

Digital Drawing Room: MFA Fine Arts featuring Xuebei Zeng

by Hannah Lamb-Vines



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.



Distortion, 2021. Photo.

Xuebei Zeng's work is imbued with the cosmic-stuff of memory. "My process involves revisiting my past," Zeng says. "It will be like: There is Xuebei from before, sitting there, while my mind from now floats in the air." In Zeng's hands, her materials travel with her through time, into her memories, and are shaped in this ethereal realm. Whether Zeng is visiting a time of sorrow, of confusion, or of longing, what she returns with to the present are the manifestations of the newly-understood memories, whose meanings, upon occurrence, were lost in the murk that so often is life in real-time.

Zeng's involvement with clay began when she was an undergraduate and worked for a summer in Jingdezhen, China — a city famed for its centuries-old history of porcelain manufacture. "I spent the summer there practicing and working in artists' studios," Zeng says. She recalls her life there as peaceful, steeped in the days-long process of creating a single, finished piece. This slow, thoughtful process spoke to Zeng: "To keep going, step by step—I felt it might give my life and my works new, deeper meaning."

Zeng, a native of China who lives and works primarily in the United States, has come to call both countries home. At times, this duality has been a deep well of misunderstanding. "It is not only misunderstanding on the first level, which is language; you can understand somebody's words and still not know what they are meaning." Zeng has



Boundaries, 2020. Ceramics.

described herself as possessing both an Eastern and Western mind, modes of being that she might toggle between.

As the artist has gotten to know her varieties of mind and as her memories come into more vivid focus, she has become more interested in the political implications of her work. "I do not shy away from the political," Zeng says. Rather, she allows it to shine through on its own accord, "because who I am is always there."



Boundaries, 2020. Ceramics.



Mama, 2020. Ceramics.