

# An Alternate World: An Artist's Self Study on the Creation of Fantastical Worlds

By Toni Shi

# Introduction

## Theme of an Alternate World

- Author Richard Matthews talks of fantasy as a literature of liberation and what unlocks the imagination (Mathews, 2002).
- Since the end of the 19th century, the relationship between the personality and the work created by the artist has been of interest (Golomb, 2004).





# Guiding Questions

- In what ways is the theme of another world attractive to both adults and children
- What attracts me to the theme?
- How does this theme inform my artwork and my art practice?

# Methodology

The Creation of a body of work centered around the theme of another world

## Studio based Self Study

- Series of Drawings
- A Sculpture

## Documentation

- Photos and videos of work in progress and completed work
- Including sketching, ideation, and reflections

# Literature Review

**Throughout history, the theme of an alternate world has been present wherever we look.**

- the creation of fictional works on heroes
- narratives in religion
- the development of character designs in various modes of entertainment (Hopkins and Lewis, 2009).

**There is no definite date as to when the genre emerged and it is a valid argument to say it coincides with the emergence of beliefs.**

Religion:

- The idea of an afterlife or hell and heaven, worlds after death, comes to be believed by the masses.
- These realms of the living and the dead, and the holy and the secular, have been clearly separated from each other by mankind, creating what can be considered as various worlds.
- These can house gods, demons, and anything one can imagine, which while grounded on faith, religious traditions and beliefs, can bring in the element of fantasy.



# Fantasy

- Aided in visually representing heaven and hell based on ancient descriptions and sacred texts.
- Key to imagination, allows its user to target subjects of choice from the controversial to the light-hearted, from the grounded matters of economics to free flowing ideas on sexuality and religion (Mathews, 2002).
- No rules and allows for the humanly impossible to take place (imagination, defy science)

Some known examples of artwork are Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* which depicts the imagined afterlife and *Monkey King Wreaks Havoc in Heaven* by Liu Jiyou

The theme of the existence of another world or alternate dimension has been popular within the art and entertainment industry as well as in various other studies including and not limited to storytelling, film, animation, graphic arts, etc.

The genre of fantasy is embraced in the respective industries for its ability to accept and build upon factors that reality cannot uphold:

- Monsters
- Extraterrestrial beings
- Mythical creatures
- Etc.

Ex) Yōkai or supernatural monsters and spirits in Japanese folklore (Papp, Z., 2011).



The creation of fantastical creatures/objects are a common presence in various forms of entertainment ranging from novels, comics, animations, games, and movies.

### Genre of Isekai

- Sub-genre within the fantasy genre
- Japanese anime and manga industry
- Revolves around a character who is transported to or from another world, either fantasy, virtual, or a parallel universe (Definitions for isekai isekai, n.d)

Ex) RPG Gaming - Genshin Impact





# Data Collection

## AN ALTERNATE WORLD

### STORY - THE GALLERY - ONE SHOT

- ARTWORK GRABS ONE INTO IT LITERALLY (HORROR)

WAS THERE ALWAYS A GALLERY HERE?

SURVIVAL  
- MAKE WORK TO ESCAPE

- WORLD TO WORLD  
- ALWAYS CASSEL + BRUSHES

- JOURNEY TO FIND INSPIRATION  
- NEXT VICTIM

### SCULPTURE (1)

- HANDS ONLY + ARMS
- OUT TO GRAB/ESCAPE
- CLAW AT EACH OTHER
- DESPERATION

### AN ALTERNATE WORLD

- \* ADULTS - ESCAPE FROM REALITY
- \* CHILDREN - LAND OF WONDERERS
- \* BOTH - FALSE UTOPIA NARRATIVE SPACE - JOURNEY INTO

### DRAWING

- WONDEROUS LANDSCAPE
- WHAT MAKES ONE HAPPY? LOVE + RICHES
- EMPHASIZE IDEA OF FALSE

### SCULPTURE (2)

- WORLD WITHIN A WORLD
- INTERACTIVE PIECE
- RUSSIAN DOLL LIKE
- REFLECTING PRELUDES + WHAT IS THE TRUTH
- LAYERS (HELL?)

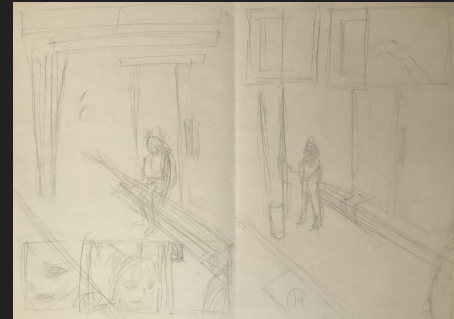
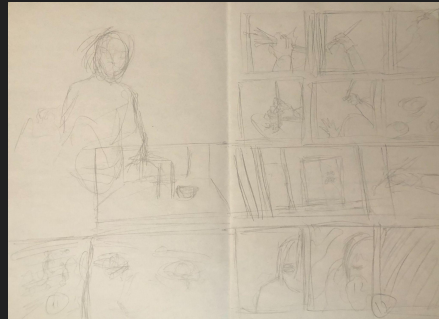
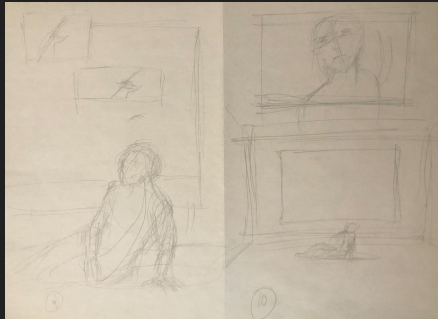
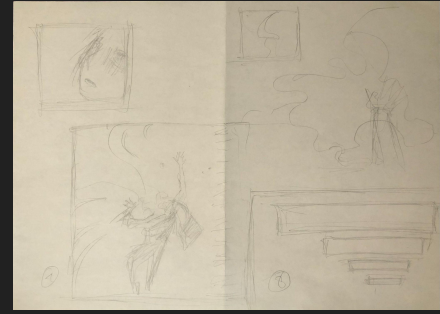
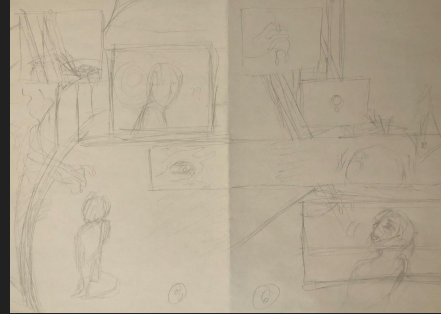
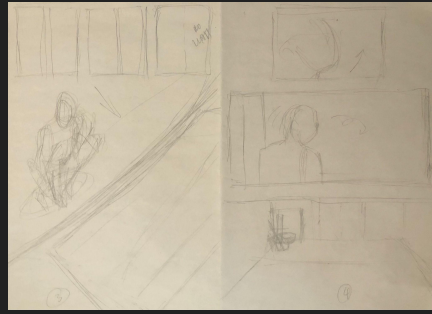
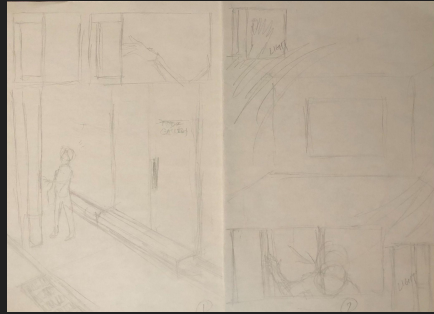
## Documentation

- Photos and videos of work in progress and completed work
- Including sketching, ideation, and reflections

## Studio Practice

- Home Studio
- Schedule- 1 drawing/week, over 7 weeks with sculpture produced simultaneously
- Ideas of reality, sequence, and falseness were a common thread of thought throughout the making of my work

# The Gallery pt.1-7 Sketches



# Artwork

The Gallery pt.1-7

Micron Pen on Paper

12"x 9"

4/27/21

March 11 20-21

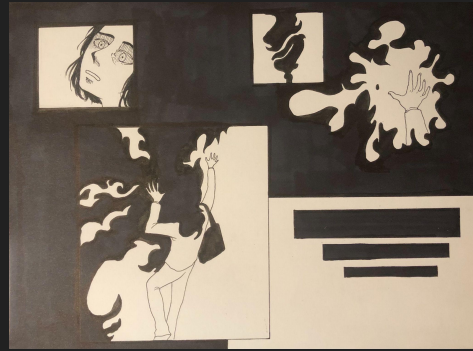
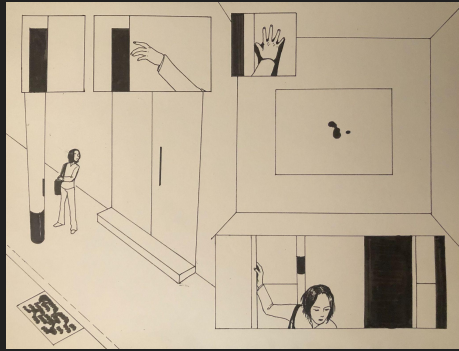
Coloraid paper, Plastic, Book  
Board

6"x 4"

3/11/21



# The Gallery pt.1-7





# Data Analysis

## The series of drawings titled: The Gallery pt.1-7

- Inspired by the presence of an alternate world in comics or novels
- Follow the narrative of a woman who is lured into a gallery, and is beckoned to paint the reality she wants in order to escape her current reality. When she does escape, another person comes to take her place, repeating the same journey.
- The viewer can conclude the journey continues in the same fashion as the world is passed on from character to character.
- The escape aspect and constant repetition of a world within a world builds on the theme being attractive in the sense that one can connect and invest in the narrative and find a mental escape in a similar fashion as to what is visually depicted in the sequence of drawings.

## The tunnel book sculpture: March 11 20-21

- References the recent happenings in the world we live in and creates a parallel universe of sorts
- Based on 2020 to 2021, living in a pandemic, visually showing the seasons transitioning through a frame which is a cut out window
- Scale being 6"x 4", allows for viewer interaction, allowing the viewer to have full control of what is being seen and how it is experienced.
- Can be understood as a documentation of the world beyond the window through the one year time frame, or be an personal object that serves as a mental escape.

## REFLECTIONS

### DRAWINGS

- PLAY ON EMOTIONS
- FLEXIBILITY + OPENNESS OF TOPIC
- MENTAL ESCAPE, CONTROL, LIMITLESS POSSIBILITY
- WORLD TO WORLD ACTION - DERIVED NARRATIVE
- SHOWING: CURIOSITY + FEAR
  - ↳ FEEL SEQUENCE OF ACTIONS (MOTIVATION)
- CALL TO QUESTION WHAT IS REAL + FALSE (WORLD/REALITY)
- REMINDER WORLD IS DESIGNED BY CREATOR, MAKER IN CONTROL

### SCULPTURE

- GROUNDED IN ACTUAL REALITY
- RELIABLE
- VIEWER IS IN CONTROL (ATTACH CHARACTER TO SYMBOL)
- REFLECTIVE LOOK INTO THEMSELVES OVER THE SPAN OF TIME
- VIEWERS MENTALLY CREATE ALTERNATE UNIVERSES IN RECOLLECTION OF EXPERIENCES

### ADULTS + CHILDREN

- FANTASY
- FREEDOM OF CREATION/ ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE
- SEXUALITY
- DEVELOP ABILITY TO CREATE SYMBOLS AS CONNECTION TO WORLD
- POLITICS
- NARRATIVE
- BASED ON REALITY/ SOCIAL CONSTRUCTS
- CASTE SYSTEM
- INFINITE ABILITY TO IMAGINE (IMAGINARY FRIENDS)
- CORRUPTION
- MAIN ATTRACTIONS (NOT LIMITED TO)
  - IDEA OF ESCAPE
  - ASPECT OF CONTROL
  - FREEDOM OF OPTION + OPPORTUNITY

- ESCAPE
- INVEST IN OTHER WORLD
- RPG GAMES, GENSHIN IMPACT
- CHARACTERS / NARRATIVES
- EMPATHIZED + INVESTIGATION
- JAPANESE ART + ANIMATION
- WORLD CONVINCING - CHARACTERS AS INHABITANTS (BY YOKAI)

# Findings

**The theme of another world is attractive to both adults and children.**

Main attractions of the theme:

- Fantastical element/freedom of creation, option, and opportunity, everything is possible
- Idea of escape (Mentally or Physically)
- Control

For Adults the theme is attractive in its ability to portray:

- Sexuality
- Politics
- Narratives based on reality/social constructs like caste system and corruption

For Children:

- Development to create symbols as tools to draw connection to reality
- Innate ability to imagine (imaginary friends)

**What attracts me to the theme is summed up in the main attractions to the theme mentioned previously, as well as:**

- Ability to play on emotions
- Flexibility and openness of topics explored
- Ability to ground concepts in reality
- Ability to relinquish control

**The theme informs my artwork and art practice as seen through the works created.**

Drawings:

- Play on emotions of curiosity and fear (Fuel character actions, serves as motivation)
- Calls to question what is real and what is false
- Reminder that the maker is in control

Sculpture:

- Grounded in actual reality (physicality and concept)
- Relatable, viewer is in control (symbolic attachment)
- Reflection over specific time, allowing for a mental creation of alternate universes based on experiences



# Conclusion

The theme of an alternate world convincingly stems from innate creativity. Its roots and origin are not easily pinpointed, yet it has significantly impacted and continued to grow across industries and modes of entertainment. After creating my work and studying my own process, for me the theme goes hand in hand with the urge to create. I daresay every artwork in this world has an aspect of an alternate world in it, whether it be the artist's own vision or concept. The work does not necessarily need to have anything to do with depicting what is literally an alternate world, rather as viewers, we are beckoned to step foot into the artist's headspace as we look at and make our own understanding of the work we see. In that sense, we are always embarking on a journey into alternate worlds with our interests guiding our field of vision. My interest in the theme is deeply integrated in my artistic practice and by making work, I too am partaking in the creation and exploration of an alternate world of my imagination.

## Contemporary Art Practices

The World and Its Things in the Middle of Their Intimacy at the Fridman Gallery in which contemporary artists showed works that blurred worlds and played with the idea of parallel universes. (Knudsen, 2013):

- Ira Eduardovna
- Jay Gould
- Dana Levy
- Sasha Serber
- Robert Lobe
- Lucia Papco



# Bibliography

- Papp, Z. (2011). Traditional Monster Imagery in Manga, Anime and Japanese Cinema. Global Oriental. <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pratt.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=5e2e7eca-25e9-4dc1-9af6-d440c5a70bbd%40sdc-v-sessmgr01&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#AN=506421&db=nlebk>
- Dwight N. Hopkins, & Marjorie Lewis. (2009). Another World Is Possible : Spiritualities and Religions of Global Darker Peoples. Routledge. <https://web-b-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pratt.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=cb3a1486-6ea2-4f02-8a59-0c61d0224779%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI>
- Richard Mathews. (2002). Fantasy : The Liberation of Imagination. Routledge. <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pratt.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=9c3c70b6-a262-4a05-aaea-ad184c4cd451%40sdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#AN=361023&db=nlebk>
- Patten, F., & Macek, C. (2011). Watching Anime, Reading Manga : 25 Years of Essays and Reviews. Stone Bridge Press. <https://web-b-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pratt.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=6&sid=cb3a1486-6ea2-4f02-8a59-0c61d0224779%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#AN=480488&db=nlebk>
- Golomb, C. (2011). The Creation of Imaginary Worlds : The Role of Art, Magic and Dreams in Child Development. Jessica Kingsley Publishers. <https://web-a-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pratt.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=4&sid=9c3c70b6-a262-4a05-aaea-ad184c4cd451%40sdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#AN=388028&db=nlebk>
- Claire Golomb. (2004). The Child's Creation of A Pictorial World: Vol. 2nd ed. Psychology Press. <https://web-b-ebSCOhost-com.ezproxy.pratt.edu/ehost/detail/detail?vid=11&sid=cb3a1486-6ea2-4f02-8a59-0c61d0224779%40pdc-v-sessmgr03&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRI#db=nlebk&AN=99865>
- Self-study. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/self-study>
- Definitions for isekaiisekai. (n.d.). Retrieved April 20, 2021, from <https://www.definitions.net/definition/isekai>
- Knudsen, S. (2013, December 23). The multiple realities and other worlds of art. Retrieved April 28, 2021, from <https://hyperallergic.com/99753/art-as-a-portal-to-infinite-otherness/>

# Image Sources

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Garden\\_of\\_Earthly\\_Delights](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Garden_of_Earthly_Delights)
- <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/297448750390969761/>
- <https://hyakumonogatari.com/2013/02/05/a-brief-history-of-yokai/>
- <https://www.playstationlifestyle.net/2021/04/02/genshin-impact-ps5/>
- Installation view, “The World and Its Things in the Middle of Their Intimacy” at Fridman Gallery, with Robert Lobe’s “Dryad” (2012) in the foreground (all images courtesy Fridman Gallery). <https://hyperallergic.com/99753/art-as-a-portal-to-infinite-otherness/>

Thank You!