

# Искусство общения: творческий подход и актуальность личного опыта

## How Does Art Communicate: Creative Approaches and the Relevance of Personal Experience

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### Аннотация

С момента возникновения критики «модернизма» в искусстве 1960-х гг. на Западе, для многих художников, работающих в рамках «современного искусства», существует все меньше и меньше границ. В настоящей статье я обсуждаю некоторые из своих недавних картин, фотографий и дизайн-проектов как формы выражения своего личного опыта, пытаюсь привлечь внимание читателя к характеристикам «безграничности» и «инклюзивности» «современного искусства». Выходя за рамки философских и формальных определений «современного искусства», при помощи «безграничности» и «инклюзивности» своих работ и своей жизни я стремлюсь преодолеть предрассудки продуктивным и рациональным образом.

**Ключевые слова:** искусство и коммуникации, постмодернизм, семиотика изображений, искусство и интенциональность.

### Abstract

Since the critique of “modernism” in the arts of the 1960s in the West, “Contemporary Art” has become increasingly borderless for many artists. In this paper I discuss some of my recent paintings, photographs and design projects as expressions of my own personal background and work experience in an attempt to draw attention to qualities of “borderlessness” and “inclusivity” manifest in “Contemporary Art.” Beyond the philosophical and formal characterizations of “Contemporary Art,” “borderlessness” and “inclusivity” in my work and in my life means striving to overcome prejudices in a productively rational manner.

**Keywords:** art and communication, post-modernism, semiotics of images, art and intentionality.

### Background, Experience and The “Borderlessness” of Contemporary Art

As I understand the art world today, “Contemporary Art” is extremely diverse and driven by quite different motives and interests. Since the critique of “modernism” in the arts of the 1960s in the West, “Contemporary Art” has become increasingly borderless for many people, represented by different personal histories, cultural backgrounds, social and political objectives and, most importantly — competing ideas about the “value” of “Art” in the world today.

If the original strong critiques of “modernism” in the Arts were based on ideas of moving from an understanding of “art itself” to an understanding of “art in context,” then the world of “Contemporary Art” seems to have challenged forcefully the very idea of “a context” for “Art.” (Archer, p. 8)

Now it is not just the work of art that has come to be defined in many different ways, but the “context for art” has also become very fluid, dynamic and constantly changing.

In a very important sense, I myself am a child of this fluidity, dynamism and constant change. From a very early age living in Taiwan, I had the opportunity to study the visual arts. I studied different schools and different styles of painting in the Chinese tradition. After my fam-

ily immigrated to the United States, I studied the visual arts in the Western tradition, majoring in painting and studio arts in university.

After graduating from university, I began working as a product designer in the commercial gift industry. Through my years of experience working in all areas of the giftware industry, I learned to work with a great range of different genres — children’s illustration, graphic arts, commercial film and advertising — in order to create new product lines for the commercial gift industry.

Given my personal background and work experience, I believe deeply in notions of “inclusiveness.” My own artistic work has always been very eclectic in the sense that I am constantly drawing upon different traditions, different influences, themes and subjects. This was the driving force behind my most recent show in January of 2016 — “Wondering/Wandering: The Eye and the Imagination at Play.” (see website [leegravesprojects.format.com](http://leegravesprojects.format.com))

In that show, I present works in different media. I also “re-presented” one of my oil paintings in reconstructions of that painting, but employing different forms and media. The point of this show was to encourage and to stimulate a plurality of ways of imagining the connections among experience, perception and representation.

Furthermore, the intersection of “borderlessness” in “Contemporary Art” and “inclusiveness” produces, for me, a very concrete moral position. Beyond philosophi-

cal and formal characterizations of “Contemporary Art,” “borderlessness/inclusiveness” both in my work and in my life means striving to overcome prejudices in a productively rational manner.

**“Into the Flames,” oil on canvas, 92” X 53”**



The descriptive references in the large oil painting (92” X 53”) on canvas above are to recognizable flora, fauna and landscape forms. Yet in this work I choose to emphasize partial details of all of these forms. Carefully detailed bare branches in the deep and far distance echo the stamen of a very close and immediate flower. Together the individual petals of flowers converse with a distant flaming sky.

From the upper-right hand corner of the painting, a blue patch of cloud flows diagonally downward and to the left to connect to other blue clouds, mists, blue flowers, blue kingfisher and water.

All of the imagery in this painting is not simply posed, but presented as active and in movement. All of these different marks and images exist in their own moments and in their own spaces, yet in their spatial and temporal relations they create coherent narratives about the interconnectedness of all forms of life.

I pay attention to details with a broader stylistic focus that allows me to consider how effectively the composition functions as a whole.

Sometimes I like to play with the multiple functions of imagery in my work. For example, the image of the spider thread also functions formally as a divider of space in the painting (notethe vertical line on the right-hand side of the painting dropping from top to bottom). In similar type of formal play, the images of the sparrow and damselfly cling to and accentuate a formal structure used to divide the painting into different planes (see lower right-hand corner of painting shown above and in first image below).

I construct my paintings from close observation of nature and the man-made world, personal anecdotes, memories, and daydreams. All of these things are reworked, reorganized and synthesized in the process of constructing my painting into a new-made reality.

**“Into the Flames,” photographic reconfigurations of oil painting**

As I proceeded to develop the oil painting “Into the Flames,” I took digital photographs of different sections of the painting at different stages in the development of this work.

Displaying them as individual pleximounted photographs (11 1/2” by 17”), I chose to arrange them as single photographs, as diptychs, triptychs, quadriptychs and one polyptych of 19 photographs (see images below):



In this fashion, I am deconstructing and reassembling the history of this oil painting in order to represent the emerging artwork in an entirely new medium with an entirely new structure. In this way, I am encouraging the



viewer to reflect on the process of artistic creation and, especially, the connection between different moments in time in the process.

This is one way I have sought to “re-present” my work in order to further my artistic goal of encouraging a plurality of ways of imagining the connections among experience, perception and representation.

I am still collecting my thoughts about the interchangeable works in this series. Since any panel can be placed beside any other, none of these separate panels has an absolute edge — the world they reveal is limitless. The idea is to emphasize the movement and the journey rather than the final destination.

**“Here and Gone Septych,” oil paintings**



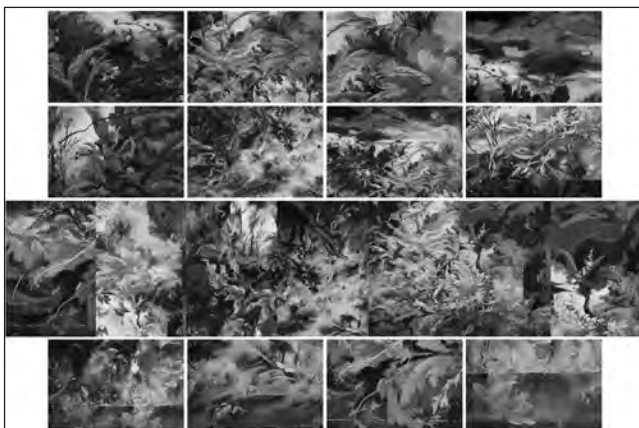
These seven small paintings on wood shown above — “Out There,” “Blooming,” “Gone Fishing,” “Conjuring,” “Flocking,” “What Follows” and “Endurance” — constitute the septych I call “Here and Gone.”

Each individual painting presents a different perspective on the overarching theme of the series — the fluid relationship that obtains between a sense of permanence and a sense of transience in our experience, perceptions and understandings.

At any given moment in this series, the ghosts that have departed, the ghosts that may return and the ghosts that have yet to make an appearance, continually haunt our existential “present.”

All of these panels can also be rearranged into different configurations as was done in the “Into The Flames” project. There are multiple possible sequential combinations. The rearrangements might transform not only the formal rhythms and spatial flow of the septych, but also the tensions among the images.

In the panel “Gone Fishing” for the septych “Here and Gone” (see above), I have constructed a reflection of an egret in the water, yet the egret is nowhere to be seen. And on the left-hand side of this painting, you may see fish jumping; and, on the right-hand side of the painting, you may see a whale in the far distance. Each of these





images occupies both a different space and a different moment, yet all are formally connected.

### “Daydreaming” Archival Prints and Photographs

The “Daydreaming” archival prints and photographs represent a selection of works from a larger series (see [leegravesprojects.format.com](http://leegravesprojects.format.com))

This series broadly queries the values of consumerism and personal possession. For each photograph in the series, I asked friends and family to bring me the sundry bric-a-brac that inhabit their households, so I could create diverse tablescapes that pose the following question:

*“What is the value of the things we possess, hoard, store or that simply form the unnoticed background of our daily lives? Junk, stuff, kitsch or things of great significance?”*

It was really fun to see all of the things people brought to me that they apparently didn’t want anymore. All of these things covered a sixteen-foot long table as I prepared my project.... Things like an ancient manual typewriter, original hand-scored musical scores, and even an old German Mennonite Bible. Small stickers of paper guitars with wings. Little toy airplanes. Old Coca-Cola bottles and so on.....

So what IS the value of all of these things? That IS the question I pose and the point of this project.

As an artist working through these questions, I think we live in a world that is oversaturated with images of things and things that perpetually surround us. We live in a profoundly materialistic world, so when we look at all of these things in front of us, I ask myself and the viewer — *Does any one of these things have any more value than any of the others?*

And what happens when you arrange these individual objects in such a way that they suggest specific narratives? Does this change the way you “value” these individual objects? (see John Berger’s classic analysis “Ways of Seeing”)



For instance, the above image was constructed out of commercially dyed chicken feathers, but arranged into the image of a flaming red bird. Do you read this as cheap feathers from a craft store or does this image lead you to imagine a mythical figure of the Firebird rising from the ashes? Or any other imaginative constructs? Where do such constructs come from?



And when you see the small blue teddy bear stuck on the train tracks in the above image, do you assign a different “value” to this blue teddy bear as you would if you saw this little bear in the arms of a small child?

In short, I seek to create works that may inspire the viewer to imagine diverse ways of contemplating the relationship between different kinds of experiences and different orientations to reality.

## Designs and Products for the Giftware Industry (see [leegravestore.com](http://leegravestore.com))

From the beginning of market research in the giftware industry comes the concept and the original designs from the designers. Then the necessary changes in the designs depend upon so many other factors, interests and context of evaluation — politics, fashion trends, product costs, profit margins, changes in the targeted market niches, changes in order to simplify, and changes in order to make more complex.

As a product designer, I have worked with many different types of products in many different kinds of materials. I am going to focus here on just one type of product I designed, produced and marketed —



Etched-brass gold and silver-plated ornaments

This is a group of Christmas collectible ornaments in silver and gold-plating. Many Americans collect these types of ornaments to hang on their Christmas trees and to preserve as family heirlooms that they pass on to the next generation.

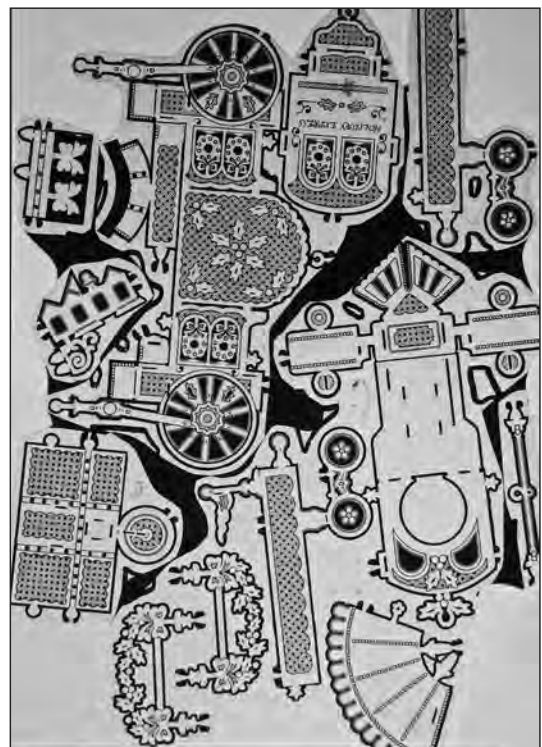
The development process begins with the designer’s proposed “rough concept sketch,” which initiates the long, complex process that leads to final production —

After the product “concept” is agreed upon, the designer provides a rough sketch of the proposed mechanical layouts for the new product —

As the mechanical layout is refined, the designer produces a final sample production tool to make the first sample —

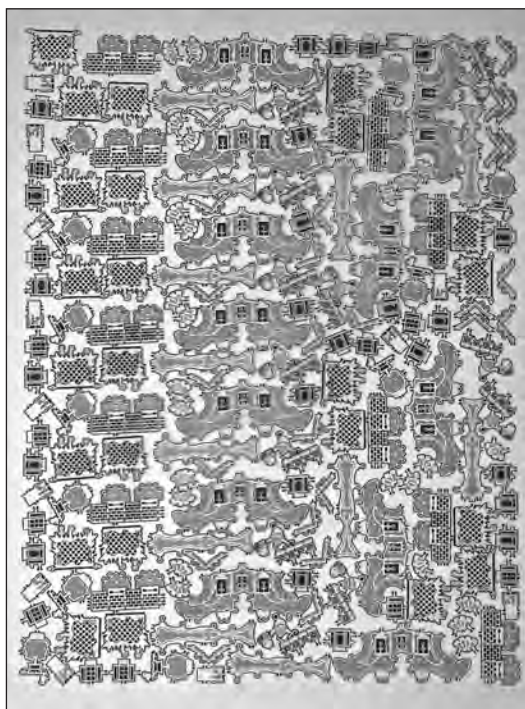


Instructions for rough concept



Final sample production tool

In the final pre-production phase, the designer produces a final mass-production tool to be used in the mass-production manufacturing process —



**Final mass-production tool**

All of the etched-metal ornaments are photo chemically etched onto a flat piece of brass, after which they are manually assembled into three-dimensional products. These finished products are then electro-plated in gold or silver.

The crucial point in the entire development process is how to translate the original three-dimensional concept into a flat lay-out that minimizes the cost of production, maximizes the efficiency of mass production, yet still achieves the aesthetic goals of the designer.

In point of fact, there are so many variables in this development process, that we always find ourselves having to change the basic designs. Sometimes we have to reduce the size of the entire design or reduce the amount of textured surface area on the brass sheet, since textured areas increase the area that needs to be electroplated, increasing the basic cost of production.

We typically also have to change the structure of the design during the process of development in order to reduce the number of steps required to assemble the final product.

Within all of these constraints and processual developments, we focus our attention on making the necessary

changes in such a way that the basic aesthetic goals of the project are reached. But sometimes when we make required changes, we make mistakes and find ourselves having to deal with unintended outcomes. Perhaps a brass plate is over etched or under etched during the photochemical etching process; perhaps something unexpected happens during the electroplating process.

Actually, in keeping with the entire creative process of development, these “accidents” and “mistakes” can be very inspiring and lead to something entirely new and unexpected as the development process changes direction.

It is this experience of working creatively across contexts and interest groups, addressing different demands and perspectives and shifting attention to address emerging new needs and interests that has deeply influenced my ideas and my overall approach to Art.

This manner of working creatively reinforces the critical importance attention to process plays in the way I create my artworks and the way I decide to present those artworks. Among other crucial lessons learned from working in the gift industry, I have found that the element of unexpected surprises is important to the creative process.

Thus, my paintings are not limited to traditional genres, such as portraiture, still life, landscape or interiors. Instead, I am interested in complex and opulent presentations of objects that confound generic categories. I always revel in the play of ambiguities and indeterminacies of forms and meanings.

It is also important to note that all of this means that I find designing products for the commercial gift industry and creating my own paintings to be equally demanding, even though I acknowledge that these creative activities have different purposes and are relevant to different contexts in our lives. And it is for just this reason that I do not think it is important to engage in debates about the so-called “superiority” of different artistic forms and practices.

Nevertheless, I do think there is such an idea as a “stronger artist,” regardless of the purpose or goal of the particular work. I have come to believe that the “stronger artist” is aware of the reasons and the history of what they are trying to achieve; and they do not just confront or point out what the world means to them. Instead, the “stronger artist” strives to continually provide new ways to rethink the world in complex and rich artistic languages.

## Литература

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2. Berger J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin.

## References

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