Imagination in Reading to Abstract Art

Student presenter: Jackie Jiang
Project advisor: Rie Hachiyanagi

It is difficult to fully understand or master a foreign language. Being Chinese and growing up learning English as a second language, I deeply understand the awkwardness of not being able to properly interpret something in a foreign language. I still remember the first time I tried to read a book in English in high school – *The Scarlet Letter* – how much I struggled while looking up definitions of words to understand just a sentence, or how miserable I felt trying to empathize with Hester who spoke strangely to me. Instead of insisting to search for explanations, at these moments, I wished that these lines of text would just slowly melt and form a straight line of black ink, or perhaps that someone could put a veil over this strange text to shield me from it. Sometimes, I merely enjoyed looking at the text without wondering what it meant. I took it all in as a unified image. These thoughts lingered in my heart for years. As I read more books, these memories started to fade away. My desire to share my experience developed into this series of work that explores my imagination and feelings generated from my difficulty in reading English.

*The Reading Imagination* series is made using only two mediums – ink and paper, simply like a printed book. The whole body of work is divided into two themes, *the veil* and *the string*, in accordance to my two anxieties when reading English. Each theme involves a type of pattern. *The veil* represents the pattern of massive lines inspired by Cao Shu, a Chinese calligraphy style that is famous for its messiness. *The string* represents the pattern of straight lines drawn in an intuitive order, inspired by Agnes Martin’s grid paintings. In both themes, these patterns are pushed beyond my reading experience to form images that please audiences’ visual sensation, in which language is rather powerless.

Agnes Martin once said, “From music people accept pure emotion, but from art they demand explanation.”¹ Maybe it is true that it is human nature to question and figure out the underlying reasons behind things. However, when people search for concrete explanations or meanings, we tend to focus on our thoughts rather than enjoy the artwork through our senses in the very moment. For me, the best method to memorize and frame these unspeakable feelings we experience through anxiety is through abstract art.

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¹ Agnes Martin. Agnes Martin | TateShots. Tate, 08 June 2015. Web 02 Apr. 2017