

Artist Statement

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What is art about? More precisely, what are my paintings about? I have struggled with this question ever since I started to paint. Having copied famous artists' work, made many still life and figure studies, and having painted for the simple sensual thrill of presenting beauty or ugliness, I am left with the certainty that art is much broader and deeper than these technical accomplishments. For me, art is incomplete if it does not transcend simple depiction of life, and enter the realms of the historian and the social commentator.

The intricate involvement with life, the sub-textual social criticism — unpolluted by propaganda — that is evident in the work of artists such as Matthias Grünewald, Albrecht Dürer, Francisco Goya, Max Beckmann, and Käthe Kollwitz has begun to teach me how to connect myself, as an artist, to the world; and, most importantly, how to perform my duty to society as an artist, to refract the world through the expression of my feelings.

As a society, I wonder whether we have lost track of the human spirit. We live in a privileged time and place, with abundant materials to consume. We are blessed with scientific understanding of the physical universe and we have been able to plant our national flag in the virgin soil of the moon. But have we built the world we ought to live in? As an artist and a human being I have serious doubts. Can we truly be meant to be the masters of the earth, if reckless consumption, pollution, and mass extinction are the result of our mastery? Will we destroy our own civilizations through irresponsible selfishness? Will our extinction follow those of whales, tigers, foxes, and dragonflies?

I have been building an Apocalypse Series of paintings and drawings since the US was poised to invade Iraq in 2003, and the series has continued to grow as conditions show no sign of resolving. Growing up in China's repressive culture and atmosphere formed the foundation of my worldview and my work. Though pessimistic, I engage through my art in the human struggle against fate.

Life is a harsh experience, yet beautiful. My goal is to discover the truth in life, and to portray those hidden aspects boldly, without losing the beauty that is seen. To merely document surfaces is not enough: I want to grasp what is behind, which to me is far more compelling and worthwhile.