



émergent magazine

In Conversation

Words by

with Wang Ye

James Ambrose



How do you feel art influences and shapes your everyday life?

I find creative energy everywhere. Whether it's the repetitive experiences from dawn to dusk or the random information I find on the internet, they unconsciously accumulate into materials for creation. Art creation for me is very spontaneous; I don't have a deadline and often lack a clear plan. It's more like responding naturally to an invisible dialogue between myself and life itself. The memories of my childhood, the changes in the landscape, and the visual forms I observed in my hometown, along with the stories I've heard from others, have all contributed to my creative resources.

The Xiang Xiu (embroidery from Hunan) that I am currently working with originates from my hometown. It was very popular when I was a child, and most women were involved in embroidery-related work to some extent. However, with modernization, fewer people are still practicing it. This experience is intertwined with the personal journey of many villagers like me, which has become the core inspiration for my creations.







Wang Ye, 'Object', 2020. Silk embroidery, 10 9/10 × 7 4/5 × 1 4/5 in. 27.7 × 19.7 × 4.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery



When did you know you wanted to be an artist?

After completing a Product Design degree as an undergraduate, I realised that I wanted to pursue something more liberating, more faithful to self-expression, and that's why I chose art in my subsequent studies. However, at that time, I didn't have a clear vision of becoming an artist; I simply had a desperate urge to try things out. The real desire to become an artist emerged from various encounters in my life afterwards.

What does a normal day in the studio look like? Are there any rituals or processes you follow while in the studio?



My day-to-day routine tends to be flexible, with no set plan. The only ritual I adhere to is following the sun's movements; I often check the colors of the embroidery threads with daylight, and sunset marks the end of the day's work. The silk thread used for embroidery is a very special material, and daylight provides the most accurate environment for discerning its colors.

Before I began working on my embroidery pieces, I spent some time visualizing the materials used for embroidery. In the neighborhoods of my hometown, I collected many old silk threads that were left over from the production of former embroidery workshops. These threads reminded me of the images and subjects of old embroidery works. The uncertainty of the hand-mixing dyeing process, the artisans' aesthetics and habits, and the different production periods and batches all contribute to the slight color variations in these threads. I was fascinated by the order and difference of these colors. During the long process of weaving fishing nets with my mother's help, I became familiar with the silk threads, which eventually led me to start creating embroidery works.





Wang Ye, 'Seated Bather', 2020. Silk on silk embroidery, 7 4/5 × 6 1/5 × 1 4/5 in. 19.9 × 15.7 × 4.5 cm. Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery

Do you work in silence or with sound?

I prefer to work in silence, even during repetitive mechanical tasks, as my mind is usually filled with rich inner dialogues while I work. These voices may represent recurring feelings about the creation or involve rational thinking and planning for subsequent work. Therefore, maintaining silence provides a conducive working environment for me.

When collaborating with an embroiderer, we discuss the details of the creation. Of course, casual conversation may arise during breaks or moments of relaxation. However, most of the time, we work in silence, as embroidery requires intense concentration. The eyes, hands, and

brain must work closely together to ensure neat stitches and efficient production.

Your practice has many facets and employs a number of different mediums. Do you work on one series at a time or a several at once?

For me, a project may involve multiple pieces that together form a complete narrative. My work isn't confined to a specific medium or form. Even with the same material, I can create works in different ways depending on what I want to express. Embroidery thread can be used not only for traditional embroidery but also for sculptural forms. The ability to freely switch between different mediums and to use my hands and eyes to explore and create is an essential source of joy in my artistic practice.





Wang Ye, 'Still Life with Old Shoe', 2020. Silk embroidery, 10 9/10 × 7 4/5 × 1 4/5 in. 27.8 × 19.8 × 4.5 cm.  
Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery

In regard to the work itself, does each series hold its own narrative?

Each series of my work has its own theme and narrative, but there is often a connection between them. For example, the *Embroidernity Series* began with stories from my embroidery teacher, Auntie Li, about her experiences. She was born into a family of Hunan embroiderers and represented her city to participate in the Great China Merchandise Exhibition in Japan in 1989. I attempted to continue this experience with Auntie Li through imagining an opportunity to reproduce five modernist works in embroidery with her. The theme of modernization explored in this series and how it is projected onto one's own life experiences was then carried over into the subsequent works such as *Manhattan A* and *Manhattan B*, which depict miniature models of

Manhattan in the Window of the World. I visited this landmark in Shenzhen for the very first time on the eve of my departure for graduate school, which left a strong impression on me even though it has become squalid. This theme park reminds me of the “image of the industrious, patriotic worker” constructed for the 1862 London World’s Fair, and Jia Zhangke’s movie *The World*.

I would love to get your opinion on the state of the contemporary art world as it stands. Do you think it is in a healthy place?

Given my focus on my own work, it’s challenging for me to answer this question. However, I believe that different shareholders in the art world—artists, creators, galleries, collectors, and institutions—harbor diverse expectations of contemporary art, which often diverge and converge in a symbiotic manner. Perhaps this diversity contributes to a dynamic state within the contemporary art world. Yet, as we know, the world is fluid, and everything is in a constant state of change.





Wang Ye, 'Woman with Pails: Dynamic Arrangement', 2020. Silk embroidery,  $7\frac{4}{5} \times 7\frac{4}{5} \times 1\frac{4}{5}$  in.  $19.9 \times 19.8 \times 4.5$  cm. Courtesy the artist and YveYANG Gallery

What is it about being an artist that you love?

As an artist, I cherish the creative freedom that comes with exploring different cultures, materials, and techniques. I can approach each endeavour with the curiosity and openness of a student, unencumbered by the fear of being inexperienced in a particular area. There are always new possibilities to explore, which is incredibly fulfilling.

What are your plans for the remainder of 2024?

I will attend a workshop to learn lacquer in the summer, and another workshop to learn rattan in the fall. The materials and colors in lacquer are as brilliant as those in embroidery, while the orderly weaving techniques in rattan weaving are reminiscent of the stitches in embroidery. Although these crafts differ significantly, they share similar methodologies and aesthetic tradition. Additionally, I'll focus on creating new works and hope to enjoy a well-deserved vacation at the end of the year.