

REWIND

REVIEW

RESPOND

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INTERVIEW

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Yaoxi (Zoey) Duan

Interviewed by Yu Jin Sung



Starting May 10, you can view work by students in the MFA graduating class on the website 2021.CCAMFA.art and in the [Class of 2021 Showcase](#).

Works in this series were written by students in Glen Helfand and Maria Porges' respective graduate writing seminars this past fall and spring.

Yu Jin: I had a sense that your focus on the aesthetic quality of images gradually moved on to an interest in the procedure itself of developing photographs in alternative ways. What drew you into this kind of photography?

Yaoxi (Zoey) Duan: This process might not seem like a traditional way to develop an image, but it actually was there at the beginning of the history of photography. I was introduced to that technique when I was in the last year of my undergrad degree. I was focusing on landscape and documentary photography back then, which required the photographer to spend sufficient time digging into the stories behind the subject. Because alternative kinds of photography also require the time and patience of the practitioner, I was naturally attracted to them.

YJ: Is there any reason for choosing the lumen printing method, or photograms, for your recent work, *Collection of Meats*?

YD: This series of works is inspired by my everyday routine of cooking. Ever since the pandemic started and we ate at home more often, I began to pay more attention to the ingredients and then got the idea to document what I'm putting into my mouth.

A photogram is an image made without a camera by placing the object on photographic paper and exposing it to light. Each of those prints is one of a kind, even though I used the same material or same chemicals. In other words, you cannot have total control of color or outcome. I am attracted to this idea of letting the subject reveal its "true tone" with minimal interference.

YJ: Your other untitled work is reinforcing this "randomness" as well.

YD: Yes, this accordion book, when expanded, is a long strip of lumen printed photo paper. I scattered several liquid materials like honey, nail polish, and sauce on it with my friends. When I developed the paper, various colors and patterns were revealed. This is called a "chemigram" since different chemicals react to the paper differently.

YJ: Do you think the alternative places, tools, and ingredients that you used for all of these works were necessary for producing the

prints as they are now? Would the outcomes have changed if you could have worked at the studio, or with proper tools?

YD: I always had an interest in the process of crafting something with my own hands. That led me to build a darkroom in my bathroom and use a chopping board and a piece of glass instead of a proper contact print frame. For me these alternative methods offered a way to escape from this pathetic world.

I try to produce the prints at home as professionally and formally as I would working in the studio. But I think this experience of living through the pandemic and being isolated has definitely influenced my mind.