



Comparative Study

The meaning and significance of an artwork usually goes beyond its frame. It may represent an emotion, object, or opinion, existing either in the real world or in the dimensions of our minds. However, some works are attempts in breaking the boundary of dimensions physically and materially: Static pieces acquire motion, three dimensional spaces show the passage of time, and like with a mathematical hyperplane, they try to visualize concepts which lie a level beyond. I have great respect for these kinds of works and the artists who produce them. That is why I was fascinated by the works of Korean artist Ahn Jong Yuen and Emirati artist Mattar bin Lahej and decided to take them as my focus for this comparative study.



Wings of Light (Ezen of Light) 2013

Sound of Light 2000 – National cancer center, Ilsan (Goyang)

Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Wings of Light*. 2013. Abu Dhabi Emirates Palace Gallery, Abu Dhabi.

AHN JONG YUEN. Web. 5 Sep. 2015. <http://ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/arts_2013_06.html>

Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Sound of Light*. 2000. National cancer center, Ilsan.

AHN JONG YUEN. Web. 5 Sep. 2015. <http://ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/art_20_20.html>



Encyclopedia 2014

Waves 2010

bin Lahej, Matter. *Encyclopedia*. 2014. The Dubai Mall, Dubai. *The National Arts & Lifestyle*. Web. 8 Sep. 2015. <<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/art/in-pictures-mattar-bin-lahejs-steel-sculpture-at-dubai-mall#10>>

bin Lahej, Matter. *Waves*. 2010. *Mattar Bin Lahej*. Web. 3 Oct. 2015. <<http://www.mattarbinlahej.com/en/galleries/images>>

Ahn Jong Yuen (Moha J. Y. AHN)

Born 1952, Mil-Yang

Korea

Historical Context

Korean Art in the first half of the 20th century was greatly influenced by the Japanese occupation and Korean War. Modern cultural movements are characterized by how people deal with the developments made during that time. Korean artists are rediscovering their national art, both traditional and more contemporary international styles (“Korean Art (c.3,000 BCE onwards)”).

Through the years, Ahn Jong Yuen tested new forms of art; her broad choice of media including both two and three dimensional art using various modes and materials, such as wood, steel, and glass (“AHN JONG YUEN – Profile”). Her exploration of media and her unwillingness to specialize in a single style may reflect the fluid nature of visual arts in her country.

Time is not only a source of influence, it is also a focus in Yuen’s art. She does not concentrate on certain events in time, but the passage of time. Thus her works are not only placed in context of the past, but also in the context of the moment itself (Kang, “A Mass of Light”).

Novelist Kim Min Sook claims that “All artworks exist in a world that discloses the deposited layers of the artists’ memories.” During her childhood, Ahn Yuen experienced many objects, all which have their own unique form, ambience, and texture.

The memories of the encounters with these objects influenced her choice of materials used in her work. One example are the glass balls, which are reoccurring elements in Yuen’s installations. The characteristics of these spheres and their effects on her work may be inspired by her memories playing with marbles (Kim, “Glass Balls”).

Another key focus of Ahn Jong Yuen is the universe and the forms of the physical world.

Ahn Jong Yuen’s works encompass both time and space. By doing so, the artist considers all the boundaries which define our world (or our perception). This allows Yuen to approach her fundamental concept: our existence. Yuen’s artworks essentially represent her understanding of these concepts (Kang, “A Mass of Light”).

Ahn Jong Yuen, also known as Moha J. Y. Ahn, is a Korean artist with degrees from Dong – A University and the School of Visual Arts in New York. I first experienced the works by Ahn Jong Yuen in a small solo exhibition in the Emirates Place Hotel gallery in Abu Dhabi. Due to my limited exposure to art forms at that time (back in 2013), Yuen’s collection was a combination of Visual Arts styles I never seen before. Even now, with the encounter of numerous artworks, I still consider her pieces to be innovative and original.

Wings of Light was one of larger installations which were exhibited in the Emirates Palace Hotel, Abu Dhabi. It is a piece which nearly encompassed the entire room. Stone slabs and glass marbles with internal lighting are placed in a sea of silica sand, like in the dry gardens of East Asia. The moving projections and the series of musical notes make the air alive. This is perhaps the work by Ahn Yuen which I found most inspiring. I believe the artist tried to express her concept of the universe using slightly alien, but yet comforting elements.

Usage of 3 Dimensional Space

The bed of silica sand fills the majority of the floor. Although there is no object placed on the walls or ceiling (except for the projectors), the lights projected from the glass balls cover the vertical surfaces. As a result, the entire display space is consumed by the single installation. I believe this represents the artist's will to visualize the entirety of her subject (the universe, human's existence).

The Overall Composition

The abundant usage of silica sand and the organized placement of the stones and glass spheres remind me of the traditional gardens in East Asia. The aim of these gardens is to replicate nature or be part of it. Interestingly, while Korean gardens are left for nature to take shape itself (Richardson, "Korean gardens"), Yuen certainly forces her work to take her desired layout. In that way, the *Wing of Light* more approximates the Chinese and Japanese styles of gardens. This may be because Ahn Yuen's aim is to visualize a concept; her understanding of the universe, and not to replicate what we perceive.

Wings of Light (Ezen of Light) 2013

Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Wings of Light*. 2013. Abu Dhabi Emirates Palace Gallery, Abu Dhabi.

AHN JONG YUEN. Web. 5 Sep. 2015. <http://ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/arts_2013_06.html>



Glass casting – programmed LED light – stone – silica sand – sound
("AHN JONG YUEN – art 2013")

Moving Projection

In addition to the lights which exit the glass spheres, the exhibition space is also lit up by the slideshow of moving images which is projected onto the silica sand base. The film, which the artist documented herself, shows the movements and changes of patterns, just like a kaleidoscope. This has similarities with one of her earlier works named *Kaleidoscope*, in which movement is produced using the Lenticular technique ("AHN JONG YUEN – art 2010"). I believe incorporating earlier concepts shows the development of style of an artist.



The *Changdeokgung Huwon*, a leading example of Korean gardens



Kaleidoscope

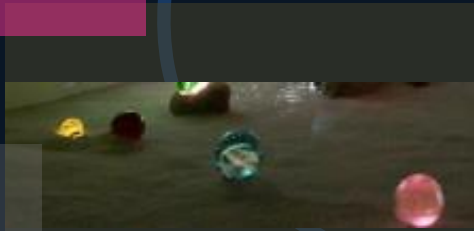
Changdeokgung Huwon. Changdeokgung Palace, Seoul. *Grace Travel*. Web. 5 Apr. 2016. <<http://english.triptokorea.com/english/viewtopic.php?t=5873>>

Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Kaleidoscope*. 2010.. *AHN JONG YUEN*. Web. 27 Sep. 2015. <http://www.ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/arts_10_add41.html>

Light

Light is a key focus in Ahn, Jong Yuen's artwork. In common western ideas, light is considered as an external source, which is used for expressionist effects by identifying and reflecting an object. However, in Ahn, Jong Yuen's works, light is something which is emitted from within an object. The purpose of illumination thus is to reveal the internal characteristics of the form and establish a connection between the body and the external environment (Cho, "The Sound of Light").

Glass Balls



A close-up of
Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Wings of Light*. 2013. Abu Dhabi Emirates Palace Gallery, Abu Dhabi.

AHN JONG YUEN. Web. 5 Sep. 2015. <http://ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/arts_2013_06.html>

These glass balls are considered to represent celestial bodies. The bubbles within the sphere and the play of light and shadow projected around the walls imitate planets and stars on a background of the universe. However, I believe each sphere could also represent a single body, by which the entire installation becomes the visualization of the universe (Cho, "The Sound of Light").

The main sources of light in the installation are the "Glass Balls". Creation and usage of these spheres are a patent held by the artist herself and these objects were formed through her experimentation. The glass ball has similarities to a marble as it contains numerous air bubbles which refract the light. These effect of air bubbles can be seen on the wall as a pattern of light and shadow. Unlike the marble, the glass ball has internal lighting (Cho, "The Sound of Light").

Sound

In *Wings of Light* and other works in the same series the visual experience is "enhanced" by a continuous symphony of sounds (Kang, "A Mass of Light"). Art Critic Kang Sun-Hack explains that the sounds represent "water dripping from somewhere". When I experienced the installation in Abu Dhabi, I remember the sounds to be a combination of long notes. I believe there was not any pattern or structure in the combination for it to be considered as music. Nevertheless, the combination achieves a form of harmony.

If the visual objects cover the surfaces of the space, the sounds fill the void created within the boundaries. The sounds thus help complete the space and create an ambience. The audio elements may not produce music and thus do not have their own structure. I believe that is because the audio is not intended to compliment the visual elements, but merge with them to create an entirety. That goes along with the artist's concepts of entirety and the universe.

Movement

Both light and sound are elements in *Wings of Light* which change their forms over time. Thus they have a kinetic aspect. The entire installation is embodied in movement and the atmosphere becomes alive. The movement gives the artwork the ability to represent the dimension of time; not only a specific moment in time but also its flow.

Placement and Space

Sound of Light is placed on the grounds of Korea's National cancer center in Ilsan Goyang. It stands in an open semi-courtyard, surrounded by large, multi-floored hospital and research buildings. This space provides a feeling of openness, which helps lifting any obstruction that might hinder the work to be appreciated to its full extent. The artwork in turn exerts a positive influence on the setting, as a sculpture placed in a public space acts to bring the surrounding elements together and turn the space into a complete scene.

Sound of Light 2000 – National cancer center, Ilsan (Goyang)

Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Sound of Light*. 2000. National cancer center, Ilsan.

AHN JONG YUEN. Web. 5 Sep. 2015. <http://ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/art_20_20.html>



Stainless steel – glass – crystal – lighting (“AHN JONG YUEN – Public art”)

Size

The scale of the installation is 15m^o by ø8m^o by ø8m (Kang, “The Structural Encounter”). A work of such size could be a large success and gain popularity. However, it could also as much as be a blunderous failure. Thus, I believe this structure shows the artist's confidence in her work and commitment behind her ideas. She is determined and courageous to attempt a work of a size such as this.

Elements

For its size, *Sound of Light* is comprised of only a few different forms of elements. The most prominent is the curved thread of steel. It is a single piece which goes through two full rotations. These arcs are connected to the ground via thin long rods of metal. Virtually hovering above the point where all these rods meet are reflective glass ovals. These surfaces create focal points which help tying the whole installation together.

Motion

The long arcs of steel create a circular motion. It circumferences the volume, creating a bound space. The sharp lines divide the space even further into small pockets of void. The entire installation invites the eyes to look deeper into the piece.

“It is an eye-catching work ... [with] a sense of movement drawn by the circles and lines in a structure letting one's gaze go through.” (Kang, “The Structural Encounter”) Kang, Sun-Hack / Art Critic

Audience

The uniqueness of the display location defines the uniqueness of the viewers. Since the installation is placed in a medical center, not a gallery, it is unlikely that those who encounter this work came for the art. Most of the people who will meet this sculpture would probably be doctors, researchers, and patients. The artist thus cannot expect her work to be appreciated the same it would be at an art gallery. She has to change her approach to conveying her ideas. Ahn Yuen needs to consider the representation of this installation, especially because the audience will inevitably include patients whose condition is terminal.

Further Exploration of *Sound of Light* through Comparison with David Stromeyer's *Shim, Sham, Shimmy*

Yuen, Ahn Jong. *Sound of Light*. 2000. National cancer center, Ilsan.

AHN JONG YUEN. Web. 5 Sep. 2015. <http://ahnjongyuen.com/eng/arts/art_20_20.html>

Installations *Sound of Light* and *Shim, Sham, Shimmy* are both public artworks placed at locations where many persons walk/drive by. *Shim, Sham, Shimmy* is designed not to be overly complicated, so that viewers may inspect it without too much concentration (“*Shim, Sham, Shimmy*’ at 119th and Metcalf”). It is almost a monument that is meant to cheer up the surroundings. I believe *Sound of Light* has a similar influence to its surroundings; not receiving as much attention as a work in a gallery, but setting the mood of its setting.

Both installations make use of curved metal surfaces, though *Sound of Light* also holds straight bars. Sally Anderson explains that Stromeyer’s work contrasts with surrounding vertical poles (“*Shim, Sham, Shimmy*’ at 119th and Metcalf”). Curiously, such a contrast is not clearly perceivable with Ahn Yuen’s work. I believe the straight metal bars in *Sound of Light* are well integrated into the installation, making a complete whole.

Shim, Sham, Shimmy 2007 – Kansas City

Stromeyer, David. *Shim, Sham, Shimmy*. 2007. Kansas City. David Stromeyer. Web. 7 Jan. 2016.

<<http://www.davidstromeyer.com/outdoor-sculpture.html?view=20>>



by David Stromeyer Metal, height: 15ft diameter 26ft (“*Shim, Sham, Shimmy*’ at 119th and Metcalf”)

David Stromeyer is a sculptor from Texas. He works on many government sponsored public art projects (like this piece). *Shim, Sham, Shimmy*, named after a tap dance style, stands at a road intersection. Stromeyer tried to capture the city’s lively character and Jazz roots with this installation.



Sound of Light 2000

Although *Sound of Light* has the previously described representation of a circular motion, it looks static and weighed down compared to the *Shim, Sham, Shimmy*. Stromeyer’s work may appear more mobile because of how the circular bent plates are attached to each other at irregular angles. Its asymmetry causes the illusion that the sculpture changes shape.

The more movable nature of Stromeyer’s installation is appropriate to the intended subject(s) of the work; a vibrant city and Jazz. *Shim, Sham, Shimmy* is designed to reflect the rhythmic nature associated with the musical culture. By contrast, *Sound of Light* is set up in a medical center, a more serious environment. The artwork, while it could cheer up the audience, would be out of place if it had the same free-spirited nature as Stromeyer’s work. *Sound of Light* is thus better suited to its display space with its more solid appeal.

“We felt like this piece is fun - a 'quick read' so you aren't overly distracted studying it while driving by, and it really contrasts with all of the vertical poles in the area.”

– Sally Anderson (concerning *Shim, Sham, Shimmy*)

(“*Shim, Sham, Shimmy*’ at 119th and Metcalf”)

Mattar bin Lahej

Born 1968, Dubai

Emirates

The Holy Quran

The Quran, the holy book of Islam, has a great influence on the Emirati society, as religion play a key roles in the people's lives, and the sacred texts are a source of guidance in normal day life. However, the all-enveloping and unchanging values of the holy book may represent an even grander concept: The Quran provides an understanding of the world and the universe (Seaman).

Historical Context

In Islam, the painting of religious figures, such as the prophets, is prohibited. As a result, art developed quite differently in the Middle East than in the West. Drawing portraits of individuals has not been a popular subject in visual arts in the Emirates. Instead, a more common form was calligraphy and the usage of Arabic writing, often verses from the holy texts, to create unique shapes and forms.

Islam and the Quran both are reoccurring themes in Mattar bin Lahej's work, especially in his sculptures. The artist takes verses and ideas of the religion and embodies them onto the metal surface of his works, similar to how traditional artists use calligraphy to creatively develop images.

Mattar bin Lahej's artworks, while using modern technology and unique techniques, are still centered around the core of the Islamic religion and Emirati culture. He recognizes the benefit of participating internationally, but also recognizes the need to preserve the native identity. I believe his approach to value both the new and the old is something shared by the country itself: the UAE is in a transition state where both the need for modernization and conservation are considered and effectively balanced.

Mattar bin Lahej is a self-taught Emirati painter, photographer and sculptor (Alam). I first encountered him through an article in a local magazine, *The Source*. Due to my misconception that most of the Arts in the United Arab Emirates come from outside the country, finding a successful local artist was a surprise to me. I believe bin Lahej's artistic styles are not only unique in the Emirates, but can be recognized internationally.

The Young Generation

There always has been some artistic exploration and unique styles in the Emirates. However, the amount produced, unfortunately, is not bountiful. The United Arab Emirates is currently undergoing an art development stage: many young persons are picking up the brush and trying out pre-existing or new forms of expression.

Mattar bin Lahej may also be considered part of the new generation of UAE artists. He also attempts to intergrade new forms of art and usage of materials into his works. Bin Lahej "believes that an artist should always strive to blaze a new trail rather than follow in the footsteps of others" (Alam). In that direction, the artist leads the new generation by opening a local gallery and sharing his passion and knowledge with others.

These components, while holding religious meaning, also represents a more secular view of our world. The spheres may represent planets, while the disks and spiral curves may suggest their orbits and flight paths. Additionally, the metal reflects and projects the surrounding elements on its surface, showing a depth which is larger than its volume. Journalist Anna Seaman suggests that it is as if “looking at a universe full of orbiting planets and stars, characterized by constant movement” (Seaman). However, by providing an astronomical perspective, Mattat bin Lahej might be hinting towards something else: that even with change, certain things remain constant – that the Quran is encompasses everything, both space and time.

The Components

Encyclopedia is the combination of numerous spherical forms and disks, made out of curved stainless steel. These forms are placed in a linear fashion, creating an ever evolving spiral.

Mattar bin Lahej explains that the installation “consists of six chapters which cover various areas such as Quranic commentary, Tajweed (rules of pronunciation) and reasons for the Quranic revelation” (GulfNewsTV). The artwork relies on its elements and principles of art such as balance to visualize the qualities of these texts.

The Engravings

The stainless steel metal surface of the artwork is engraved with words and verses of the Holy Quran and other Islamic texts.

While this artwork is heavily influenced by Islam, it is directed not only at Muslims, but people with other religious beliefs as well. Artist bin Lahej considers the Quran to contain wisdom worth jewels or gold (Seaman). He urges non-Muslims to truly examine the Quran and appreciate its values, through experiencing his work (GulfNewsTV). Mattar bin Lahej believes the best way to convey the message is through beauty, because the concept of beauty is something people of all cultures can relate to. His consideration for people of other religious groups show that the artist acknowledges the existence of a great cultural diversity in his country.

Encyclopedia 2014 – The Dubai Mall, Dubai

bin Lahej, Matter. *Encyclopedia*. 2014. The Dubai Mall, Dubai. *The National Arts & Lifestyle*. Web. 7 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/art-in-pictures-mattar-bin-lahejs-steel-sculpture-at-dubai-mall#2>>



Top-grade stainless steel (4.5ton 15m long, 3m high) (“GALLERY ART WORK”)

Encyclopedia is an installation which was temporary on display at the Dubai Mall, during the Ramadan season. It is based on the inspirations given by a Islamic text that the artist read. Matter bin Lahej tries to counter the negative opinion Islam receives and tries to inform the viewers of the beautiful message of the religion. What attracted me to this work was the complex curves which are created using steel sheets.

In addition to the exposure to a great number and variety of audiences, the location offers the space required to exhibit such a large piece. By providing enough volume, one can focus on the entirety of the piece without being overwhelmed by its size (which is probably not part of the artist’s intentions). The installation also has the ability to unify the surrounding elements by filling the void in between.

The Placement – Location

An interesting aspect of *Encyclopedia* is that it is (was) displayed as public art in a shopping center, not in an art gallery. It was thought that such a large installation should be placed in a larger space. By displaying his art in a public area frequently accessed by both the general population and tourists, Mattar bin Lahej aims at communicating his message to a greater variety of people (Seaman).

Bin Lahej, quoted from the Quran “if you are going to invite people to read that message, don’t invite them with a sword or a knife, invite them with beauty” (Seaman).

The Process of creating *Encyclopedia*

Appropriate to the size of the work, *Encyclopedia* required a long duration of time to create. The planning stage alone spanned over a time period of 6 months. Mattar bin Lahej first sketched out his idea using pencil, then used a computer program to draw every fine detail of his installation. Even when the making of the artwork was handed over to the machines and other personnel, the artist ensured the product reflected his vision by closely supervising the creation process (Seaman).

Instead of in an art studio, “Encyclopedia” was created in a factory. The stainless steel metal was manipulated into its shape using machines and heavy equipment, not the artist’s hands. In one way, one starts questioning about the authenticity of the artwork. In another way, this shows that the artist is professional in endeavoring into intensive manufacturing processes and works effectively with other individuals (Seaman).

I believe the long hours bin Lahej put into the designing of his work show that he carefully considered every aspect of the artwork before production. This assures that each element in the structure has meaning and thought put into it. However, bin Lahej’s approach lacks the spontaneous aspect of other artists’ hands-on approach. Yet, the method bin Lahej took may have been appropriate, as such a large piece necessitates the understanding of the shape of the entire structure, as well as its components’.

Mattar bin Lahej claims “that working with steel ... not only requires ... experience, but is so expensive that many artists shy away from this form of expression” (Alam). I believe that is a bold explanation. However, this is also a major indicator of the artist’s confidence in his skills and works.

Metal is an interesting material since it is malleable and thus can be shaped into almost any form desired. However, when one thinks of metal, we tend to imagine a highly geometric structure. Personally, this gives me the impression of toughness and hardness. I believe Mattar bin Lahej, however, effectively employs all properties of the metal. His artworks are a combination of both sharp and fluid surfaces.

To curve out and form the shape of the 3 dimensional art, bin Lahej used modern industrial procedures such as the usage of laser and waterjet. Additionally he used chemicals to corrode the metal and inscribe the Arabic writing onto its surface.

I find it interesting that an artist uses ultramodern techniques to promote traditional values. Moreover, coupling mechanical methods to artistic skills is something I often am not aware of in other artworks. For another artwork, Mattar bin Lahej explained that “The work in this piece expresses the mix between technology and art, giving rise to a new phenomenon that is a blend of both. I have tried to express the interaction between these two elements” (Alam). This is curious, because I believe it reflects the approach United Arab Emirates takes to ensure that it advances into the future without losing its cultural background.



Depth & Speed 2011 – another work by bin Lahej which makes use of the malleable properties of metal

Calligraphy is a medium not only found in the Islamic world, as they there are works of calligraphy in Japan and China. Moreover, its contents are not limited to Islamic teaching, but those of the bible as well. However, the abundance of styles present and the relative lack of other Visual Art forms make calligraphy a prominent part of Islamic Art (“Calligraphy in Islamic Art”). Mattar bin Lahej makes excellent use of this medium in his “Encyclopedia” installation.

Close up image of *Encyclopedia*



“Metalworkers chiseled out tiny areas of the brass surface and filled them with pieces of silver and gold. They added details by chasing the surfaces of the softer inlaid metals with a hammer and tools and adding a black filler to create contrast” (“Calligraphy in Islamic Art”).

To place the inscriptions onto the cube, the surface seems to have been scratched off and painted black. The indented space was then filled with a molten silver. The process of chiseling at brass metal surfaces, then filling them with silver or gold to create contrast is an already established method (“Calligraphy in Islamic Art”). Thus the creation of this cube most likely followed the traditional forms of this art. However as mentioned earlier, *Encyclopedia* also has stainless steel as a calligraphy canvas. Mattar bin Lahej inscribed these surfaces using chemical corrosion techniques (also mentioned earlier). This strengthens the notion that while the artist values know-how of past generations, he does not hesitate from embracing new knowledge.

The writing on the cube says

“الله رسول محمد”

Which translates into “Allah, Prophet Mohammed”.

The God and Prophet are both very important figures in Islam. Inclusion of their names/titles in the artwork shows a strong connection to the religion and subsequently represent key Emirati values.

bin Lahej, Matter. *Encyclopedia*. 2014. The Dubai Mall, Dubai. *The National Arts & Lifestyle*. Web. 7 Jan. 2016. <<http://www.thenational.ae/arts-lifestyle/art/in-pictures-mattar-bin-lahejs-steel-sculpture-at-dubai-mall#7>>

Afterthought

What I found curious about this work is the artist’s choice of writing (element) when compared to the work’s intended function. The Qur’an is originally written in Arabic, so using Arabic inscriptions may be appropriate. However, Mr. bin Lahej stated that he wanted viewers to discover the “jewels” of the Qur’anic writing. A large portion of the people he referred to are likely to be non-Arabic speakers. If so, why did he not include English writing or that of other languages? Did he conclude that the original text to be the symbol of purity and beauty? Or does he believe that the beauty of its form will encourage the viewer to further explore its meanings?

Elements

The presence of the three bodies of horses is clear. However their volume, shape, and tones are not fully represented. Rather, the creatures are broken down to simple elements; lines and shaded variations of the color, blue. I believe this shows the artists intended focus. Mattar bin Lahej did not want to show the horses themselves, but their movement.

Color

The blue color has a lot of symbolism. It can represent loyalty, stability, and trust, amongst other things (“Color Symbolism and Culture”). These values are essential to the union of the Emirates nation. However, in the context of this work, blue represents something else. I believe the artist used the freshness of the color to refine the imagery of speed and power.

Composition

The odd number, three, of horses creates a comfortable balance and visually pleasing display. I believe the composition is heavily horizontal, with all three horses running in a single linear direction. The shift from dark blue to white is in line with this direction. By composing the horses to run into a white void, the artist express the passage of time and our journey towards the future.

“Waves” 2010

bin Lahej, Matter. *Waves*. 2010. *Matter Bin Lahej*. Web. 3 Oct. 2015.

<<http://www.mattarbinlahej.com/en/galleries/images>>



[Mv2]

Acrylic on canvas (200 × 200cm) (“GALLERY ART WORK”)

Lines

Most of the ‘lines’ shown in the work are the curvy, curly strains of the horses’ manes. The artist painted them in such a way so that they fall behind the horses like ripple of waves. It is an excellent technique to express air-braking speeds in a static painting.

Acrylic

Acrylic paints have the unique ability to hold both the transparency of water colors and the opaqueness of oil paints. I believe in this painting, this characteristic helps facilitate the contrasting shades of white to dark blue. The watercolor transparency enables the fresh overlap of differently shaded colors, while the opaqueness allows light shaded horse manes to stand out in a sea of indigo.

Horses

Horses, like their camel counterparts, occupy a special hearth in Emirati culture. They enjoy a close relationship with the people of the desert. Some people even consider horses to be their soul mates (Al Hameli). It is not surprising that horses are subject of a number of artworks in the Emirates.

Speed

I believe the theme of time and movement is reoccurring here, but instead of trying to create a work which encompasses the entirety of time, Mattar bin Lahej tries to express speed, the element movement of the horses. The elements are drawn in and out of focus to create the impression of a continuous wave-like movement.

Compare/Contrast Cultural Relevance

Ahn Jong Yuen

(South) Korea

Mattar bin Lahej

Emirates (UAE)

Both artists originated from cultures in which local forms of contemporary art were still developing. The artist's works are great contributions to the developing art cultures.

When compared, each of the two cultures have their own religions and beliefs. However, while Mattar bin Lahej's reveals religious ideas in his work, Ahn Yuen's approach may be more secular and universal.

Both artists incorporated elements in their works which are prominent symbols of their respective cultures.

Mr. bin Lahej was greatly inspired by the teaching and texts of Islam for his work, *Encyclopedia*.

The Emirati artist attempts to contribute to the growing multicultural society in the Emirates by encouraging people to reconsider their opinions on Islam and find the positive beauty in the religion.

For *Waves*, bin Lahej implemented element from the Emirati culture, mainly the people's connection to horses.

Ahn Yuen may have been influenced by Buddhism and Confucianism, both existent in her culture. However, her work may represent more of her opinions than that of a religious doctrine.

Ahn Yuen's experimentation of using glass marbles in her *Wings of Light* installation may come from her interactions with the spheres during her childhood.

Wings of Light's layout of elements and its silica sand floor imitate gardens in Japan and China (Curiously not South Korea).

Compare/Contrast Space

Ahn Jong Yuen's two works and Mattar bin Lahej's two total to three installations and one painting on canvas. Even though one of them is a two dimensional piece, all use the display space to enrich themselves. They create a mutual connection with surrounding volumes by either in-taking the outside elements or projecting the installations' own elements on them. This way, the world the four artworks want to define transcend beyond their frames.

Sound of Light

Sound of Light is located on the grounds of a hospital and medical research facility. *Encyclopedia* was temporarily displayed in a shopping center. In both cases, the artworks existed in a large space, many times their size. This bountiful room enables the viewer to enjoy the entire piece without being overwhelmed by it.

Additionally, these locations being public spaces, both works were subjected to audiences who were not the typical museum-goers.

Both works of Ahn Jong Yuen have a certain transparency. They allow the eyes to gaze through, which enables the viewer to appreciate their entirety. The *Sound of Light* installation is brought together into a single object through the long, rotatory arcs of the steel ovals. It serves to bring the surrounding elements together. Similarly, *Wings of Light* also acts as a single landscape by utilizing all available space. Therefore, while they are made of numerous details, Ahn Yuen's works can be seen as single entities.

Both the *Sound of Light* and *Encyclopedia* are composed majorly of metal and steel. Their surfaces act as mirrors, reflecting the surroundings. This way, they 'take in' elements, and thus expanding themselves. In a similar way, both works are affected by external lighting; here, light is considered as something outside the artwork which is used to selectively expose the piece.

Wings of Light

Unlike the *Sound of Light* or the *Encyclopedia*, *Wings of Light* is an installation which uses the entire displaying space. With the Zen garden-like sea of sand on the floor and the projections on the remaining walls, this artwork consumes the entire volume. It offers a sense of completeness and overwhelming serenity. Additionally, this piece is unique in obtaining its brightness from internal lighting. Instead of external elements projecting onto its surfaces, this artwork projects its elements onto the surrounding surfaces.

Encyclopedia

Encyclopedia is an installation composed of numerous rings and spheres. Although their connections and overall composition are significant, Mattar bin Lahej invites the viewer to examine the details in this work. This approach is coherent with the underlying message of this artwork, as the artist wants his audience to look at the Quran closely and discover its hidden values.

Waves

It is a two dimensional work which only covers a single wall of the display space. Nevertheless, the volume forming in front of the piece is important as the audience requires unobstructed space to appreciate the two by two meter work to its fullest extent. Additionally, the variance in color and tone within the painting creates a continuous lateral space which extends beyond the artwork's boundaries.

This metal sculpture stands on the grounds of a medical research center. It stands isolated, almost as if waiting for something. I believe this connects to the idea of mortality of the man.

Sound of Light

Sound of Light and *Encyclopedia* have the similarity of being fairly circular in composition. They are both mainly made out of metal which spirals to create a cylindrical shape. Although this spiral is cut in *Encyclopedia*, while it is continuous in *Sound of Light*, both exhibit a rotatory motion; movement through the piece, from one end to the next.

Encyclopedia

Opposed to *Wings of Light*, where time is represented frame by frame, I believe *Encyclopedia* represents the entire continuity of time. As the metal surfaces mirror the surrounding elements, including the coming and going of viewers, the work captures the changes happening around it. Yet, the installation itself is motionless. I think this represents the constancy and endurance of the holy Quran. Even with the never ending motion in the world, the words of the holy book are timeless.

Out of the four works, *Wings of Light* has the uniqueness of having audio and projection which facilitate an actually changing installation. While it offers the artist's understanding of the concept of time, much like in *Encyclopedia*, this artwork also covers the change occurring as time progresses. Therefore, it is able to capture every moment of time. This makes *Wings of Light* a timeless piece of art.

Wings of Light

compare/contrast Movement - Time

With the exception of Ahn Jong Yuen's *Wings of Light*, which has motional audio, lighting, and projection, these artwork are all static installations/painting. However, they all possess a certain motion, either in composition or in significance (meaning). Furthermore, the messages or representations the artists want to express with these works are something related to or mapped against time.

Waves

As mentioned before, I believe this painting expresses the speed experienced by the running of horses. Thus, instead of making a statement about time itself, Mattar bin Lahej shows the distance travelled during the time that has past; perhaps alluding to the history of the United Arab Emirates and the successes of the country.

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Comparative Study

Conclusion, Reflection, Influence

Ahn Jong Yuen & Mattar bin Lahej

Galiana

Felka

Sakde

I applied what I have learned from studying Ahn Jong Yuen's "Wings of Light" and "Sound of Light" and Mattar bin Lahej's "Encyclopedia" and "Waves" in three of my Studio Pieces. The common/unique styles I discovered through comparing these works I incorporated to create visual representations of the minds and personalities of three fictitious characters, Galiana, Felka and Skade, based on the words written by Alastair Reynolds.

Function and Purpose

While for each work, the artists had different aims, all four works functioned to present a viewpoint on the universe and passage of time. It may be connected to a message about religion and local traditions, like in bin Lahej's case, or a more unbound perspective as with Ahn Yuen's works. Nevertheless, the artworks I investigated all exerted a sense of wholeness.

The following Studio Pieces do not represent my understanding of the world more than the minds and personalities of fictional characters. However, I treated each mind as a single complete entity, a small universe by itself (while still maintaining a connection to the outside). I also incorporated the sense of time by including an element related to movement in each work like light or other non-stationary elements.

Formal Qualities

Perhaps the qualities in which both artists thrived was the usage of space and the element of light. Three of the artworks, "Wings of Light", "Sound of Light", and "Encyclopedia" are installations, which either exert an influence over or become influenced by the surrounding display space. The artists found light to be an active component in their works and worked with it to project their message. Even "Waves", a two-dimensional acrylic painting, incorporated these elements by the creation of depth and off-canvas area through the use of light and dark values.

The two artists inspired me to explore these two qualities: space and light. All my three works inspired by this investigation are installations; a form of art I never worked with before. I designed my Studio Pieces so they have some kind of interaction with its display space. I also considered the effects of lighting and experimented with several light sources and light-reflecting materials.

Cultural Context and Significance

All four works have relevance in their contexts. Especially bin Lahej's "Encyclopedia" and "Waves" have connections to traditional values. However, they establish a link with the past in contemporary methods. I believe both Ms. Yuen's and Mr. bin Lahej's works are significant to their respective cultures (South Korea and the Emirates), because they explore new, creative ways of expression. By breaking free from the traditional repetitive styles, the two artists lead their local art communities out of a creativity vacuum.

My Studio Pieces, which visualize how minds of characters of fiction work differently, is in my opinion a break with the common belief that beauty is only a characteristic of people's external appearances. I still work with the traditional ideas concerning aesthetics, but will apply them to a character's inner being.

The Universe of Revelation Space

The *Revelation Space* trilogy is a Science Fiction, Space Opera written by my favorite author Alastair Reynolds. It is a series of stories set in the near to distance future (up to 40 000 CE). I was first introduced to the author when reading *Galactic North*, a collection of short stories set in that universe. What drew me to his writing was probably its sheer uniqueness (almost alien) compared to anything I read before. I liked the grand ideas Reynolds presented in his fiction. The three Studio Pieces shown in the following slides were greatly influenced by Alastair Reynolds literature, as well as the art of Ahn Jong Yuen and Mattar bin Lahej.

Conjoiners

Unlike what is expected in space Science Fiction, Alastair Reynolds's universe does not harbor many extraterrestrial species. Instead, humanity is divided into various factions. The Conjoiners are one of them. This group, through neural machinery in their brain, achieved a state in which their minds are interconnected; a state they call Transenlightment. They are quite secluded from the rest of humanity and plain in terms of their external appearances. They are subjected to much misunderstanding and stereotyping by the commoners and are often referred to as *Spiders* (not entirely without justification. In an early conflict, the Conjoiners used the 'web' accessed by people with neural-machinery to forcefully recruit more soldiers).

Inhibitors

Also named "Wolves" by Conjoiners, this cybernetic specie is a survivor from the early eras of the universe. Their goal is to halt any development of intelligence and annihilate space-faring cultures. Paradoxically, their justification for mass murder is preserving life in the galaxy through a future crisis. The Inhibitors are considered the main antagonist in the *Revelation Space* trilogy and humanity works desperately to survive their confrontation with this intelligence.

Song Birds, Turbine Hall, and A House of Mirrors

What inspired me to create Studio Pieces based on the fictional universe of Alastair Reynolds was an extended monologue by one of the lead characters, Nevil Clavain, in the novel *Absolution Gap*. Countering the stereotypical viewpoint of non-Conjoiners, Clavain explains to his friend how each conjoiner's mind is unique. He recalls some of the minds of notable characters he encountered and describes his experience through extensive imagery. By this point of the story, I was already aware that Conjoiner society is more fragmented than initially perceived, but such a difference was a surprise. I was also amazed the concept that a mind or personality can be an object of beauty. We do often describe people's inner characters using adjectives and metaphors, but I think we rarely consider someone's mind an art piece.

Providing insights to Reynold's world of *Revelation Space* is similar to establishing the cultural context of an artist or work. It helps me appreciate the significance of my pieces when I understand their background knowledge.

Inviting with Beauty

With "Encyclopedia", Mattar bin Lahej expressed the words of the Qur'an in a visual installation to reveal the hidden beauty of its verses. Similarly, I wanted to turn Clavain's words into three dimensional art. Little concept/visual art is done on the characters of the *Revelation Space* trilogy. Furthermore, I never encountered an artwork which attempted to visualize an individual's mind (or how it works). Therefore, I believe using three dimensional art to visualize the minds of Conjoiners as described by Clavain is something unique. The three characters I chose to focus for my Studio Pieces were Galiana, Felka, and Skade; all members of the Conjoined.



A poster I created to promote an imaginary film based on the same story. **This was created for an assignment in my English course.** The cube visible behind gas curtains is a representation of an Inhibitor object.

“Her mind was like a room full of birds. Beautiful, clever songbirds. And they were singing – not in some mindless cacophony, not in unison, but to each other – a web of song, a shining, shimmering conversation, quicker than the mind could follow.”
(Reynolds, *Absolution Gap* 141)

Galiana – A Symphonic Mind

Galiana was one of the first Conjoiners (the person who initiated the experiments which led to Transenlightment). She had a central presence in the Conjoiner society and was like a queen figure. She is often described as a person of beauty and brightness. Clavain had a close/special relationship with her. The recollections of his encounters with Galiana’s mind are vibrant as a result.

Sound of Light by Ahn Jong Yuen

Ahn Yuen’s choice and placement of element’s in “Sound of Light” influenced the way I approached the composition of this installation. The Korean artist composed her work to exist as a complete piece while still connecting its personality with elements of its surroundings. This relates to Galiana’s character; a multi-layered, complex individual, who has great affections for her community. I designed her visual representation to include private space, as well as elements reaching out to her surroundings.



Photograph of my Studio Piece

without the birds, taken in darkness



Photograph of my Studio Piece including the birds, taken in daylight

The myriad colors present in the cage as layers of transparent sheets are an approximation of Galiana’s beauty. This is probably the radiance Clavain felt when he encountered her during Transenlightment. In darkness, these colors circulate around the cage’s bars, enveloping the character in golden light.

The cage serves to create an encasing which defines the boundaries of Galiana’s mind. Normally, if there is a cage, the birds are expected to be inside it. By intentionally placing the creatures outside the encasement, I express the freedom and progressiveness the character symbolizes.

The rods of rounded fluorescent paper, shooting out of the cage like branches represent the connections Galiana has to her fellow conjoiners. The light at the cage’s center symbolizes her role as a central figure and leader of the Conjoined. The songbirds on these branches, while related to the birds in Clavain’s description, also personify some of the other avatars in Conjoiner society.

I explored several ways of creating three dimensional bodies of songbirds.

Initially I made a few songbirds out of wire, because I believed it provides the proper transparency. However, I also considered Anne Pasco’s approach of interlinking precut plates in her Lovi bird products. Additionally, I created a few birds folded in Origami style, based on John Montroll’s design of the “Eagle”, published in the book, *Animal Origami for the Enthusiast*. The different designs may diffuse the unity of the installation, but it also helps illustrate the different personalities of other individuals in the community.

During a scientific expedition, Galiana’s group encounters the Inhibitors. The cybernetic specie kills the crew and invades Galiana’s mind. Galiana became the host of the Inhibitors’ voice to the Conjoiners. While she keeps on living, Galiana is effectively dead. While she represents freedom, at the core she is a prisoner. I thought of expressing this entrapment by placing dark transparent cubes amongst the bright birds and towards the center of the cage.



Anne Pasco’s Lovi Bird (16cm version)

Pasco, Anne. “Lovi Bird.” Photo (of product). *Lovi shop*. copyright Lovi Oy, n.d. Web. 3 Jan. 2016. <<http://shop.lovi.fi/product/4/lovi-bird-16cm>>

“Felka’s was like a turbine hall, that awful impression of simultaneous stillness and dreadful speed. She seldom let me see deep into it. I’m sure she thought I wouldn’t be able to take it.” (Reynolds, *Absolution Gap* 141)

Felka – A Volatile Mind

Felka and Galiana had a daughter-mother relationship (although a biological connection is unlikely). Due to a failed experiment during her initial stages of life, Felka suffers from Prosopagnosia (inability to distinguish familiar faces). She thus lives in isolation. Her mind developed to appreciate emergent phenomena. She would study a chaotic system until she discovers the defining patterns and becomes bored of its predictability. Although she is likely to be far more intelligent than the average Conjoiner, Felka’s mind can be related to a monster.

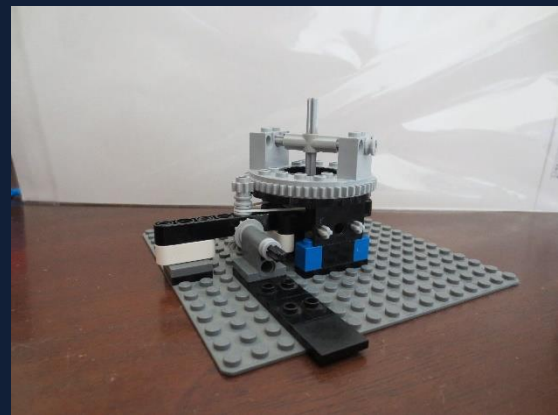
Wings of Light by Ahn Jong Yuen

Ahn Yuen’s “Wings of Light” is an indoor installation in which elements radiate onto surrounding surfaces. I believe this relates to Felka as she exerts her influence onto the Great Wall of Mars. However, instead of using the entire room, I created a dome-shaped screen around the core of my work. I think that better represents Felka’s isolation and it alludes to the wall.

Inside the domed perimeter, two rings of objects spin in opposite directions. This constant movement creates an ever-changing light and shadow show on the paper-screens. This non-predictable performance best represents Felka’s state of mind; a wild storm interested in clearing the chaotic secrets of emergent intelligence, only to endeavor in more complex systems.

The dome perimeter adds to elaborating Felka’s character, as it encircles an area of isolation. Felka is better represented to be a person whose mind is focused on her immediate surroundings, not the entire society. Therefore, it is more appropriate to project the shadows onto a small radius screens than the room walls.

In the first years after the discovery of Transenlightment, the Conjoiners inhabited a region of terraformed land on Mars. The habitable environment was protected by a wall, which encased the region like a dome, open at the top. Felka’s unique mind allowed her to interact with the wall, directing its repairing system to self-maintain. You will find her sitting in a room, engaged in an intricate game of hand gestures directed at invisible objects placed around her in a circle. The wall is represented in my work by the dome-shaped paper screen on which Felka’s directs her gestures in the form of light projections.



Photograph taken of the mechanical part of the installation.

It was constructed using LEGO technic elements. The most important feature I considered when designing this structure was to have two objects on the same axle spinning in opposite directions. I obtained the knowledge about the appropriate combination of gears through looking at Jason Allemann’s custom LEGO model *Orrery*.

I began working on this installation, but was unable to finish it. In this page I show my intended ideas and some of the progress. The writing on this page represent ideas, not a finished studio piece.

“She was like a shining silver abattoir, all whirling and whisking blades, designed to slice and chop reality and anyone foolish enough to peer too far into her skull... Her head was like a hall of mirrors. What you saw in it was only what she wanted you to see.”

(Reynolds, *Absolution Gap* 141)

Skade – A Shattered Mind

After Galiana’s exit from Conjoiner society, Skade became the next leader of the Conjoiners. More capable and efficient than her predecessors, she is first of a new breed of Conjoiners; considered ‘cold’ by the preceding generation. Shattered, secretive, and cruel, Skade is considered as one of the antagonists in *Redemption Ark* and *Absolution Gap*.

Encyclopedia by Mattar bin Lahej

Mattar bin Lahej’s work has surfaces which reflect its surroundings; the viewer. I incorporated this feature into my work to represent the “house of mirrors”. Encyclopedia also encouraged me to use curved and chromic materials to visualize the “shining silver abattoir”.

The cube resting on the shoulders is detachable, inviting the viewer to take it into his hands and look inside it. The interior of the cube is walled with mirrors, which reflect the central pattern, essentially a “house of mirrors”. The act of looking through the small hole is a metaphor for the dangers of peering into Skade’s mind. Removing the cube off the mount itself represents the character’s willingness to sacrifice for preservation and shows her shattered nature. The shape of the kaleidoscope (a cube) indirectly relates Skade’s cruelty to the Inhibitors’ evil (Inhibitors are thought to have cubic shapes).

The upper part of Skade’s torso was crafted using a combination of aluminum foil, clay, and hard paper. To design the shoulders, I looked at diagrams of human muscle and skeleton structures. Skade got involved in an accident, which took away a large portion of her torso; thus the existence only one shoulder and the sharp arc. The shiny and grey tones of various surfaces correspond to the colors of her android body. The multiple sharp pieces which make up Skade’s muscles emphasize her blade like character. The usage of several curved surfaces was in part inspired by bin Lahej’s “Encyclopedia” and its complex circular design..



Photograph taken of the inside of the cube



◀ Photograph of my entire Studio Piece. The Cube is resting on top of the installation. Viewer can lift it off and look inside it.

During an accident, a tow cable separated from a spacecraft slashed across Skade’s upper torso, splitting her in two. Skade willingly let her head be removed off her original body (and placed on an android body) to preserve it. This shows her cold determination to pursue her goals no matter what the cost. It well reflects Skade’s sharp, bladelike personality. I expressed this event through using multiple sharp-edged shapes which represent its ‘shattered’ nature.

This is one of the few images I found which ▶ visualize a character in the story. Skade is recognizable by the cranial crest on her forehead. However, the bald head and attire she wears is common among Conjoiners. This shows that the mind is what truly defines an individual conjoiner.



Concept Art of Skade by Elijah Stillson

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