Why I Create Visual Art

Ever since I was young, I've always had a keen interest in the visual aspects of life. I saw that there was art everywhere. Whether it be the art in museums, the composition of buildings, the graffiti on walls, or in crowds of people, where their unique colors, and placement act as a canvas in front of my eyes. I make art because I can't stop seeing it, because it's a place where every decision is mine, and it's something that people can notice me by.

To explore my interests at a young age I attended an art class near my home. I remember everything, from the rigid wooden benches, the lingering aroma of paint wafting in the air. In these art classes, I used pastels, water colors, colored pencils to create images where I had no creative say on the final product. They would lay out roughly three options to choose from for each project, yet each option blended together. It didn't excite me, it didn't challenge me. Even though I could create something, and have the accomplishment of finishing a piece of art, it was never truly my own. Anyone in that class could've made what I made, so there was nothing in it for anyone to notice. And, I know the point of these classes is to hone your abilities but at a young age I was indifferent to that, trying to skip steps necessary to an artistic journey.

Or, maybe I didn't like the class because I couldn't create what I wanted. As at home, I would happily draw pictures I copied from the internet, my favorite super heroes or characters. One specific memory I hold is when I sat at a vertical window for hours using the outdoor light to trace an intricate Spiderman drawing, which is either lost in my home, or in atom-sized particles in a landfill or in the ocean. I could have free handed when drawing Spiderman, but I needed complete control for this project. I needed my friends in my elementary school class to see that I could draw. To show my art to my classmates and friends, I displayed my art on the outer translucent sheet of my school binder. Looking back, I think one of my motives to create art was the praise and respect I would receive from others. And now, that need to be seen still partly lingers within me.

In middle school, as I wanted to continue my artistic journey, I started to attend a different art class. Within this new class, I would sit on the most uncomfortable stool in a barely lit room huddled with 30 other students at a table drawing. The teacher was an old stoic man who only really knew Mandarin, running the establishment with his wife or girlfriend, I didn't really know. And, during weekly visits he would always wear the same clothes(a long fleeced coat, a face shield, bedtime slippers). I was the only one in the class who didn't understand Mandarin very well. There would be a kid younger than me with a microphone translating everything the teacher said to the class to English because of this. Yet, even though it was translated to the entire class, I think everyone knew who it was for. I had wanted to be noticed, and now I was, for the wrong reason. It wasn't just my Mandarin I lacked, it was my drawing skills. In that class, it didn't matter how much skill I thought I had, as a kid half my age could perform twice as well. I quit the class in freshman year.

Nothing replaced it. I filled up that empty time with videos and videogames which asked nothing of me. I spent those years on things nobody would have wanted to look at, and I knew it. My days settled into a loop with no creative activity to challenge me. I didn't miss the rigid-metal stool, or the language barrier. The thing I missed was the anticipation before every drawing, wondering what I would create every time. I continued to notice art all around me, yet, I no longer trusted myself to make it. Within my classes at school, most did not challenge me

creatively. I would sludge through my work, forming headaches from the memorization. So, in my junior year of high school, to re-explore art, I joined a separate art school connected to my school district, Freestyle Academy, where I would complete some of my classes there. Honestly, the only reason I joined was because I was bored. I also wanted people to look at what I created and think, this guy has something to him. I still want that. To me, the most important project I've had was my documentary book. Within this project, I found an issue within the community and created a documentary around that. And to illustrate that issue, I created an entire book. For this project, I had complete creative control on what I wanted to make. Nobody gave me three options to pick from. I chose Animal Assisted Happiness, a non-profit within the bay area focused on serving the Bay Area with their animals. And the main issue for them was a lack of transparency on what they do and the impact they have on their community. During the designing process, it was difficult finding a way to compose my book yet I enjoyed the struggle. What colors to use, how to utilize the images I had, what to use for the cover, it all consumed my mind. Every single time I sat on the fence of making certain design choices, it reminded me of how I had the freedom to make my own choices.

Outside of Freestyle, my days are still in a loop. Most of it is decided for me, from the schedule of the assignments to the answers I'm supposed to give. The easy way to fill the rest of my time is to scroll, watch videos, and play games. Freestyle is the opposite. Within Freestyle, I'm given projects but I'm given creative freedom on what I want to create. I'm also surrounded by others who like to create, so what I make gets looked at by people who know what it took.

I'm in my senior year now, and I still want what I wanted at that window. I want to make what I see, I want every decision to be mine, and I want people to notice. The difference now is what I put in front of them; something crafted from my own choices, not a copy of someone else's.