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Lei Xue

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Hearsay

by

Lei Xue

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts in Metals and Jewelry Design

School of American Craft

College of Art and Design

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

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Thesis Title: Hearsay

Thesis Author: Lei Xue

Thesis Committee Final Approvals:

Chief Advisor: Leonard Urso

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Associate Advisor: Juan Carlos Caballero- Perez

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Associate Advisor: Eileen Bushnell

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Administrative Chair: Glen Hintz

Signature: _____

Date: / /

Abstract

The inspiration for my artwork comes from my life experience and cultural background. There is an idiom in China, “daotingtushuo,” which explains that “most people’s impressions of a certain person/thing are easily affected by irresponsible rumors.” In general, people are more likely to add their personal and emotional perspectives to a certain person/thing when describing it to others. After observation and research, the rumor propagation process needs a medium—the emotions of a human being. To materialize this concept of the emotions, I related color psychology to my work. Based on psychological research, I introduced five different colors to represent human emotions and characteristics. For instance, I represent pride as cyan, greed as orange, sadness as blue, anger as red, and envy as yellow. I am trying to relay a message to my audiences to make them consider how to effectively deal with various negative emotions. Moreover, people should pursue responsible judgment and opinions when dealing with rumors.

This thesis work includes five pieces of jewelry and an installation. Each piece of jewelry represents one typical human emotion. Different forms, colors, and techniques were used to illustrate the characteristics of the emotions and their effects on message spreading/rumor. In addition, in terms of techniques, not only did I employ metalworking, I also introduced a new technique that uses print-making to explore textures on acrylic paper.

Keywords: Psychology, Emotion, Color, Plastic Paper, and Jewelry

Discussion of Sources and Research

Concept and Inspiration

Based on my life experience and cultural background, there is an idiom in China, “daotingtushuo¹” which partly explains that “most people’s impressions of a certain person/thing are easily affected by surrounding rumors that are irresponsible to spread.” For example, people are more likely to add their personal and emotional perspectives when describing it to others. After the words have spread, transformed by these people’s emotions, the last person informed is unlikely to receive the comprehensive and authentic message. Words can be altered by messengers’ personal experiences and emotions. Thus, the more people involved in this process, the less likely it is the original and true message or intention will be passed to the receivers, resulting in various rumors. While the people who creates rumors might just be trying to create an ‘afternoon tea’ topic among friends, the irresponsibility of altering the truth could unintentionally hurt others. In some cases, the pressure of public opinion will worsen the damage of rumors and lead to unpredictable and serious consequences.

This experience reawakens my memory of a movie called *The Hunt*² (a 2012 Danish film directed by Thomas Vinterberg and starring Mads Mikkelsen). A good-hearted and upright man, Lucas, is adored by a little girl, Klara. When the man kindly declines her offer of a gift, the little girl lies to express her feeling of being rejected. She lies

¹ Weili Zheng and Qian Zhou, *Cheng Yu Da Ci Dian: Zui Xin Xiu Ding Ban, Cai Se Ben—Chengyu Da Cidian*. (Beijing Shi: Shang wu yin shu guan guo ji you xian gong si, 2013).

² *The Hunt*. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunt_\(2012_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunt_(2012_film)). Zentropa, Sweden's Film i Väst and Zentropa International Sweden, 2012.

to the kindergarten director and accuses Lucas of a lewd act. Because the accusation comes from an innocent girl, almost everyone believes her. As word spreads quickly, Lucas loses his job and his friends, is seen as a freak, and even receives death threats.

From my perspective, there are two key reasons for Lucas' dramatic life change. First, it is easier to spread irresponsible messages when emotional. In this movie, the lie from the little girl is the start of Lucas' tragedy. Because she was rejected by Lucas, she becomes emotionally reactive—feeling sad and angry—and talks to the kindergarten director about some pornography that she had heard about from teenagers, giving the impression she had heard about it from Lucas. Second, people are more likely to add their personal and emotional perspectives to a certain person/thing when describing it to others. For instance, the kindergarten director and general public, because of their biased sympathy or morality, believe that the little girl is vulnerable. This sense of justice makes them blindly point the finger at Lucas and blame him for an action he never committed. The truth is never discovered, and every person involved makes the situation worse by adding his or her own biased opinion or even made-up stories. In the telling of rumors, the inauthentic messages we receive from people will further spread out with our own modifications and will harm the person/thing being described.

This movie convinced me that inauthentic messages are associated with human emotions. To some extent, irresponsible behavior hurts people in intangible ways. I expect that my works will reflect my mind and sense of various observable phenomena to remind people that they should set up a value with their own judgments and opinions when they faced with rumors instead of following others and they should raise their awareness through self-reflection. I want to create artwork that is interesting and elegant enough to be attractive and educative, yet

surreal and remote enough for audiences to resonate with it through their own stories and imagination.

Research of Color Psychology

In Sara Seamark's research in *Color Psychology: The Emotional Effects of Colors*³, she explored the visual influences of color, which affect people's emotions. Based on her research, I picked five colors to represent the five most typical human emotions. It is my aim to introduce psychological elements to my work and promote interaction with my audience both visually and subconsciously.

The social perception of color and its associated emotional effects can be vastly different according to cultural, religious, and historical contexts. For example, red is a joyous color in Chinese culture; it is considered lucky or happy and is widely used in weddings and other celebrations. But in Western culture, it represents danger, vigilance, and often aggression. Therefore, when selecting colors and emotions, I tried to think synthetically and find the balance among the influences of culture, religion, and region. In summary, I made the following selection of colors to present these five typical emotions as my design fundamentals: yellow as envy, blue as sadness, red as anger, green as greed, and orange as pride.

Below are some sample research results in color/emotion symbolism:

A quotation from "Color Meaning: Meaning of the Color Yellow,"⁴ written by Jennifer Bourn: "Yellow is

³ Deborah, Christine Harris, Amelia, Kevin, Alexandru Darida, Natasha98, Sara, et al. "Color Psychology: The Psychological Effects of Colors." Art Therapy, December 24, 2012. <http://www.arttherapyblog.com/online/color-psychology-psychologica-effects-of-colors/>.

⁴ BournCreative, Jennifer, and Digital Strategist · WordPress. "Meaning of The Color Yellow." Bourn Creative, June 3, 2016. <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-yellow/>.

the color of ambivalence and contradiction; the color associated with optimism and amusement; but also with betrayal, duplicity, and jealousy. ”

A quotation from “The Color Psychology of Blue,”⁵ written by Kendra Cherry: “Blue can create feelings of sadness or aloofness. Consider how a painting that heavily features blue, such as those produced by Picasso during his ‘blue period,’ can seem so lonely, sad, or forlorn.”

A quotation from “Red Enhances the Processing of Facial Expressions of Anger,”⁶ written by Steven G. Young, Andrew J. Elliot, Roger Feltman, and Nalini Ambady: “The current research investigates how the psychological meaning implied by the color red biases the processing of anger expressions. Red has been shown to carry the meaning of threat and danger, and in two experiments we find that exposure to red enhances the perception and identification of anger.”

A quotation from “Color Meaning: Meaning of The Color Green,”⁷ written by Jennifer Bourn: “Green, the color of life, renewal, nature, and energy, is associated with meanings of growth, harmony, freshness, safety, fertility, and environment. Green is also traditionally associated with money, finances, banking, ambition, greed, jealousy, and Wall Street.”

A quote from “Color Meaning: Meaning of The Color Orange,”⁸ written by Jennifer Bourn: “Too

⁵ Cherry, Kendra. “How the Color Blue Impacts Moods, Feelings, and Behaviors.” Verywell Mind. Verywell Mind, October 6, 2019. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-color-psychology-of-blue-2795815>.

⁶ Young, Steven G., Andrew J. Elliot, Roger Feltman, and Nalini Ambady. “Red Enhances the Processing of Facial Expressions of Anger.” *Emotion* 13, no. 3 (2013): 380–84. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0032471>.

⁷ BournCreative, Jennifer, and Digital Strategist · WordPress. “Meaning of The Color Green.” Bourn Creative, June 3, 2016. <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-green/>.

⁸ BournCreative, Jennifer, and Digital Strategist · WordPress. “Meaning of The Color Orange.” Bourn Creative, June 3, 2016. <https://www.bourncreative.com/meaning-of-the-color-orange/>.

much orange causes self-centered and self-serving qualities, including pride, arrogance, and lack of care for others.

Too little orange causes loss of motivation, lower self-esteem, and loneliness.”

Research of Creative Color Assortment

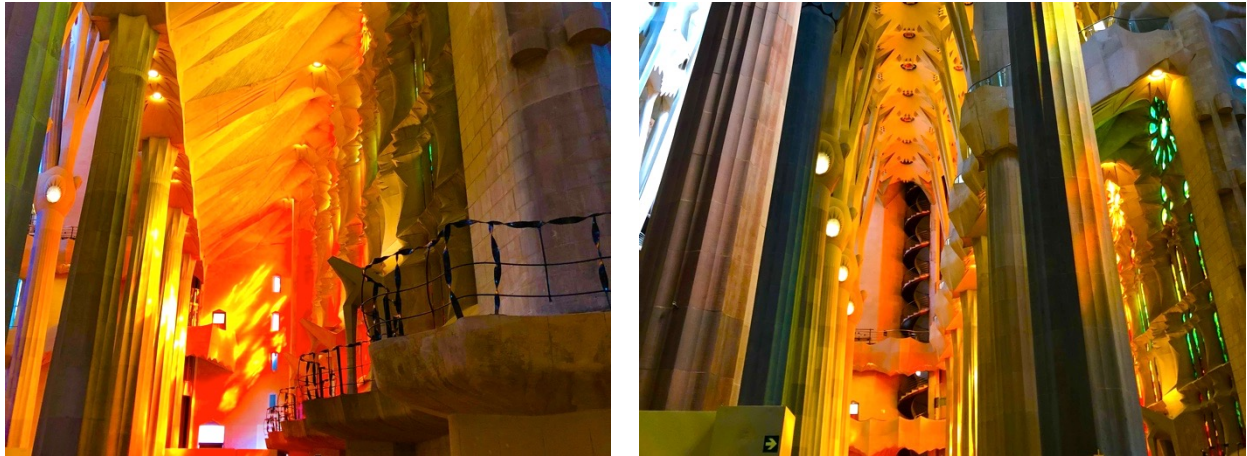


Figure 1. Antoni Gaudí: La Sagrada Família (1883–present)

Credit: Lei Xue (2018)

I was inspired by the interior decor of Antoni Gaudí’s basilica, La Sagrada Família (Fig. 1). The light streams poking through various stained-glass windows from multiple angles create a sense of imagination and enhance the infectiousness and solemnity of the church. This is a unique trait of the Sagrada Família. From Gaudí’s work, I see the light streams as the original messages that flow through the media (glasses) and become thousands of different color combinations. Just like rumors, the original message can be deformed garbled through irresponsible communication (media), which alters the truth. It is my aim to let the light shine through variously colored pieces, and depending on the angle and your position, your perception of the “message” will be subjective and always

different.

Research of Material

Film Paper

Film paper is a transparent lighting gel filter often used as a color correction tool in photography and film. Compared to other color correction materials, such as stained glass, its lightweight and foldable features make it ideal for paper modeling. This color collection is also widely available, so I have chosen to use 0.2mm film paper as the main material to shape my work. One of the challenges I encountered with film paper was adhesion. To maintain transparency, I trialed several glues, including traditional and acrylic. Because the thickness of the glue application affects light transmission, it is extremely hard to control quality during handcrafting. After much trial and error, I discovered a highly simple yet effective way to glue the film papers: a transparent sticky tape.

Copper

Copper is ductile and easy to shape. Because of its relatively high melting point compared to silver and gold, copper is ideal to use with enameling. Because my design concept is to explore color psychology, colored coating is necessary, and the texture of the original material is less important. Therefore, I chose to use copper in my work.

To better visualize my design concepts, I prefer making paper models (Fig. 7) before metalworking. In this way, I can effectively make multiple concept designs early and explore the mechanism of metal. Paper modeling is an efficient method to explore the mechanism of metal.

Research of Technique

During my study, my goal was to explore different and creative techniques that add a “wow” factor to my work. Not only will adding new elements attract the audience’s attention, it is also my aim to expand the expressiveness of my work and create more possibilities to better present my design concept. In this series of pieces, I introduced the following techniques in addition to traditional bench work:

Screen Printmaking

In the process of creating “Hearsay,” I aimed to create random crossing patterns to represent the interaction of human emotions. I applied a transparent pigment as the base and randomly sprinkled colored pigments on the screen. The order of the pigment application and the force of brushwork also affected the outcome of the screen-printing. Thus, the finished product is both unique and random, which is a perfect reflection of the uncertainty of message propagation.

Texture

Enameling is a way to add color and different textures to metals. To create a unique texture, I learned to heat the enamel powder below the melting temperature, which creates a unique texture like a sugar coat. However, this method requires precise control of temperature and relies heavily on experience. With the number of soldering points in my work, it is extremely hard to maintain structural integrity and also control the finish. Thus, after many trials, I found that powder-sprinkling with paint protection (before and after the powder application) simulates the sugar-coating effect and allows more structural variation.

Powder Coating

Powder coating is another method of adding color and texture to the metals that I utilized in my work. Unlike the sugar coat finish that I created with the enameling technique, powder coating can only create matte or glossy effects. However, the powder-coating process requires much lower heating temperatures, which allows soldering and therefore the creation of various structural forms.

The Body of Work

Hearsay



Figure 1. Lei Xue: Hearsay (2018) Credit: Meng-han Tsai

Through my observation of how people can hurt others or get hurt unconsciously because of irresponsible message spreading, I made abstract jewelry (Fig. 1) revealing the power of rumor. In this piece, I created a

series of diamond-shaped film paper models, which represent the media of hearsay. Each color represents a typical human emotion, and screen printing shows the randomness of message spreading and the unpredictable interaction with human emotions. From the original truth (the transparent diamond piece), the message moves through the media and various human emotions, becoming unpredictable. Because of irresponsible alterations by the media, the message might ultimately end up on the opposite side of the original truth. To improve the integrity of the diamond model and minimize the gluing point, I created a 3-D model and then transferred the 3-D surface onto a 2-D Illustrator diagram (Fig. 2). In this way, I was able to create a 3-D diamond model by scoring and folding the 2-D film paper layout onto a 3-D structure (Fig. 3). Another advantage of editing the 2-D layout with Illustrator is that I was able to scale up or down to create identical structures with different sizes.



Figure 2. Hand draft(2019) Credit: Lei Xue



Figure 3. Working Progress(2019) Credit: Lei Xue

Emotions Installation



Figure 4. Lei Xue: Emotions (2019) Credit: Hang Zhang



Figure 5. Lei Xue: Light Effect Testing (2018) Credit: Lei Xue

This work (Fig. 4) is an extension of “Hearsay.” It is aimed at representing a process of message spreading. In the beginning of the installation process, I arranged the film paper sheets on the wall to test the lighting effect, including the spacing and interaction of colored streams (Fig. 5). After achieving the desirable lighting effect, the color arrangement was then applied to the main installation. I ordered the same size transparent acrylic box as a medium to contain diamond models. The light streams penetrate the boxes/media, producing different refractions, which represent the message experiences of different human emotions via “Hearsay” as the original truth is altered unpredictably.

Envy



Figure 6. Lei Xue: Envy (2019) Credit: Meng-han Tsai

In my experience, I often hear people judge someone with negative information. In my understanding, envy is an emotional interaction/situation between two people, so I created two similar, but different shapes to express two kinds of people: the person who envies and the person who is being envied. By using these fundamental shapes, I made paper models (Fig. 7) to design the structures through combination and decomposition.



Figure 7

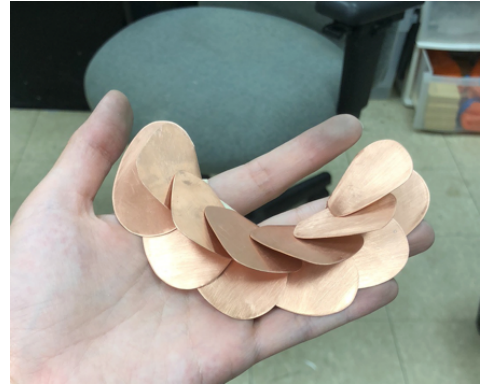


Figure 8

Sadness



Figure 9. Lei Xue: Sadness Necklace (2019)

Credit: Meng-han Tsai



Figure 10. Lei Xue: Sadness Eyewear (2019)

Credit: Meng-han Tsai

People often use the term “feeling blue” when they are sad. Even the names of some therapeutic institutes include

the word “blue.” Therefore, I used blue to represent the topic of sadness. Some people feel down or cry a lot when they go through something stressful, like having an argument, facing confronting problems at work, or enduring major life changes. Persistent sadness lingers to create an invisible burden that weighs people down. This piece is my attempt to materialize sadness. It is just like a chain that clings and drags and follows you wherever you go. Although sadness is a normal human emotion, it is harmful to the psychology of people. It causes the thinking of people to be interrupted; the horizon is clouded by sorrow, and just as the saying goes, “sadness can blind people.” This is a reason why behavior can be influenced so easily. Consequently, I made this piece in the form of eyewear (Fig. 10) to confirm that both reality and truth might be indistinct.

Anger

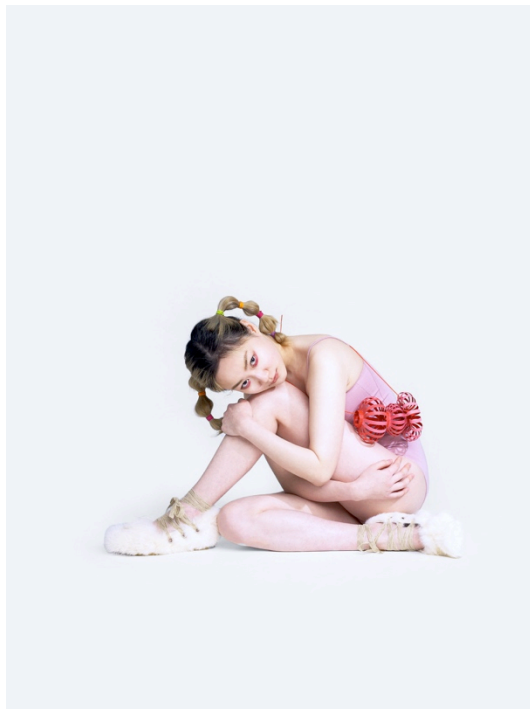


Figure 11. Lei Xue: Anger Pendant (2019) Credit: Meng-han Tsai

Anger is a reaction to inner discomfort, caused by unfairness and unacceptable setbacks. This work is my understanding of anger. When we are emotional, we usually have a rapid heartbeat. An uncomfortable reaction occurs in our physiology, like a time bomb. Therefore, the shape of the piece looks like a mushroom cloud after the big bang.

Greed



Figure 12. Lei Xue: Greed (2019) Credit: Meng-han Tsai

Greed is an irrational desire that is hard to manage. People are often dazzled by the gaiety and splendor of the city and are more than likely blinded by the emotion of greed. My art piece illustrates the characteristics of greed as irrational and uncontrollable; like a tumor, greed grows in all directions and can multiply, becoming dangerous and difficult to handle.

In photo 13, I am trying to send the message to my audience that there are so many things that attract desire, such as sex, money, and social status. However, when the approach to success is tainted by greed, the beautiful things will become dangerous and corrode the original aspiration.

Arrogance



Figure 13. Lei Xue: Pride (2019) Credit: Meng-han Tsai

Arrogance is a condescending attitude. In my understanding, arrogance is a strategy contrived to protect self-worth. People with low self-esteem are more likely to express arrogance. Therefore, I built a cage-like artwork to represent the emotion of arrogance that becomes a hard shell protecting a sense of inferiority. Arrogance builds up a series of cages in different phases of growing up, which keep adding weight/pressure to our lives. This photo (Fig. 13) illustrates a person with a rope around her neck connected to my art piece, which makes it harder for her to breathe

under pressure.

Exhibition Display and Demonstration

To create a fun and joyful viewing experience for the audience, I assembled many pedestals of different sizes, like a large set of rectangular toy blocks to play with, and the final effect became a cluster of irregular geometric pedestals.

I placed “Hearsay” at the center of the tallest geometric pedestal and settled the other pieces around it. I wanted to emphasize that my work of human emotions are derived from “Hearsay.” I customized many acrylic photo frames and hung the photos of models wearing the work on the wall to make my presentation more lively. Because my work has high color contrast, I placed my colorful installation alone in the opposite position to the geometric pedestal to make the audience’s viewing order more organized.



Figure 14. Lei Xue: Hearsay Thesis Show (2019) Credit: Hang Zhang



Figure 15. Lei Xue: Hearsay Thesis Show (2019) Credit: Hang Zhang



Figure 16. Lei Xue: Hearsay Thesis Show (2019) Credit: Hang Zhang

Conclusion

My thesis inspiration comes from the human emotions of envy, sadness, anger, arrogance, and greed. I researched human psychology during the process of exploring my design inspiration. For example, I wanted to understand how people express different emotions, and I wanted to comprehend causes and effects. It makes me convinced that people might affect or even hurt others when they are emotional. Based on my study, the emotions are the predominant factor influencing the spread of rumors. Rumors lead to the alteration of information. In the telling of rumors, the inauthentic messages we receive from people will further disperse with our own modifications and are sure to affect the person/thing being described. Even though most of us are not doing this on purpose, our unconscious behavior still hurts others in intangible ways. This phenomenon may disturb people's daily lives; it may

even indirectly lead to more serious consequences. I am trying to send the message to my audience to consider how to deal effectively with various negative emotions. I believe that people should pursue responsible judgment and opinions when dealing with rumors.

In this thesis, I aimed to express a negative theme in a pleasant way, because I wanted to create a sense of contrast. I hoped my audience would understand the meaning behind it and could still find joy through self-reflection. Considering the reactions and comments of my audience, I believe my thesis exhibition successfully achieved my goal. To maintain a sense of unity, I created a cluster of irregular geometric pedestals to present the artwork as a collection. Therefore, it is possible to view the details of the artwork without losing the feeling for the composition as a whole. In addition, I will continue to explore the material of film paper in the future and hope to develop the perfect connection method.

I must thank my committee members. New ideas always spring forth when creating new work, and I had thousands of ideas at the beginning of the thesis. I had no idea how to get started, but they encouraged me to write down my ideas, do the research, and summarize it. This has been a rewarding experience for me.

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