

OUTBACK ARTHOUSE

JACKIE FENG - MAY 2020



Can you tell us a little about yourself?

I'm mostly a painter. My parents immigrated here in the 70s so I'm a first-generation Chinese-American citizen. I was born and raised in Illinois, studied Industrial Design in undergrad at the University of Illinois-Urbana and then spent about 8 years doing bullshit corporate graphic design jobs. Eventually I started taking some adult-ed night-classes for painting, which eventually led to getting my Painting MFA at Boston University. Growing up I didn't know any artists, aside from a distant grand-aunt I only saw a handful of times in my life, and who was more of a hobbyist painter of traditional Chinese watercolor landscape paintings.

What's your studio routine like? Any zany habits?

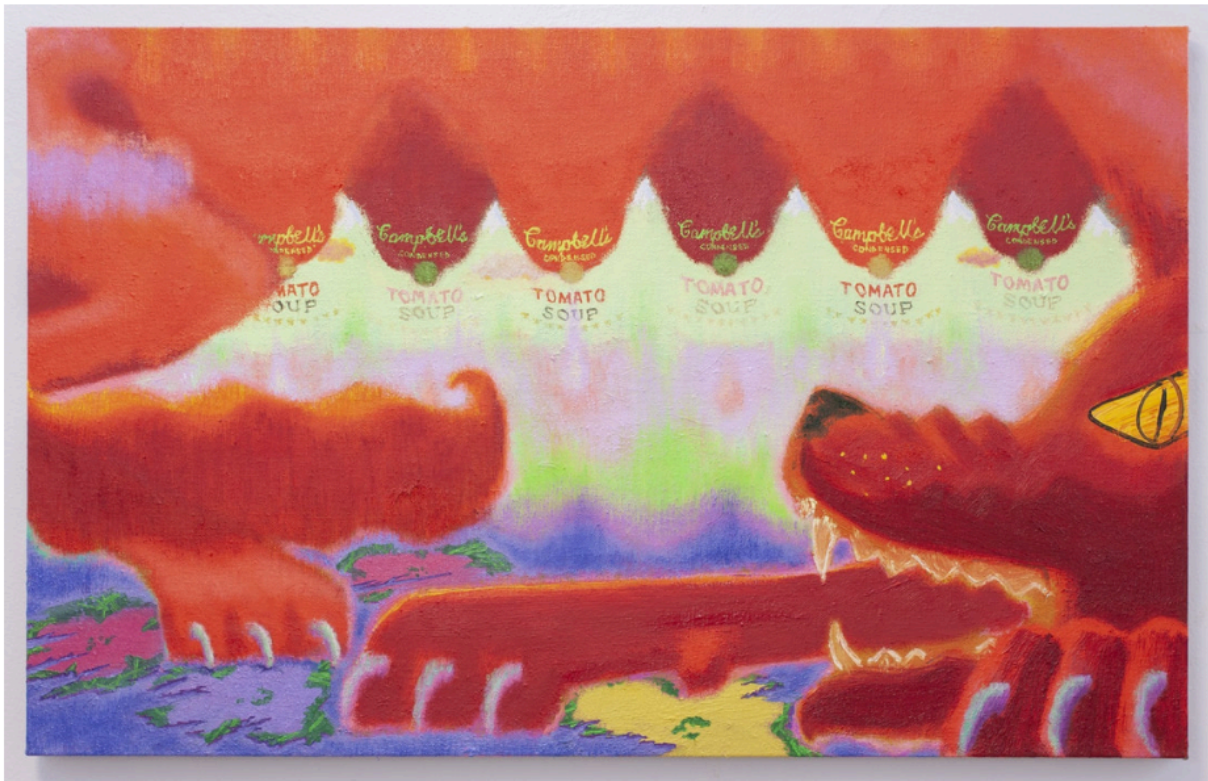
Nothing too zany. My studio, however, is in my bedroom, so getting into work mode there requires jumpstarting my brain with some signals, like changing out of my pajamas, flipping on the studio lights and putting on noise-canceling headphones. Sometimes a little dancing to get the blood pumping.

I'm not a night-person at all so I start working in the morning. That's usually when I do my best thinking and feel the most faith in the work I'm doing. When I'm in painting mode I work on several paintings at the same time and I like to start by working on the one that is the most exciting to me that

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day. Many paintings take dozens of sittings, with resting time in between, so the working time for a painting can vary from weeks to years.

It's a privilege to live and work as an artist in Brooklyn, but the struggle is very real. Working in my bedroom isn't my first choice but I've found that when living here in the grind that is NYC, you have to choose 2 out of 3 necessities: time, space and money. For now it's time and space because what's the point of having a separate studio if you don't have any time to work in it?



What are your favorite materials to work with?

I have worked in both acrylic and oil but especially love oil paint. The last couple of years I've been trying to hone in on a good method of working solvent-free in oil because I developed asthma (prior to having a home studio) after working with mineral spirits for years. Gamblin's Solvent-Free medium has been a godsend in that it enables me to still use oil paint. It hasn't been a seamless transition because I've found that solvent-free medium doesn't work in the same ways as the more traditional ones, but I've come to embrace the way of painting that has come from my experimentation. Still, if anyone reading this has any tips to offer on solvent-free oil painting I'm interested!

How has your work changed over the years?

The content of my work has remained constant. I'm still interested in conveying transformative narratives of vulnerability and humor, especially about the female psyche, and depicting these recurring feminine forms that occupy psychologically charged spaces. I think I have opened up a lot more to allowing less identifiable imagery to make its way into my work. I used to not be okay with that, for

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example previously I just assumed when I was painting an apple it had to look like an apple, and a foot had to look like a foot. Now I'd be okay with an apple looking more like a foot or vice versa. Or even trying to depict just the energy around a foot-like apple...

A lot of change in my work over time has occurred within the materials I use. In the first year after finishing grad school I hit a dead end with the way I had been painting. I'd been using big brushes, juicy paint and smooth white canvas surfaces and I noticed it was starting to get in the way of my image-making. As an experiment I decided to switch to the opposite of everything I'd been used to: small brushes, very little medium and heavyweight linen and jute with clear gesso. That shook things up for sure, in a good way. Now more recently, while social distancing at home these last couple months, I've had the compulsion to start working in acrylic paint and smoothish canvas surfaces once again. The short drying time and thin glazes I can create with acrylic has served well in allowing me to make a lot more moves and mistakes in a single working session, which is great when you're having difficulty concentrating for very long. Maybe the smoothness of the surfaces is also helpful since the last thing I need right now is to fight through any additional friction, physically or emotionally. But I do like that I'm not simply reverting to a previous way of working but bringing new movement and knowledge to a familiar medium. At the end of the day I think rather than having faithfulness to just one medium, the choice of materials will constantly be changing in order to serve me best. Maybe material fluidity will become my new constant.



Who else do you recommend we look at / read / listen to / cook with?

Books: Hannah Ryggen: Threads of Defiance by Marit Paasche

Cooking: PBS episodes of Julia Child's The French Chef

Artists: Too many to count. Agnes Pelton, Diane Simpson, Aaron Gilbert, Mike Cloud, Gladys Nilsson, Noah Davis, Rob Werbicki, collaborative duo Matt Shalzi and Millie Kapp. Some particular west-coast

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artist loves: Keenan Derby, Rachel Borenstein, Grace Colletta, Sophia Flood, Amanda Horowitz, Julia Haft-Candell, Rob Monforte, Corey Ruecker, Beth Parker, Eddie Apparicio, Christina Quarles.

Any exciting projects on the horizon?

I'll be showing some work with 12.26 Gallery for Future Fair Online, which launches May 6th. I've also been participating in Shandaken's Paint School. It went on indefinite hiatus at the beginning of the Covid-19 epidemic in NYC but happy to say it has recently resumed, on zoom.



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