

Fortis Plantis

Xinyue (Selina) Wang

The natural world is full of hundreds of thousands of plant species, and their presence enriches our lives – their beauty and magnificence are awe inspiring. Therefore, plants and flowers have been represented by many painters throughout art history. Some artists have specialised in observing and depicting the objective facts of plants, while other practitioners have attached unique ideas and emotions, as well as symbolic meanings to plants. My body of work explores two such thematic directions of botanical life.

The first installment of my body of work is a diptych that focuses on the study of realistic botanical imagery. Through my collection and observation of plants surrounding my everyday existence, I have found their life cycle, particularly the stages from death to germination, fascinating and beautiful. Thus, I have concentrated on the death and decay of plants, as I have found that the decay of wildflowers and weeds are more powerful and resilient than that of typically beautiful flowers. For even as wildflowers and weeds dry out and wither, they have the ability to regenerate themselves the following year. I consciously observed and collected an abundance of wildflowers and weeds. Observing their decay, their poignancy and their resilience has inspired me to create this piece entitled 'Fortis Plantis'. Through this piece, I wanted to show my reverence and appreciation for life through the natural decay and rebirth of plants.

My work is influenced by different genres and painters including Classical, Expressionist, Romantic and Realist, but especially the fine brushwork techniques seen in Chinese 'Gongbi' paintings and the strong sense of feminine power of plants in Lucian Michael Freud's work. Through a series of developments and studies, I eventually adopted the medium of oil painting to present a realistic style. After experimenting with oil on canvas, the thin application of oil was the best way to present the delicate, intertwined, and poignant quality of the plants compared to a thick, expressive application. I decided to present a detailed, realistic painting that embraces the traditional style of the genre through such an oil painting technique.

There were three stages in the painting process, using coloured pencils to start the drawing, oil painting to detail the plants and painting the background, where the coloured pencils have the effect of a fine sketch and the oil painting depicts the relationships and projections between the plants in fine detail. These projections require a great deal of time to be carefully drawn. In addition to the details of the projections, the forms of the plants need to be finely etched in color according to their objective forms. In the detailing of each plant, I paid more attention to the overall color balance to make the picture more harmonious. All these details build the visual effect of the painting, giving it a bleak, decaying effect. In the background, I have used bright green, which does not give the picture an overly melancholy effect, but rather creates a visual contrast with the subject matter. Green is a symbolic reminder of the life that once flourished, and a yearning and expectation for the life that will come.

In the second installment of my body of work, I focused on creating a polyptych of non-realistic botanical paintings, focusing on the principles of Abstract Art, Cubism, Modern Art, and Pop Art. The plants and flowers are not represented in an objective way as in Installment 1, but rather in my own subjective consciousness and feelings.

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In my earlier research and observation of the various plant forms and features, I also captured their unique characteristics and temperament. It seems to me that these plants are not static, they are lively, flamboyant and ever-changing. They can appear in our lives in any form, in any meaning, some perhaps emotive or strangely absurd. Their images are not bound by figuration, but rather straddle the line between the figurative and the abstract and convey a range of spiritual ideas.

It is through such observations and perceptions that I am prompted to complete a work that is totally different from what I have done before, breaking with the academic techniques, and principles of painting that I have learned before. Choosing a challenging way to create. I have used mixed media combined with paper and textile collage to express my different perceptions and feelings about the ordinary plants in our lives. The combination of cloth and newspaper, glazed paper, and lace collage makes for a very varied and rich image. This unusual technique is the result of my search for a multifaceted form of painting, that is not bound by realism or traditional classical painting techniques. The background of the painting includes patterns on cloth and paper, colours which, through careful arrangement, ultimately form the balance of the image and have a unique visual effect. The addition of the gold adds a richness to the paintings and creates a link to the golden colouring found in traditional Chinese gongbi paintings. The result is more emotionally compelling and visually impactful than the first component of my body of work.

In my body of work, I was able to employ different techniques and styles through the representation of one of the art world's most adored and revered subjects. Creating two installments for my body of work meant I was able to fully express the diversity of my feelings and observations of flowers and plants and share this with my audience. And by studying the subject in different directions has also developed the diversity of my aesthetic understanding, allowing me to understand and experiment with a wider range of styles and techniques.