Perfectly Imperfect

Jizhi Li
Tuesday, April 27th, 2015  8:30am  Location: 410 Bush
Autobiography

I was born and grew up in Chongqing, China. I have loved the fine arts since I was very young and have pursued this field since high school, where I received my initial art training. In 2007, I made up my mind to concentrate on studying sculpting and painting because I thought the process of learning art could always bring me inspiration and confidence. In 2011, I obtained my BFA degree in Ceramics from Jingdezhen Ceramic Institute in China, where I eagerly absorbed the fundamentals of ceramic art and experienced the culture fine arts brought to me. That period was an important stage for me as I searched for my style.

After I graduated, I decided to expand my knowledge in the realm of fine arts. So after graduation I came to America, hoping to experience arts under different cultural backgrounds. During my second year at college, I started to manage a small ceramic jewelry business with my associate. Gradually, I came to realize that I became even fonder of this industry; moreover, I wanted access to more diverse materials. This was also the most important reason for my choice to study Jewelry and Metal Art.
During my study at the Academy of Art University, my jewelry education provided me a lot more opportunities to explore various materials and techniques beyond the field of ceramics, such as metals, wood, plastic, cement, paper, resin, and more. During this period studying contemporary jewelry, the application of various emerging concepts and materials totally subverted my stereotypical ideas about traditional jewelry. For the first time, I paid attention to the close relationship between humans and jewelry. Meanwhile, the flexible artistic forms and distinct viewpoints and perspectives enabled jewelry to express various complex emotions, which I became obsessed with. Up to now, during my time studying here, I have made the successful first step in my career in jewelry design. Furthermore, at school, I learned not only how to push the idea further and master the techniques but also how to promote myself and my artworks, which is very important in my career. I will continue to delve into this field after graduation. The adventure will continue in the future.
Timeline

2011 Fall
FA 631   Book Arts                    R Chadwick
ESL602   English for Art Purposes    Anne Ricketts

2012 Spring
FASCU 629  Fashion Jewelry: Design & Fabrication  Wendy McDermott
FASCU 645  Relief: expression & interpretation  Daniel Burt
ESL 603   English for Art Purposes        Daniel Broch

2012 Summer
FASCU 648  Bronze Pour                Michael Walsh
ESL 603   English for Art Purposes    Stacy Nelson

2012 Fall
FASCU 624  Expressions in Clay        Anne Stryke
FASCU 623  Metals-Forging & Welding   John Fick
GLA 612   Writing & Research          Blaire Kilbey

2013 Spring
JEM 649   Modular Casting             Jonathan Russell
JEM 620   Advanced Fashion Jewelry Design & Fabrication  Patricia Nelson
JEM 605   Forging & Forming           Michael Walsh

2013 Summer
GLA 602   The Art & Ideology of the 20th Century  Denah Johnston

2013 Fall
JEM 630   Innovation in Materials and Processes  Kelly Nedderman
JEM 644   Midpoint and Project Development  Charlene Modena
GLA 606   Crossing Borders: Art & Culture in a Global Society  Andrea Maison

2014 Spring
JEM 800   Organic 3D Modeling & Printing  David Chaney
JEM 800   Digital Design Laser Cutting  Gordon Silveria
JEM 801   Group Directed Study          Patricia Nelson

2014 Fall
JEM 801   Group Directed Study         Killean Evans
JEM 630   Innovation in Materials and Processes  Kelly Nedderman
GLA 674   Professional Practices for Fine Artists  Cheryl Coon

2015 Spring
JEM 801   Group Directed Study         Killean Evans
Thesis Summary

I make wearable jewelry and sculptural objects based on my concept of the “perfectly imperfect”. Body ornamentation is often used to distract attention from the imperfections and flaws in our bodies. When I was 17, I became paralyzed for a short period of time. The temporary paralysis of my legs left me with an incomplete body, and this unpleasant experience made me think about the fuzzy boundary between perfection and imperfection. I was broken, yet I still had intrinsic value. Since then, I have often felt that people judge themselves harshly because of their physical defects. Such damaged ego drives people to overly decorate themselves. I use body ornamentation to express and highlight such phenomena.

My graduate thesis projects are inspired by picture frames and ornamental objects. The narrative forms trigger me to use various media, such as different metals, porcelain, cement, and other diverse materials in order to convey various emotions. My current series consists of fragments using traditional ornate frames. My artistic intention is to frame parts of the body to redecorate their imperfections. To challenge the wearability of classic jewelry, my jewelry projects should be wearable on unusual parts of the body. I place a particular emphasis the body’s flaws, thereby showing the individuality and unique life story of the viewers.
To me, ornamentation is an expression of awareness of imperfections. My concept rejects the traditional ornamental role of jewelry. Picture frames on the body represent embellishments and perfection. The wearer is imperfect. By framing a part of the body, there is a sense of dark humor and irony, unpleasant and painful, which twists the traditional sense of jewelry.

**Thesis Project**

My graduate projects are mainly concerned with imperfections and defects on the human body. I create wearable jewelry to redecorate the flaws, imperfections or incomplete body parts. At 17, I suffered a temporary paralysis of the leg due to a physical disease. This was an unpleasant experience. At the beginning, I often felt hopelessness and agony. Whenever I went outside, I always felt as if everyone was watching me. I always thought, “God, they are all staring at my flaw!” I often felt myself to be quite an outsider due to there being something different about me. I was always experiencing negative emotions. Later, I came to realize that, despite my physical flaw, I still had intrinsic value. Physical deformity does not cause life to be deformed. On the contrary, perhaps it could endow us with a lot more and make life more complete. My experience urged me to decide to discuss the meeting point between perfection and imperfection. Through my jewelry, I hope the wearer can feel more confident, special, and contented.
Humans’ bodily imperfections fall into multiple categories. Some are extrinsic, like scars, illnesses, paralysis, etc., caused by physical trauma; while some are the imperfections we identify with ourselves as we pursue and yearn for perfection. Everyone has a specific body image. Sometimes what we regard as society’s standards may not always coincide with our perceptual criteria of our own body. We often excessively criticize ourselves due to these defects. But from my point of view, perhaps these “imperfections” happen to be our most distinctive features. Perhaps it is these “imperfections” that make us stand out among the ordinary masses.

I made a vast use of picture frame elements and ornamental elements in my works. It was a long time before I made the final decision to use this element. During the first semester after the midpoint, I once tried to represent it in diverse forms, such as representing it using simple shapes like pills, abstract pupil patterns, or woods whose materials per se had not been polished. But they failed to give me a strong sense and inspiration from beginning to end, such that I could not feel any connection with them. Following my midpoint, I was perplexed about what exact element I should use to express my conception. The philosophy of imperfection has been widely used in the realm of art, with highly abundant and diverse patterns of representation, like the Japanese philosophy of wabi-sabi, which presented this concept through materials being unfinished and incomplete. In my opinion, jewelry in itself is a
manifestation of people’s pursuit of perfection, bearing an inseparable relevance to the human body. So I hope my jewelry can be tightly connected with people, rather than showing the idea of “perfection and imperfection” alone. When I felt like I wasn’t moving forward, I took out all my previous works, trying to recall the concept behind each piece. When I was taking the Final Project Seminar class with director Charlene Modena, I made a tiara, which combined different picture frame components. Picture frames’ original purpose was to protect and enhance objects, like a structuring device. People use picture frames to enclose nice or precious moments so as to collect them. This gave me an idea: What kind of information would be conveyed if people were taken as the framed subject? From this moment, I began exploring the deep-seated significance jewelry could attach to us. To me, ornamentation is an expression of awareness of imperfection. As I see human body parts limited within a frame, this frame denotes edification, veneration, embellishment, crowning and perfection, while the people become that imperfect subject. Using the idea of imperfection, I connect my theme to a contemporary aesthetic concept.

My graduate projects consisted of a series of body jewelry pieces that were inspired by fragments of traditional ornate picture frames. Meanwhile, I tried as much as possible to avoid using traditional square or oval shapes, but only extracted their features and style in an attempt to create a new pattern of
representation. My works were concentrated on manifesting the connection between body and visual ornaments. By investigating the complex sentiments humans have created in pursuit of perfection, I expressed this sentiment with ornate body jewelry. I communicated with others via jewelry, through symbols, and by creating value and meaning, hoping that the wearer and spectators could feel a sense of dark humor and irony that is unpleasant and painful.

Progress

Facial Adornment

In the second semester after the midpoint review, I took the group directed study with Killean Evans in Fall 2014. This series of works was a starting point, where my graduate projects were formed. At the very beginning of the course, I made up my mind to use picture frame as my major object of investigation. At the same time, I had been exploring what kind of theme could be a source of inspiration for this series. Then I heard a song “Try,” sung by Colbie Caillat, and watched the music video of this song. “You don’t have to try so hard” was repeated throughout this song. In the video, people stripped off the layers of make-up, took off the wigs, and removed all their disguises in front of the camera. “When you’re all alone by yourself, do you like you?” the song asked. This song touched me deeply, as well as resonating with me, since we always act as if we have to try to live up to others’ expectations. In this class, I created a series of face adornments, since people always hope the face – one of the
most important parts of people’s body image, in my opinion – could become more perfect. I selected some important parts, such as eyes, teeth, jaw, and skin as carriers for the jewelry.

Fig. 1-8: facial adornment sketches
I searched through a lot of picture frame elements, such as those from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Influenced by them, I simplified their shapes into the main elements in my pieces. I sculpted small components with clay and cast them into multiple units with brass. Then I slowly built them by following the natural shapes of the components. Decorating them with interlacing wires, I shaped thick gage wires overlapping each other to create movement. By giving diversity to them, ranging from thick to thin, I tried to enrich and elaborate the styles. These subjects, with a strong sense of adornment, were enclosed in a narrative picture frame that was fabricated with silver wires in different shapes. The sterling silver outline creates a strong contrast in color to the bright yellow brass. The midterm project was connected to a three-part tube hinge that could adjust the mask and enhance its wearability. The main challenge I encountered in making this series of works came from wearability, in addition to the soldering and combining large a number of pieces. As I tried to put on these pieces of jewelry, the weight made them unsteady on the head, so afterwards I utilized some black rubber bands and fabricated hooks to stabilize them. In this class, I created a series of face masks. Instead of creating a sense of obfuscation, these masks revealed more about their qualities and functions. I hoped this series of works could urge women look deeper than the superficial by highlighting a few parts on the face. I was attempted to make them reveal, personalize, and enhance more of their original the women’s unique nature.
Body Frames

In the same semester, I took the Innovation in Materials and Processes class, taught by Kelly Nedderman. It was the second time I took this course, since I felt the materials used in this course were abundant and distinctive. The traits of these materials gave me an opportunity to work with large-scale jewelry. I began to explore diverse materials and corresponding techniques. I consciously explored body parts as subjects. Finally, I decided to decorate two parts of the female body – the chest and the hips – with picture frames.
Females always unconsciously care about the appearance of their chest and hips – as symbols of femininity. Surveys indicate that, when females stand in front of the mirror, the two parts they are mostly concerned about are their chest and hips. In the midterm projects of this class, I designed two large-scale pieces of body jewelry, which were respectively framed above the chest and above the hip. Meanwhile, they had a streamlined shape and a curve following the body. To accomplish this, I had to overcome lots of technical difficulties. At the very beginning, my inspiration originated from a few classic ceiling reliefs, with highly sophisticated but uniform patterns. I decided to use cement as the material to represent a sense of purity, delicacy and serenity. First, I used oil clay to sculpt decorative patterns, and then I made a rubber mold for them. When I finished making the first casting, I found it could not completely follow the curve along the body. I had no choice but to explore other methods. After several discussions and inquiries with Kelly Nedderman, I discovered a new type of oil clay CX5, which is sensitive to heat. Taking advantage of this trait and the first mold, I cast the whole piece with CX5. Before it had cooled down completely, I curved it along the body’s shape so that I got a mother mold with a perfect curve. When duplicating the final subject, I added some high-strength plaster to reinforce the cement’s durability and prevent it from peeling off, breaking, etc. When I was making a silver base for the component for the relief, I underestimated the time required for fabrication. Too large a size resulted in frequent deformation and
a failure to solder them. Nevertheless, the final result was pleasing. The large size and elegant colors added charm to this group of works.

Fig.19-22: Body Frames sketches  
Fig.23-24: Oil clay sculpting
Limb Cast

My final project for the Innovation in Materials and Processes class was a series of porcelain bracelets. My graduate series was largely influenced by my experience in sculpture. When I had just started in the art industry, I made frequent use of clay. I chose to use porcelain as my media for this series because it was an indispensable component in my artistic creations. The inspiration for this group of works was fractured arms and legs immobilized by the plaster. The frail arms and legs, as well as the immobilizing plaster, brought back memories. I chose to make a series of bracelets that could cover the entire limb. Immobilized in the stiff porcelain, it would, at the same time, give the wearer a sense of agony and unease. The shape of each individual bracelet was inspired by the picture frame elements. The individual forms were clean, smooth, plain, and quiet, but they might create a sense of overlapping space and movement when worn and overlapped all together. The porcelain I chose was cone-10 Coleman, which was very difficult to work with because it contained no grits inside. I thought the most challengeable part was the firing process, during which they might change shape, shrink, or crack. This also took a long time for me to test. The final result coincided with what I had anticipated. The tier-upon-tier structure and elegant colors distinguished it a lot from traditional jewelry. This work also encouraged me to
challenge the wearability of traditional jewelry and burgeoning materials, and to explore more changes beyond the original concept.

Leg Adornment

In the last semester, I took the group directed study with Killean Evans in Spring 2015 to develop my project further. At the beginning of this course, Killean led me to reflect on what perspectives my theme could develop from to become more novel and fashionable after graduation. During the process...
of data collection, I got acquainted with a singer, Viktora Modesta: the world’s first amputee pop star. She had her damaged leg amputated at age 20, but she appeared so distinctive when she was dancing in an ornate artificial limb. She upgraded her opportunities, body, and comfort. Her becoming famous demonstrated my viewpoint: Perfection and imperfection never have precise definitions; perhaps what is deficient could become a person’s most distinctive feature. From then on, I decided to make ornaments for the legs. In combination with the outline of the lower leg and picture frame elements, I designed this group of ornaments for legs. I used the wires in different shapes to make up the forms of a frame that were tightly arranged and continuously overlapped, giving the works another kind of dramatic tension. This group of works was ostentatious, gorgeous and hazardous, displaying a self-protection awareness and an imposing appearance. I made this group of works the focus of the entire work, in combination with enamel, using a pattern I had commonly used before. The cloisonné changed from big to small in accordance with the outline of the leg, not only adding color and delicacy to the entire work but vivifying it with variation in size.

During the enameling process, I encountered a difficulty. I used cloisonné for enameling. It took 15–20 times to fire each piece since I could only apply a small amount of enamel powder. The main hues were gray and light blue. As I turned back to see other works of mine, a majority appeared as a whitish gray.
There were a few pieces whose coloring results were undesirable to me, so I ended up grinding them down to re-fire these pieces. Another difficulty was the wearability of the first work. Since the wire covered the lower leg tightly, I had to split it into two parts to wear it. I searched for a lot of ways to enhance wearability, until I finally found the screw spikes type 00-09, which were used to connect the two separate parts. In the second project, I used the same inspiration and techniques but further simplified the whole object's structure and changed the mode of wearing it. This adhered more to my theme – framing the body – while placing more focus on enameling.
Fig. 47-53: Limb cast sketches
Fig. 55-57: Wire frame construction
Fig. 59: Frame bracelet
Fig. 61: Wire cutting jig

Fig. 54: Paper mold
Fig. 58: Silver plate
Fig. 60: 00-90 brass screws
After my midpoint review, I became uncertain about how to express my theme. I was confused about what colors, shapes, and materials to use. Through endless experiments, I finally found means of expression that were uniquely my own. I selected the main elements as the origin of inspiration but was not limited to a single material. I really succeeded in being dedicated to developing a subject and learning to innovate within the limited origin of inspiration, rather than using too much diversity of forms to express myself, as before. One theme could be represented in multiple ways and expressed from various angles. But in the continuous learning process, I have come to realize the importance of maintaining the work’s cohesiveness, which laid the basis for the main pursuit of my graduate work – the pursuit of a diversity of works.
I am very thankful for all the professors who have helped me. They have helped and guided me to pursue the art I wanted and urged me to develop it in the proper way. They have offered me a lot of help, whether academically or technically. More importantly, they have taught me the right attitude towards art in my graduate learning process.
Inspirations

Otto Kunzli

The director Charlene Modena once recommended a book on jewelry for me to read, in which a chapter had a specialized discussion on the topic of beauty, providing an introduction to a lot of contemporary artists who discussed the ideals of beauty through contemporary jewelry. There I found the artist Otto Kunzli, and I used similar articles as inspiration. Otto Kunzli is one of the artist that revolutionized the art of contemporary jewelry. While respecting its primary function as bodily adornment, he questioned the materials and subverted its symbols. His concepts and thoughts affected me a lot. One of his series inspired me and significantly changed my artistic style. He framed people’s bodies directly with traditional frames so that spectators felt a lot of complex feelings. From then on, I started to reflect on how I could put my idea into more novel use. Meanwhile, I was even inspired by avoiding as much as possible the use of traditional squares and ellipses.
Lauren Kalman

Lauren Kalman’s works are often presented in mainstream metal art magazines and on websites. She is a visual artist whose practice is invested in contemporary craft, video, photography, and performance art. The ideals of beauty have been discussed in most of her series. Her works are inspired by diseases, like acne and herpes, and physical trauma, like amputation and facial reconstructive surgery. Her works are bold in style and sharp in topic. They are hybrids of the grotesque and undesirable aspects of the body and objects we associate with beauty, status, health, wealth, and power. To me, this encourages me to promote my works in that direction with more innovation and enthusiasm, in terms of vision or wearability.
Influence

Picture Frames

My works are inspired by picture frames and ornamental elements. Picture frames’ original Intent was as a structured device intended to protect and enhance an object. The legacy of picture frames evolved 3,000–4,000 years ago. Picture frames as a legacy have a rich history with many different cultures playing a part, such as the Renaissance and Baroque periods. I always love subjects with a strong sense of adornment. The rich and detailed features and sense of the frame elements evoke my passion. I was influenced by them to create wearable jewelry.
Physical Defects

I often investigate some defects of body parts, a portion of which have undergone artificial modifications. For example, some tribes might pursue so-called beauty or privilege through physical modification, such as the corset in Victorian period or foot binding in China. At times, I create works with such morphology as the origin of inspirations. Artificial fabrication of physical defects is ironically a manifestation of pursuing perfection. I feel such a sense of contradiction and conflict has provided me a lot of space for innovation.
Thesis Photographs

LEG ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE,
COPPER, BRASS, SCREW
15" x 6"
LEG ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE,
COPPER, BRASS, SCREW
15"+6"
LEGG ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE,
COPPER, BRASS, SCREW
15**6"
LEG ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE, COPPER, BRASS
15" x 5"
LEG ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE, COPPER, BRASS
15" x 5"
LEG ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE, COPPER, BRASS
15" * 5"
ARM ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE, COPPER, BRASS
8" x 2.5"
ARM ADORNMENT
2015 FINE SILVER, ENAMEL, SILVER PLATE, COPPER, BRASS
8"*2.5"
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
(5.8" x 8.3")
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
(7" *10")
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
(3.5” x 5.5”)
FRAMES MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT,SILVER,BRASS,BRONZE
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
(6" x 9")
FRAME MY FACE
2014 FACE ADORNMENT, SILVER, BRASS, BRONZE
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
LOOK AT MY BREASTS
2014 CEMENT, PLASTER, COLOR PIGMENT, SILVER, PLASTIC
(17.5" x 14")
LOOK AT MY BREASTS
2014 CEMENT, PLASTER, COLOR PIGMENT, SILVER PLASTIC
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
LOOK AT MY BUTT
2014 CEMENT, PLASTER, COLOR PIGMENT, SILVER, RUBBER BAND
(13.5" x 6")
LOOK AT MY BUTT
2014 CEMENT, PLASTER, COLOR PIGMENT, SILVER PLASTIC
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
ARM CAST
2014 PORCELAIN, RUBBER BAND
(15 “ x 4.5”)
ARM CAST
2014 PORCELAIN, RUBBER BAND
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
ARM CAST
2014 PORCELAIN, RUBBER BAND
PHOTOGRAPH: JIZHI LI
LEG CAST
2014 PORCELAIN, RUBBER BAND
(15" x 6")
Promotional Materials

Business Card

Post Card
## Future Plan

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<tr>
<th>1 Year Goals</th>
<th>How are you going to achieve this goal</th>
<th>Who is involved</th>
<th>What resources are needed</th>
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<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Prepare resume, portfolio, styling photographs</td>
<td>Graphic Designer, Friends</td>
<td>Online handing portfolio to HR departments</td>
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<td>Move to Seattle</td>
<td>Ship my projects, Build connection with art groups in Seattle</td>
<td>Shipping company</td>
<td>Galleries and Craft studios information in Seattle</td>
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<td>Internship</td>
<td>Work with studio artists as assistant</td>
<td>Studio artists</td>
<td>Group shows for meet other artists</td>
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<td>Friends in school</td>
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<td>Gallery, Artists, Friends</td>
<td>Connect with different Galleries</td>
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<td>Web designer, Branding</td>
<td>Fashion jewelry trend, build up online store</td>
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<td>GIA Gemology certification</td>
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<td>New York or San Diego location</td>
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