Xuechun Wu. My Experience Manifesto- marketing video, 2019](image)

The following is a series of screenshots in a combination finalized in a 46 second marketing video, which follows the style of Apple Design with black words on a dark background or black words on a white background, and expresses the core of my theme in a very striking and intuitive way. In the meantime, I

combined the process from my sketch with the illustrated scene. Through the gestalt principle, I superimposed the corresponding picture when different words were expressed to echo them. Thus, the audience can quickly feel the emotional expression of video, which is not only a combination of cold words but also varieties of vivid and real story backgrounds supporting this video.

D. Parallax Art (Figure 16)

To enhance the interactive function and integrity of my thesis, I used a combination of JavaScript, HTML and CSS to blend my illustration into parallax art on an iPad, computer and mobile electronic devices through code, to make my illustration full of layers, enhance the interlaced sense of my story expression, and enhance the interactive entertainment and engagement of visitors. The backside of the character illustration, according to different layers, through the representation of physical relations of near and far, allows the user to check and control the story through the touch screen on responsive devices. This new experience allows users to try tilting their device, or moving it around with their mouse or finger, which can also bring freshness and entertainment to participants likewise.

Figure 16, Xuechun Wu. Parallax Art, My Experience Manifesto, 2019

Further refinement and development:

In today's era with increasing development of VR technology, Tilt Brush lets us paint in 3D space by means of virtual reality. Unleash our creativity with three-dimensional brush strokes, stars, light, and even fire. The room is our canvas. After I first tried oculus Tilt Brush, my thoughts and concerns about VR painting
were also aroused. Then, it made me ponder over how to let online people who are unavailable be present at the exhibition and know and experience my concept simultaneously?

Section III: Results

The Imagine RIT Festival is a creativity and innovation event and is a campus-wide that showcases the creative and innovative spirit of RIT students, faculty, and staff. There are many visitors or Rochester citizens going to experience the breadth and depth of RIT through interactive presentations, hands-on demonstrations, exhibitions, and research projects set up throughout campus. Multiple performance stages with live music and entertainment are also a hit with visitors of all ages. So I believe the visitors’ reflections can prove my thesis’s value. Let me show you what I prepared for this momentous day.

A. Marketing video showcase

First of all, I play my marketing video at the visitors’ entrance, hoping that they can notice a site to guide them into the project theme as soon as possible when they enter (Figure 17).

Figure 17, Xuechun Wu. My Experience Manifesto- marketing video showcase (Galley view), 2019.
At the same time, to encourage people's engagement, I also arranged a lot of post-it-notes to encourage people to write down and participate in discussions on this topic. Everyone also commented on the strongly visual impact of my video, which is quickly conducive to help them understand my pivotal theme.

B. Illustration Art poster showcase (Figure 18-19)

When I finished this 875*350 inches painting, I went to print it. The most challenging problem is how to solve the drawing in the specified scope of the site and show it as the previously conceived cylinder (Figure 25, 28). Here I would like to thank my boyfriend for his help. All night we went to Walmart, Target, and other supermarkets to buy fish lines, sticks, and all kinds of tapes, etc. We borrowed the photography background stand from my photography friend and tried all the methods we could think of to hang up such a long and heavy picture completely. Just when we thought we were lost, we noticed the table tennis table in the corner of the lab. Its ratio of length to width is matched with some boards, which was just enough to support the length of the picture. In this way, it perfectly solves the problem of exhibition arrangement.

Here is what the front-side poster looked like when it was exhibited.

![Image](image1.png)

Figure 18, My Experience Manifesto - character (Gallery view), 2019, 175"×350".

Here is what the backstory poster looked like when it was displayed, which is in accordance with each of the front characters.
What cheered me most is that many people in this exhibition were very interested in the theme of my project. I didn't sleep a wink all night, but I was still excited to expound it to everyone. Under my explanation, most people gradually realized my intention and gave me a lot of encouragement and support. Also, they spoke with empathy about the experiences they have had.

C. Message board (Figure 20)

Before the exhibition, I hope that those visitors who have feelings about my works can leave something behind, which can export their real emotional interaction at that time. So, I produced a simple message wall to help promote visitors to leave their thoughts. After Imagine RIT Festival, I reviewed some visitors who stayed in front of my works for a long time and left me a lot of sincere wishes and understanding of the works. I was very impressed and delighted by everyone's ebullient participation and reflection.
D. Parallax Interactive Art

How to let online people who are unavailable be present at the exhibition know and experience my concept in another way? They could learn details about my illustration concept by visiting the website and through a form of entertainment on different devices and media. The poster will only be displayed for one day, but the link will be kept for a long time. Most of my friends enjoy the process when they are exploring in this new viewing-interaction way (Figure 21, 22).

Based on different layers, through the representation of physical relations of near and far, allows the user to check and control the story through the touch screen on responsive devices (Figure 22).
Section IV: Evaluation & Discussion

In line with some studies, this is something that extensively affects women. Furthermore, a US survey in 2009 drew a conclusion that women are also more likely than men to accept feelings of inadequacy at home or while at work than men, and a larger proportion deemed that they failed to cater to their own high standards. Although in the rapid development of society, the social concept is turning into more and more advanced in modern society. Nevertheless, no matter in developing countries or not, there is still a large group of women who are still up against the pressure of perfection. They are still under tremendous pressure from social public opinion, are always worried about a small decision or action, will collide with the comments of others. Among the 15 people I surveyed, their social attributes included graduate students, housewives, university professors, and office workers. All of them said that they had done a quick judgment on the people around them. While 95% of women said they had been queried, "why did you have to marry him? ", "it's easy to escape from the life circle as a housewife and not be afraid of proving to be a worn housewife in the future, which means even these intimate people are troubled continuously by their choices.
It is worthwhile to comply with others’ friendly advice properly contrarily, listen to others blindly and abandon personal judgment is not encouraged. No matter any determination in the future you will make, only you can be responsible for yourself.

After presenting, one marketing video, ten art posters and five across platforms of parallax arts, the visitors are in position to be equipt with a basic understanding of the general life of contemporary Chinese women. Simultaneously, they may feel more vividly toward the stereotype, what how we usually define others is not rational. Thousands of background experiences prop up the significant choices everyone makes for themselves at distinct times, and only by doing this can we determine whom we become. All research, interviews, and current statements have completely confirmed the practical value of my topic.
Conclusions

It is an opportunity for me to bring my Chinese cultural background into the thesis of my study abroad to some extent. In addition, to deliver it to people who are from different countries, consequently they can experience and understand the concept of my work. I recall that the most challenging part of the whole thesis process was the topic selection. And as a member of the visual communication design program, how do I make use of the skills I learned to convey my concept, is very vital. The most unforgettable part was the curation night before the Imagine RIT Festival and the visitors' feedbacks towards to my design concept and their love for the illustration style on the exhibition day. Even if I am not a major participant of illustration, probably I am not skilled in wielding illustrative techniques enough. However, it does not affect my determination to integrate them into my thesis. I believe there still have a lot of different perspectives and opinions between a man with a woman. That's also a part of what I'm curious about and interested in. It could be my future exploration for further steps. The illustration works well in this poster. But for the parallax art, if there could add some tiny animation around the illustration scene. I think that will look rather extraordinary.

Last but not least, my special thanks to Professor Adam Smith, who is always supplying me a variety of creative ideas and assistance for the exhibition. As well as the illustrations' weekly meetings and help my project name "My Experience Manifesto" from Professor Alan Singer.


