

BOYNES ARTIST AWARD

INTERVIEW WITH ARTIST XINRAN LIU

January 7, 2025

Written by Chantal Boynes

Congratulations to Xinran Liu for earning her place as a Winner in the Boynes Monthly Art Award October 2024 Edition!

WHO ARE YOU?

My name is Xinran Liu. I come from China and I am currently living in London. When I look back at my career path, becoming an artist didn't seem like an option for me until recent years. I was interested in art history and contemporary art. And I know I want to paint. However, the uncertainty and the difficulty of becoming a self-sustaining artist are so hard that I decided to find a job in the art industry and keep painting as a hobby.

During those years, I worked in museums, galleries, and various art communities, but eventually, I realized

that making art is what I truly love to do. So I decided to take a graduate degree and give portrait another try. The two years of study in London provided me with another chance to start my art career. Now I paint in a small studio in east London.

WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO UTILIZE PAINTING AS A MEDIUM?

In the first few years of my study in art school, I learned many types of art. I've learned to do carving, printing, etching, and many more that allow me to create better art pieces. But after all these experiences, painting is still special to me. I think painting is one of the most intuitive forms of art in that I can express my emotions and things, the ones that cannot be turned into words and sentences. The marks placed on the canvas can form a unique visual language. And sometimes it is universal to people from different cultural backgrounds. Painting doesn't need you to read but rather see through your eyes, which is the part that draws me the most.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR ARTWORK?

My works are about the memories that I had with family and friends. I like to capture the unconsolidated thoughts that emerge from the instant and recreate them on the canvas. In my paintings, the shapes and images are reconstructed through iterative layers and evolving lines, and then, blurred, erased, and reformed. This movement — a continual process of building up, removing, and redefining — mirrors the way memories are built up in the mind. In my opinion, it is these subtle marks that keep my memory from losing its shine.

CAN YOU DISCUSS THE INSPIRATION AND THOUGHT PROCESS BEHIND YOUR WINNING WORK?

The work "Within the swirls and circles" is a visual diary of my trip to the beach. It was an ordinary trip. But I can still remember the sky with pale blue light between the clouds. I lived in Chengdu for almost 20 years. The cloudy weather on that day reminded me of the time I spent in my hometown. This dreamy and melancholy scene inspired me to create this painting. I hope my painting has a connection to feelings rather than solid representations. Therefore the painting "Within the swirls and circles" is abstract and



"Coniferous Forest 1"

Oil on Linen

By Xinran Liu



"Coniferous Forest 2"

Oil on Linen

By Xinran Liu

expressive.

CAN YOU WALK US THROUGH THE TECHNICAL STEPS OF CREATING YOUR WINNING WORK?

The painting talks about the process of recalling memories. When I prepare a canvas, I usually use rabbit skin glue to size it, so I can keep the raw color. This yellow tone reminds me of the aged papers. I think it is compatible with the idea of a visual diary that I want to achieve in the works.

I wanted to capture the subtle color in the sky, the movement of waves hitting the beach, and the never-ending breeze. So I started with a thinned-washed layer with a tone that I feel connected to my mood. I mixed blue with slightly grey and white to paint the underground. After finishing the blue tone, I used thin lines and diluted oil paint to create form and space. In the painting, there are many swift brushstrokes and pencil marks that I use to refer to the brittle waves. When I dealt with these marks, I chose to make them overlap and intersect so the viewers could feel the movement within the painting.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO COMMUNICATE TO AN AUDIENCE WITH YOUR WORK?

Most of my paintings are about personal memories and feelings. When people see my works, I hope the

emotions within the works can be expressed and communicated, but at the same time, being open to interpretation. These images and shapes are loosely connected to create different ways to understand them. When the viewers take a closer look at the pieces, they will find traces of pencil marks and brush marks that were erased and covered, suggesting an ever-changing movement. And I hope these subtle moments and tranquility within can be noticed.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT YOUR BIGGEST LEARNING EXPERIENCE DURING THE PROCESS OF CREATING YOUR WORK?

Understanding different materials and mediums is important for painters. When I started to paint, my professor always took us to the drawing collection room. I had many valuable chances to see the master's drawings and watercolor pieces. These sketches give me a lot of inspiration for utilizing different mediums to create the variation of marks. Marks can give richness to layers and spaces on the canvas surface. These techniques still benefit me today.

CAN YOU DISCUSS YOUR BIGGEST SUCCESS SINCE STARTING YOUR ARTISTIC JOURNEY?

The biggest success would be my first solo show held in New York this year. I've only had a few group shows in the past, but none of the experience in the solo



"Within Swirls And Circles"

Oil on Canvas

By Xinran Liu

exhibition. Preparing paintings was stressful. It was a great challenge because I needed to create a series of works within a limited time. I used to paint more intuitively. However, the exhibition taught me how I should plan my schedule and how to keep myself creating works of the same quality. Besides, talking to galleries and curators gives me a whole different perspective to see my works. I got the chance to review my work in a more objective way. They look so much different on gallery walls compared to my studio walls.

This exhibition is a short retrospection of my art practice. And I believe it helps me to figure out what I want to paint in the future.

CAN YOU GIVE US THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE YOU HAVE EVER HEARD/RECEIVED?

My professor once told me that the flaw in an artwork is not a failure but a chance to explore more possibilities. I believe all artists should have the courage and patience to try things they have never done before.

AS A WINNER, DO YOU HAVE ANY ADVICE FOR ARTISTS WHO WANT TO APPLY FOR AWARDS, COMPETITIONS, RESIDENCIES, ETC.?

I want to say that there will always be some programs that are suitable for you and some will not. So it is important to do the research before sending the applications. And artists should keep a good list of their works. A folder of well-documented photos of works and great statements will save so much time when applying for open calls and residencies.

WHAT PROJECTS ARE YOU WORKING ON CURRENTLY? CAN YOU DISCUSS THEM?

I am currently planning to create a series of small



"Jump Jump Up!"

Oil on Canvas

By Xinran Liu

paintings inspired by different poems that I've read. I want to explore how the language can be turned into images.

WHAT IS YOUR DREAM PROJECT OR PIECE THAT YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

I can't think about a dream project now, but eventually, I want to keep painting, and hopefully, live as a self-sustained artist. It's still a long way to go. As for now, the project I want to try is some site-specific ones. The city I used to live in is surrounded by mountains. It's the place that was deeply rooted in my childhood and teenage years. These memories and experiences have influenced who I am and how I see the world. And since my art practice is always connected with myself, I wish to create some works there.

LASTLY, I LIKE TO ASK EVERYONE WHAT ADVICE THEY WOULD GIVE TO THEIR FELLOW ARTISTS, WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE?

I've been rejected countless times by all kinds of open calls. In the end, the reason that supported me in creating artwork was truly my passion for the art. Whatever you choose to do, you should be truthful to yourself. When you make a piece of work, it is about how honest you have been with yourself. An artist should have a sharp eye that can see the special in ordinary life.



"A Footnote of June 12th"

Oil on Canvas

By Xinran Liu



“The Endless Sticky Noise Inertia Coming Out From The Bud”
Oil on Canvas
By Xinran Liu



“Masquerade”
Oil on Canvas
By Xinran Liu



“The Last Note Vibrating Through The Night”
Oil on Canvas
By Xinran Liu