

CONVERSATION WITH YIBEI LIU



Yibei Liu is a figurative sculptor whose work delves deeply into the complexities of the human experience. Liu's sculptures, which show a profound interest in human behavior and emotions, are an exploration of the inner world we all navigate—our struggles, desires, vulnerabilities, and resilience. Drawing on personal introspection as well as broader social issues, Liu seeks to bring visibility to often invisible aspects of mental and emotional health. In her hands, clay, metal, and other materials become a means of expressing these complex states—shapes and forms reflect the tension between confinement and liberation, vulnerability and strength. Through her work, Liu invites viewers into a dialogue about mental illness, creating a space for reflection, understanding, and connection.

On their journey to arts

I am a figurative sculptor whose work delves into human behavior and emotion. My exploration is driven by a curiosity about why people feel and act the way they do. This theme manifests in abstract figurative sculptures that express emotional loops and examine the psychological mechanisms behind them. Recently, my practice has expanded to explore societal issues, and how society shapes individual human conditions, bridging personal emotional experience with broader social dynamics.

My journey to the arts wasn't marked by any dramatic moments—it was more of a quiet, gradual pull. From a young age, I felt naturally drawn to creativity, although sometimes I wonder whether my decision to pursue art was partly influenced by the fact that I was not excelling academically. It's hard to say whether my interest was innate or shaped by my environment. My mother had a deep passion for fashion, and my father once dreamed of becoming an architect. Due to the constraints of their time, they weren't able to pursue those paths, so their aspirations subtly became a part of my own.

Choosing ceramic design as my major was almost accidental. Growing up, my exposure to art was entirely 2D—painting, drawing, and the like. But just before starting my undergraduate studies, I suddenly became obsessed with the idea of creating in three dimensions. It was an unexpected shift but one that felt right. Over the years, that decision has proved to be a good fit. I find immense satisfaction from the tactile nature of clay and the meditative process of coiling and sculpting. For a person like me, who finds it difficult to express his thoughts through words, working with clay has become my primary outlet—a way to channel emotions and ideas that might otherwise remain unspoken.



I got my Bachelor of Arts degree in Ceramic Design from Central Saint Martins College, a journey that proved to be profoundly challenging during its initial phase—especially in the first two years. It was a period of intense transformation as I grappled with assimilation into the environment and deciphering academic criteria. To be entirely candid, nothing resonated with me at that time. I have always held the conviction that compelling art transcends the need for explanatory essays or elaborate presentations.

After a two-year hiatus, I returned with an unapologetic “Screw it” mindset, and it was then that my experience truly began to flourish. In my final year, I worked with a sense of unwavering conviction—a blind faith, if you will—that my work possessed merit and that I was destined to leave my mark. I believe such faith is necessary for any artist. The realities of the world can be unforgiving, gradually eroding one's ambition and rendering one's efforts seemingly invisible. This chapter of my life taught me invaluable lessons about perseverance in the face of profound despair. Rather than resisting these emotions, I learned to embrace them, transforming them into a source of creative nourishment.

While I deeply appreciate the three years I spent within the academic confines of an art institution, I remain steadfast in the belief that art, at its core, does not require formal instruction to thrive.

Messaging with art

My work revolves around dissecting human behavior and emotion. At its core, I'm driven by this nagging question: Why do we feel and act the way we do? For me, this curiosity isn't just theoretical—it bleeds into how I shape clay or carve forms. My sculptures are abstract figures that trap emotional loops in physical form, almost like freezing a moment of tension or vulnerability. They're not just about capturing a feeling, though; I want to poke at the psychological why behind those reactions—the quiet insecurities, societal pressures, or habits that control us without us even realizing it.

A pivotal moment in this exploration was my piece “Untitled 1” (white stoneware, glazed stoneware). This work marked my first

On personal education, and creative education viewed locally and globally





intentional shift from purely emotional excavation to critique of how societal structures shape and manipulate human behavior. At its center looms a monstrous figure—a grotesque embodiment of power and capital—towering over a sea of smaller, agonized bodies suspended in twisted, hanging postures. These fragile forms represent those excluded from privilege yet trapped in a Sisyphean chase of it.

While sculpting this piece, I kept circling back to one question: Is this a relentless pursuit of true progress, or simply a mechanical mimicry of others' footsteps? The figure's multi-faced head, a motif from my earlier works, gained a new meaning here. Originally symbolizing chaotic inner thoughts, it now mirrors the overwhelming flood of information we are force-fed daily—like a ravenous monster growing taller as we consume more. This shift mirrors my own artistic evolution: from introspective analysis to urging viewers to pause. I want people to spend time with a piece, to let their interpretations breathe before accepting the artist's narrative.

Lately, I've been expanding this dialogue between personal and societal forces. Whether through distorted textures mimicking industrial decay or fragmented bodies echoing urban anonymity, my goal remains to make the invisible gears of power and desire tactile. For me, sculpture is a way of translating abstract struggles into something you can walk around, touch, and contend with.

Rather than embedding specific messages, I see my sculptures as conversation starters. What truly excites me is when someone pauses to look closer, maybe even circles the piece, and walks away with an interpretation I'd never considered. That is the magic—it shows that the work has a life beyond my own intentions.

I'm less interested in being a storyteller and more committed to creating spaces for personal reflection. If the viewer feels a connection, regardless of whether or not it aligns with my original idea, the sculpture has done its job. My role isn't to dictate meaning but to arouse curiosity. After all, resonance thrives on ambiguity.



On Art as a representation of reality or escape from it

I hold the conviction that art, from the moment of its inception, is inherently shaped by the prevailing social and cultural milieu. This is rooted in the fact that artists, as human beings, are inextricably bound to the influences and limitations of their temporal context. The same principle extends to the act of art appreciation. When engaging with historical artworks, we endeavor to situate them within their original socio-historical framework. Yet, even this interpretive act is inevitably filtered through the lens of our own contemporary societal paradigms, which subtly—yet profoundly—color the way we understand them.

My experience with online galleries has been somewhat limited. As an emerging artist, I've found that the probability of selling work through these platforms is relatively low, especially before establishing a mature artistic philosophy and a cohesive body of work. At this stage, I'm more focused on developing my creative practice than on prioritizing online sales.

One issue I've observed is that many online platforms create a barrier between artists and buyers. Often the works are curated by agencies or the platforms themselves, which can be discouraging for emerging artists who have yet to build a strong network. Additionally, the current market tends to artificially categorize art into hierarchies, which I find counterintuitive. I believe art is deeply personal and subjective—it shouldn't be ranked by arbitrary notions of "high" or "low" value.

To improve the representation of artists online, I think platforms should focus on fostering direct connections between artists and collectors. A more transparent and inclusive model would allow collectors to discover work based on personal preferences rather than solely on curatorial selections. This could create a healthier, more efficient marketplace, where artists can thrive without being overshadowed by gatekeepers.

Online galleries and marketing artwork online

