Still life:

An Investigation of Realism in Oil Painting in the Development of New Forms Derived from an Observation of Industrial Products.

An Exegesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Fine Arts

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; and, any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

Yu-Lun Wu
March 1, 2014
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Abstract

This studio-based research project is an investigation of 17th century traditional still life painting. With a primary focus on the critic Dennis Diderot (1713-1784) and his critique of the work of the classic still life artist Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin (1699-1779), who shaped the principles and typical forms of traditional still life, I will discuss the connection between still life painting and its period of production. My research indicates how still life painting strongly references the lifestyle at the time of its execution. After an analysis of approaches to traditional still life painting, I will discuss my own work within the still life genre and the connection between my work and the modern environment. My research includes the influence of industrial change on modern life including its effect on the convenience of modern life; how life styles have changed and the impact of industrial products on modern society. This research project will focus on the following:

- The relationship between living things and industrial products.
- How industrial products affect the original environment and human lives in contemporary circumstances.
- The application of illusion, and the role of the sense organs.
- Model building in still life painting and the investigation of surreal space.

In the beginning of the exegesis, I will discuss the theories of Diderot and the work of Chardin with a primary focus on the importance of illusion in still life painting. I will then explain how the illusion works in the process of viewing a painting.

I will then discuss the effects of industrial products upon living things, and a number of relevant contemporary still life artists whose work I have referenced in this research project, including the famous Chinese oil painting artists Leng-Jun (1963- ) and Shi-Chong (1963- ). I will provide an overview of their backgrounds and how they develop their works, and discuss how their approaches contributed to the development of my own work.

In the third part of my exegesis, I will explain the reason I adopted artificial models as the main method of constructing my compositions and describe each step of the painting process, from designing the initial draft, to making a 3-dimensional model and producing a photo for the basis of the final painting. Finally, I will make a comparison between my work and traditional still life painting in its subject matter and form, to point out the benefits of model building in my work.

In the fourth section, I will discuss the form, the visual effects and metaphors in my work, including the technical processes used to produce each painting. The exegesis aims to present my approach to the still life genre using the theme of industrial objects and expand the process of developing new forms and a new visual language.
Chapter I

Introduction

This studio-based research project is focused on an investigation of still life oil painting and forms an extension of my previous work completed for my Master of Fine Art degree (2005-2008). The project will investigate non-natural still life subject matter in contrast to the traditional subject matter of still life painting. The still life compositions I depict, are all constructed by myself, with the aim of investigating the relationship between living things and industrial objects and to present a stronger personal motive than traditional still life painting of the past. Objects that do not appear in the natural world will be constructed and by altering their shape and texture, they will be used in roles they have never been presented in before, such as a combination of various materials to form a certain shape. The research aims to discover ways to extend and develop the traditional forms of still life painting and extend the parameters of my previous work, which was constructed in realistic space. The new work constructed for this project will investigate combining all of above elements and objects in a surreal space.

The project will investigate ways to combine various materials together to create a unique form of still life involving a transformation of space and the removal of gravity to render the subject more personal and alive. A primary aim in this new series is for the objects to appear as though they suddenly have permission to move as they wish rather than being settled in a particular location. In this new body of work I aim for a greater sense of spatial freedom.

In this project, I have focused on the following research questions and contextualized them in my exegesis.

- How can I create a different expressive style of still life painting through consideration of composition, texture and alteration of the subject matter?
- How can an understanding of the history of still life painting inform this process?

To address these first two questions, I will research the history of still life painting in order to investigate the main principles of still life, with reference to theories from relevant art critics. Also, the aesthetic principles of still life will be considered.

- How can I present my concern regarding the relationship between Industrial products and living things through a series of still life paintings?

In the following chapter, I will discuss the historical background of still life painting and compare relevant examples with my own paintings in order to uncover some of the values and unique characteristics of my work. To be more specific, I aim to explain the relationship between artists and the environment they live in and explain why I consider my own environment as a series of
conflicts between industrial products and living things. I will deal with this question through my studio practice and the research will be contextualized in the exegesis. In addition, I will also discuss the work of a number of artists whose works have been relevant to and informed the development of this project.

This written exegesis also includes an explanation of illusion and new forms of still life; the views of related artists and critics whose work and aesthetics inform my project; the introduction of my personal aesthetic viewpoint and the development of my studio practice. Moreover, this exegesis will be accompanied by an Appropriate Durable Record that documents my studio practice in the form of detailed descriptions and images of the work produced. Through studio-based practice, the project will culminate in a solo exhibition comprising a series of resolved still life paintings that reflect my understanding of the concept of illusion and my perception of a new form of still life aesthetics.
Chapter II

Still Life Art and Realism in Oil Painting

(1) Still Life

“Still life”. The term - a latecomer in European languages - denotes a particular genre, or category of picture, analogous to other familiar types such as portraiture or landscape. Known in ancient Greece and Rome, still life was revived around 1600, and became a focus of artistic experiment from the late 19th century to our own time.¹

Still life as a subject in itself, emerges quite suddenly at the end of the sixteenth century in northern Italy, the Low Countries and Spain - all three areas effectively dominated by the Spanish crown. In Spain, it evolves amid a dense web of associations, at times alluding to the lost still life celebrated by authors of classical antiquity, at others suggesting the essential vanity of all human existence. Part of the game is obviously to make us marvel at the technical virtuosity of the artist. Yet underlying any of the painting is a spiritual intensity that compels us to consider the meaning and the point of the – often very ordinary – things represented.²

Flowers, fruit, vegetables and other foodstuffs, pots and pans, tableware, books, musical instruments- in short, objects of all kinds- are the typical subject matter of still- life painting. Sometimes they are beautiful, ornate and desirable in themselves; very often they are commonplace household items. It is their re-presentation in paint that makes them seem remarkable, and a source of special enjoyment.³

The aesthetic of still life painting is to make us notice the beauty of ordinary things, realize that we had never carefully looked at such thing before and appreciate how astonishing they were. In Zurbaran Francisco’s (1598-1664) work, the jugs look much more delicate than they used to be (Fig.1). In Sanchez Cotan’s (1560-1627) work (Fig.2), the cabbage also looks much more attractive than usual. These paintings change our aesthetic appreciation of ordinary things.

³ Erika Langmuir, ibid, p. 9.
The purpose of the above definition is to enrich that enjoyment by exploring the nature and history of still-life painting. The subject is more complex than it seems. It goes to the very heart of the relationship between art and reality, perception and representation, and touches on how artists view their role in society. Perhaps more than any other topic in the visual arts, it also requires definition: virtually everybody knows what kinds of things are represented in still life, but has difficulty explaining precisely what still life is.

In the 17th century in the Parisian Academy of Art, still life paintings were given the lowest rank, as they were regarded as mere recordings of inanimate objects, such as a vase of flowers; the leftovers of a meal on a table; books, documents and painter’s palettes - things that appeared to have been scattered around without thought.  

The themes of still life paintings were presented in the following categories:

(1) Kitchen scenes:

“The subject of food and supply was of particular interest to those who commissioned and bought these paintings. In the early modern period the “entire house”, as the household of

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the landed gentry, and the merchant classes of this time were often called, formed a self-contained, self-sufficient economic system which produced everything required for the needs of its members. Therefore, the production and preparation of food were the most important economic problems of society, which explains their central position in contemporary iconography and the spread of kitchen scenes still life. 

This shows that in the 16th and early 17th centuries, the biblical motifs of feasts were used by painters as pretext for reflection on consumer habits and attitudes towards the new wealth which resulted from improvements in agricultural production.

(2) Game still life:

Game still life was closely connected with kitchen scenes and pantry motifs of which they were in many ways a special form. While the social context of a kitchen is not always obvious and may be either the household of the landed gentry or the merchant Patrician classes (peasant households were very rarely depicted), the majority of early, large-format game still life reflected the interests and spheres of royalty and nobility. The hunt as an aristocratic privilege had only just begun to emerge at the beginning of early modern times.

There is no conceptual difference between the painting of fruit and flowers as ornament, the inclusion of still life details in figural works, and the painting of fruit and flowers in independent still life works. The factor that linked them was the common enterprise of imitating nature motifs, and the accuracy achieved was a measure of the artist’s mimetic skills. As a contemporary painter focusing on still life genre, the mode of classical still life fascinates me and provides me with an essential basis of creation. In this studio-based project I aim to explore potential developments of still life form through deconstructing the traditional still life form, and rebuilding a brand new structure of the still life.

I am particularly interested in industrial products, whilst traditionally most still life painters take natural things such as flowers, fruit and dead game as their theme. The industrial products found in my living environment, such as superannuated engines and rusted metals have become my main source of creative inspiration through their astonishing variety of forms and textures. Thus, in this project the industrial objects are used as expressive subject matter through the presentation of a new structure of still life.

In addition, based on the ambition of chasing the ultimate technique, which allows the creation of an almost-real visual effect to the audience, the concept of “illusion” has since the early 18th century, purported to be the goal of still life painting. This provides me with a direction.

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5 Norbert Schneider, ibid, p39.
6 Norbert Schneider, ibid, p51.
for the potential development of a new form. The concept of Illusion was a major part of the principle of judging still life works. Compared to other critics in the same period such as Jean-Baptiste Dubos (1670-1742) and Étienne La Font de Saint-Yenne (1688-1771), the criticism of the French philosopher and art critic Diderot (1713-1784) is generally considered to provide the most important data in the research of Chardin. He pointed out how the object in the painting appears to come out of the canvas and how the audience enjoy being tricked by the illusion, such as the appearance that the viewer can “hold” the neck of the bottle, “pare” the skin of the fruit and “taste” a piece of pie etc. This illusion leads the viewers into the picture and enables them to experience these things in their imagination. In other words, Diderot described how the illusory effect of ‘likeness’ highlights the physical characteristics of the items in the picture. To summarize, he described the primary value of still life painting as “almost real”.

The traditional still life form has two characteristics in its basic structure. Firstly, the subject of the picture is comprised of various natural things such as plants, dead game and animals or commonplace things such as kitchenware, bottles, vases and food. In my view, to generalize the above items, a conclusion can be drawn that the shapes and look of the items in the painting remain the same as they appear in actual daily life. Secondly, the arrangement of the subject matter closely resembles a scene from the real world. The objects in the painting are often arranged on a table, with all the items settled side by side or with some of them superimposed on the others. All of the objects followed physical rules and the role they should play in ordinary life. There was no correlation or interaction between them; they stayed in a permanent quiescent state. These two features provided me with further potential for developing a new structure of still life. I designed a new form in which these two features no longer exist. Also, from my point of view, the realism of the painting is seen as a method of contributing an illusion in order to achieve the ideal relationship between the audience and the artwork. In addition, Diderot prefers to introduce the illusion effect by emphasizing the touchable features. For example, he mentioned to “hold” the neck of the bottle or “pare” the skin of the fruit. This has inspired me to consider how the touchable features might be helpful in contributing to the illusion. This leads to a potential way in which to present the visual elements. My intention is to revive the goal of still life, to create an illusion with a new basic structure. Therefore, through reference to the concept of illusion and a new structure, this series of oil paintings explores new form that not only alters the objects in the painting from what they traditionally used to be, but also creates a new relationship and interaction between the objects, providing me with the possibility of giving a new interpretation to illusion logically, through a synthesis with a western approach, to the aesthetic expression of still life.

Furthermore, this project also investigates the aesthetic perspective of classical still life that has informed and inspired my artwork through researching the works of the artist and critic, Chardin, and the critic, Diderot.

During 18\textsuperscript{th} century France, Chardin was undoubtedly considered to be a special painter. His
accomplishments in still life painting resulted in him being considered the first artist to give independent value to this genre. An effective critic, Diderot also dedicated himself to exploring the aesthetic principle and standard of Chardin’s work in this genre. Their works have contributed the basic system for still life criticism. Therefore, in this project I attempt to reference these aesthetic ideas as my aesthetic basis, in order to develop my personal artistic language of still life and its’ formal possibilities.

The illusion as an ideal goal of still life

The history of the concept “illusion” can be traced back to the ancient Greek period. The most well-known example in art history is the competition between Greek painter Apelles (352-308 BC) and Zeuxis (479-323 BC). They compared each other’s work to find out who was the most successful creator of illusion. This admiration of illusion in still life painting has evolved over a long period of time. The description of illusion was usually presented as a record of a human act. In 1763, Diderot commented on Chardin’s work ‘Le Bocal d’Olives’ (Fig. 3):

In this painting the objects are so convincingly rendered that a viewer standing in front of the painting could be convinced that he or she can smell the scent of the wine, bite into the fruit or break off a piece of the bread.

This project will specifically focus on the interpretation of illusion as an expressive method and the audience’s reaction to viewing the illusion of still life.

Figure.3: Chardin, 1763, Le Bocal d’Olives, 71x98 cm, Oil on Canvas.
The reality and the imitation of still life

In the beginnings of western painting, when fine art was not used to celebrate religion or monarchical power, the painters and the audience judged painting according to how closely their work resembled the real scene. This was because representing nature was considered the original desire, deeply buried in human psychology. The realistic depiction of nature was the way they used to prove their art skill and show their understanding of nature through their inherent sense organs. In fact, humans as audience, have the ability to determine if a painting represents nature realistically enough or not without any training. That is why Diderot considers realism as the first important principle and notion of painting.

One of the most recognised still life artists is Chardin, who established the classical model of still life and defined the characteristics of reality remarkably well in his work. The art critic, Diderot, who is considered the most talented critic of the 18th century by modern researchers, confirmed Chardin’s contribution to the genre of still life. Diderot, himself, enabled art criticism to become a formal type of criticism and not just a report.7

For Diderot, the process of writing art criticism was the method through which we can learn to understand the artwork and also a way to clear the relationship between art and nature. In contrast to previous art critics who used the standards of the art academy to praise historical painting and ignore the value of still life painting, Diderot was deeply aware of the aesthetic characteristics of Chardin’s still life. By observing Chardin’s work, he began to seek different principles to critique the special effects in his work.

From 1753- 1771, as Chardin exhibited his still life works, Diderot also began to discuss Chardin’s still life paintings in the same period.8 Throughout his criticism, there are two key points of view in his writing. The first is regarding “Trompe-l’-oeil”, which means applying an almost real illusion to trick the viewer’s eyes. The second is “Technicite”, which refers to the painting skill that Chardin employed in his works. According to this, the main characteristics of still life could be shaped; firstly, the importance of the illusion effect and secondly, the excellent technique of the painter.9

In several of Chardin’s paintings such as ‘Chien Courant’ (Fig.4), ‘Lapin Mort avec Poire à Poudre et Gibecière’ (Fig.5), ‘Le Jeune Dessinateur’ (Fig.6), ‘Panier de Pêches et Raisin Blanc et Noir avec Rafraîchissoir et Verre à Pied’ (Fig.7), Diderot commented in 1759 that:

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9 Collins, Manet and Chardin:Artistic Affiliation and the Problem of Frenchness in Painting, 1858-1870, M A. diss, University, 1997, pp.64.
We always saw the nature and truth. You can hold the neck of the bottle and take it up if you are thirsty. The pears and grapes raise the appetite of the audience and attract them to take it.  

In this paragraph, Diderot referred to the nature and truth in the painting, regarding these two features as the principles of painting. We can be sure that the “truth” referred to here is the level of the realistic effect presented to the audience. The item depicted in the painting is the illusion of the real one, and Diderot referred to this with the term “almost real”; “lifelike”. In addition to these terms, he included responses from the audience who attempted to “hold” or “cut” the illusion in the painting to prove how the realistic effect was tricking them. These records demonstrate Diderot’s appreciation of the realistic effects achieved by Chardin in his

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work.

The principle Diderot used to evaluate a still life painting was based on how it matched the appearance of nature and if it achieved a realistic effect, which was sufficient to trick the viewer’s eyes. He wrote the following criticism in 1763:

There are several works of Chardin, most of them depicted kitchenware and food. The objects in the painting were depicted in an extremely realistic way. Regarding that they are depicted realistically enough to trick the audience, they can be considered to be totally the same as the natural scene.¹¹

Diderot describes how Chardin employs illusion in his work, by creating objects which appear to extend in front of the surface of the canvas. He describes how objects seem to come out of the picture in order to emphasise the primary value of still life painting as being “almost real”. At the same time, he pointed out that it is entirely of no difference to the audience whether they are experiencing the real scene or the illusion in Chardin’s work.

Diderot believed that still life painters should try to observe shape, color, light, shadow and structure carefully in order to represent it on their canvas.¹² He believed that the only way to represent the beauty of nature in painting was to observe the object directly.¹³ His point of view clearly favors depicting the model in an extremely realistic way. Although the subject of Chardin’s work is quite different from mine, the advantage of producing an ‘almost real’ effect also works with my subject matter. It makes the image appear utterly convincing to the audience.

On the other hand, Chardin also inspired my use of models when composing a painting. According to Chardin’s friend Charles-Nicolas Cochin (1715-1790), Chardin differed from other artists who worked from the imagination to compose their artwork. When developing a scene which included several models, he would ask his friends to be the model, positioning them in different poses and locations, and would then draw them into his picture. On the contrary, most of the artists of that time dealt with this through their understanding and imagination, which was learnt from the art studio.¹⁴ This approach seems similar to his process of creating the still life painting. He settled the subject in front of him and tried to observe it and expressed his ideas through the visual observation of his models. This historical description of the use of life models to create an illusion of reality motivated me to adopt a similar approach to painting from observation in this project.

¹³ Diderot, Salons, ed. By Jean Seznec and Jean Adhemar, vol. II 1765, pp. 75-82.
The 17th century artist, Jan Vermeer (1632-1675) is renowned for his sophisticated use of illusion. Vermeer’s masterpiece ‘L’allegoria della pittura’. (Fig.8) is considered by critic Koning-Sberger to be his most complex work.\(^\text{15}\) It includes numerous metaphors: the female model wearing a stylish dress symbolizes fame or Clio (In Greek mythology, Clio is the muse of history. Like all the muses, she is a daughter of Zeus. She represents Diderot’s concern with the accomplishment of Dutch art).\(^\text{16}\) The map in the background represents the seventeen provinces in Vermeer’s home country, Holland. The laurel on the canvas symbolizes beauty and immortality, the horn represents fame, and the book held by the model and the mask on the table stress the importance of literature and sculpture as forms of artistic expression.\(^\text{17}\) In addition, the painting employs an interesting method of illusion – the use of a drape set on the left side of the canvas. This arrangement was made to match the shape of the frame, which was constructed in the shape of a window. As a result, a viewer standing in front of this painting is made to feel as though they are looking at the scene through a window.\(^\text{18}\) Vermeer’s arrangement inspired me to consider the fact that not only realistically painted objects have the ability to trick the audience, but clever arrangements can also emphasize the effect of illusion. I adopted a similar compositional device in my work ‘The Babel Tower II’ (Fig.9) in which I encircled the painting with a depiction of “realistic” steel bars, creating a fake frame around the edges. (Fig.10). I attempted to convince the audience that the frame was constructed from steel bars, although in fact, they were painted by hand. In summary, Vermeer’s influence on my work is twofold: Firstly, rendering objects to create an illusion of the “real” is important in a still life painting. Secondly, illusion is not only created by a detailed depiction of objects, but also by considering the frame of the canvas. In ‘L’allegoria della pittura’, Vermeer’s method was to activate the frame as part of the illusion. He achieved this by depicting the drapery on the left side to match a window-shape frame, and, importantly, by making the scale of the whole painting and drapery similar to that of a real window. As a result, the audience would find it difficult to discern whether the drapery is real or part of the painting. Through an analysis of this artwork, I realized that scale is a crucial aspect to creating illusion. Although I do not literally consider the frame in every one of my artworks, I do consider it important for the scale of the objects in my painting to imitate the scale of real objects in order to trick the audience.

\(^\text{16}\) Hurley, Ut Pictura Poesis-Vermeer’s Challenge, Fall 1989, p.351.
\(^\text{17}\) Hurley, op. cit, p.351
The relationship between illusion and the sense organs

Overall, while Diderot affirmed the value of illusion in still life, he equally affirmed the impression of the sense organs. This had been clearly expressed in the case of viewing still life. He considered that there is no difference between the painter and creator (God) when viewing the painting from a far enough distance while the viewer believes they are looking at the real scene because they are unable to notice the brush marks and identify what they see as the illusion of the painting. In other words, because of our sense organs, the illusion as the replacement of nature in the painting can also be seen as nature itself. This means that we can trust nothing but the impression from our sense organs. If we follow the definition of reality from the philosopher in Diderot’s citation, all things we see in the painting no matter whether it is the space or the

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Figure.8: Vermeer, 1662-65, L’allegoria della pittura,
Oil on Canvas, 120x100 cm, Museum of Art History,
Vienna

Figure.9: YuLun Wu, 2012, The Babel Tower II, Oil on Canvas, 200x90 cm, Beijing.

Figure.10: Example of the fake frame.

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objects, are equally real things. On the other hand, in this citation Diderot also states that when the audience views the painting from a far enough distance, they wouldn’t be able to tell if the picture they have seen was the real thing or just an illusion. In this situation Chardin could be regarded as the creator of the world. Chardin, in some way, created a world in his painting, which provides the audience with totally the same visual impression they would have in the real world. According to Diderot, the natural scene and the illusion of the painting is rendered the same by the sense organs. Diderot’s views on this issue have contributed to my own desire to present my works in a realist manner.

Diderot believes that our sense of the beauty in painting comes from the experience we gain through our sense organs. It can be understood why Diderot paid so much attention to the experience from the sense organs in his critical writing. From translation through the sense organs, nature is considered as the model for artists to imitate and present. Because all of the experience of nature is perceived by the sense organs, it seems there is no objective reality; the status of the ‘almost real’ illusion hence has become important.

The most creative aspect of Diderot’s criticism is that he considered that sight is not the only means by which humans identify the reality of a painting. He prefers to discuss the artwork from a multi-perception angle. By also emphasizing the “touchable” quality at the same time in order to stress the physical characteristics of the models, he believes that the “almost real” status would be even better expressed. In conclusion, according to Diderot’s point of view, the sense of touch is much more reliable than the sense of sight when we identify the object. As a result, I have tried to emphasize the texture of my models to help contribute to the illusion of my work. The use of a rough texture does make the model look more touchable and vivid than before. (Fig.11, 12)

Figure 11: Example of rough texture. Figure 12: Example of rough texture.

20 Crocker Lester, Diderot’s chaotic order: approach to synthesis, Paris: Librairie Armand Colin pp. 52-53.
21 Crocker Lester, Ibid, pp. 52.
22 Diderot, Oeuvres. Tome I, Philosophie, pp. 171.
Conclusion

Overall, in Diderot’s criticism, there are two points in the discussion of the relationship between illusion and the sense organs. Firstly, the illusion itself can be seen as an effect of experience. As a result, the most important thing for the artist is to find the method to make the sense organs identify their works as a real scene. Secondly, the characteristic of appearing to be “touchable” is the other possibility that contributes to the illusion and may have the potential to assist the sight to achieve a more persuasive illusion.

The rediscovery of nature

This project forms an extension to my earlier exploration of still life form. Due to the influence of the aesthetics of classical still life, and my interest in exploring a new form of still life, I began producing a new series of oil paintings that took modern industrial products such as superannuated engines or metal parts as an expressive subject and re-established a new structure of composition, releasing the object from its traditional presentation on the table surface. I did this to explore the possibility of form before I commenced this research. By means of discovering and creating varied compositions and textures of objects including such things as soldered marks; superannuated machine parts; the appearance of objects floating in space, I attempted to reflect my own sensibilities, that is, making my models look alive. Hence, I discarded the traditional composition of the picture, trying to alter the texture, shape and also the space of the picture to highlight the fascinating characteristics of my models. As a result, there are some expressive results that have never occurred in still life painting before, such as the mark of a smear over the surface of a plank; the scratches on the surface of an object; the burnt border of an object or a soft object punctured by another sharp object. Even the spatial arrangement differs markedly from traditional still life; there is no table used as a platform to carry the objects in the composition. The objects themselves seem to no longer have to be carried as well. They are arranged in the picture according to their relationship to each other. Even gravity doesn’t exist anymore (Fig.13, 14).
The starting point of this project derives from observation and research of classical still life. I was attracted by the wonderful color, light, shadow and delicate depiction. However, the surviving classical still life in European art usually represents subjects such as fruit and other provisions, and sometimes includes live game, poultry and hunting dogs. They were called xenia, “presents to a guest”\(^{23}\), from the Greek xenos, meaning either, “foreigner, foreign guest” or “host”. Vitruvius, the Latin first-century BC writer on architecture and architectural decoration, explains how xenia received their name:

> Xenia is the ancient Greek concept of hospitality, the generosity and courtesy shown to those who are far from home or associates of the person bestowing guest-friendship. The rituals of hospitality created and expressed a reciprocal relationship between guest and host expressed in both benefits, such as the giving of gifts to each party. This is why artists called pictures representing things sent to guest xenia.\(^{24}\)

Because of the purpose of classical still life and although various objects have been depicted in the picture, the subject is still limited in some way. Most still life artists tend to select kitchenware, food and flowers. Moreover, the classical still life artists regard the object as merely a scene of daily life in which the objects are in a static situation, but never present other actions such as posing like a living thing or altering the original appearance. In addition, the categories of subject in classical still life painting represent the scene, life style and aesthetics of ancient times well, but are no longer precise in presenting contemporary society. This provides me with several potential possibilities to create a new structure of still life. As a person living in a highly industrial

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\(^{24}\) Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, VI,7, 4
society, the scenes I am in contact with everyday are markedly different to those depicted in classical still life. The products of modern industrialization are more familiar to me, which spurs my interest in attempting to present them. In fact, industrial products have prevailed in daily life within my home country of Taiwan and the progress of urbanization in Taiwan is growing remarkably. Almost 70% of Taiwan’s citizens live in metropolitan cities. Compared to the background of classical still life painting, the life style in Taiwan is far removed from nature. In my view, the scenes of flowers, fruit, vegetables and other foodstuffs; pots and pans, tableware, books, musical instruments - in short, objects of all kinds that constituted typical subject matter in previous still-life painting cannot symbolize my own living environment anymore. On the contrary, industrial products have replaced the domination of nature in my visual aesthetic.

Therefore, the movement or shift from traditional subject matter to industrial subject matter provides me with the potential to explore a new contemporary form. When the subject of still life has changed in order to match the idea and aesthetics of modern life, it could be applied to the exploration of a new structure of still life. As a result, the direction of exploration could involve the different subject material, the change of color tone and atmosphere; the alteration of the subject material or the relationships and dialogue between the objects. These concepts can all be included in the process of creating a new form of still life and present a contrast between the new form and the previous work through reference to the research and analysis of the history of still life.

**Modern subject matter in still life**

Still life is a form that remains wedded to the notion of truth to things that can best be apprehended through the senses: form, color, texture, the memory of flavours and fragrances. Culturally determined like all art forms, it is also one of the rare means by which art can give culture the slip, to engage as immediately with reality as is possible for human beings. When culture becomes especially oppressive, still life offers a means of peace. In the history of painting, it is common to see such an aesthetic application of classical still life; the artists were trying to adjust the composition, the shape, the contrast of light and dark, the arrangement of each color and the depiction of the texture together, and then balance them in a picture(Fig.15,16). From my research in to classical still life, it can be said that to present the wonderful balance of various visual elements is a major accomplishment of the progress in still life.

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25 Erika Langmuir, ibid, p. 89.
For example, in classical still life, whatever their level of illusion, *xenia* in private villas celebrate the riches of the countryside and its rustic pleasures. Such as Pieter Cornaelisz van Ryck’s large-format kitchen scene from 1604.\(^{27}\) (Fig.17) These messages were expressed through the arrangement of the objects. To sum up, the function of the object in the still life is to reflect the life mode, which might relate to the environment, technology, religion or any other things, which can typically enable the audience to gain a familiarity of the time. In others words, despite the creation of a harmonious visual effect, the ideal goal of still life is to express the characteristics of a particular period of time.

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\(^{27}\) Norbert Schneider, ibid, p. 40.
In this research project, the objects depicted in still life provide an important basis from which I can take the first step towards establishing a new interpretation of still life. I decided to present some parts of modern industrial products as the prime element in my work, as they can be considered to be a typical object that is expressive of modern life. On the other hand, the tendency of using a specific category of objects also reveals the personal aspect of the subject. In my case, I believe that the influence of industrial products has significantly changed our lives. This is how I regard and intend to express the contemporary subject matter in a new form of still life. Thus, in this project the subject matter, consisting of parts of industrial products as the common representative of the highly industrialized modern life were displayed. These objects play the leading role in the forming structure and embody the features of the modern environment in my oil paintings through a series of developments according to my own aesthetic experience and understanding of harmonious visual effect.

In fact, as described in Chapter 2, there is a trend in selecting the objects of classical still life. It is reasonable to consider that the artists of a particular time represent their period in an accurate and precise way. However, things are different nowadays. The subject matter, the atmosphere, the color and light, no longer match the visual experience and aesthetic of our life. As a result, the original purpose of classical still life reflects nothing now; the language and metaphor they use are not understandable in the modern culture. It could be concluded that besides the accomplishment of the basic principle of harmonious visual effect such as composition, color, contrast of light and dark, or the delicate painting technique which might still be applied nowadays, other concerns such as the theme and method of expression of still life should be renewed.

Throughout history, there are a great number of artists who have expressed through their work, a concern about the circumstances in which they live. They identify and employ subject matter that was not only contemporary, but also derived from their particular cultural base and that was second nature to them both personally and as an artist. For example, by the middle of the 17th century the Dutch had built by far the largest mercantile fleet in Europe, with more ships than all the other states combined, and their economy, based mainly on maritime commerce, gave them a dominant position in European trade. This progress is based on the development of astronomy and geography. Vermeer as a Dutch artist of that time, celebrated this achievement in his works ‘The Astronomer’ (Fig.18) and ‘The Geographer’ (Fig.19). From these works we can gain an understanding of how Dutch society respected science in the 17th century.

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Political position can also be the subject matter of an artist’s concern about society. In 18th century France, Jacques-Louis David (1748-1825), as an active supporter of the French Revolution, was very enthusiastic about political activities. In 1793, David’s friend Marat was assassinated for political reasons. He hence completed ‘The Death of Marat’ (Fig.20), which is considered to be David’s most famous painting.30 Another work that David was commissioned to paint is ‘The Coronation of Napoleon in Notre Dame’ (Fig.21). In this work we are able to witness a great moment in the period in which he lived.

From the late 19th century, the Industrial Revolution and the World Wars brought about significant shifts in society, government and technology, which transformed everyday life both in and outside the home. Art and artists also underwent major changes, abandoning traditional subject matter, such as religion and mythology, and embraced topics which addressed the concerns of society at the time. These shifts in society manifested in styles we know as Impressionism, Symbolism, Expressionism, Cubism, Dada, Abstraction, Social

Realism, Pop Art, Op Art, Minimalism and Photorealism.\(^{31}\)

French Impressionists such as Pierre Auguste Renoir (1841-1919) and Claude Monet (1840-1926) developed new techniques to express modern life in Paris such as the bars, cafes, dancehalls and train stations depicted in ‘Bal du Moulin de la Galette’ (Fig.22) and ‘La Gare Saint-Lazare’ (Fig.23).

In addition, Impressionists also responded to the development of photography and its optical theories. Photography exerted a powerful influence on the Impressionists who expanded theories of colour and tonal contrast. In particular, the Impressionists represented light into warm tones and translated shadows into cool tones. Its influence soon spread to other Impressionist artists as can be seen in paintings such as Seurat’s (1859-1891) ‘A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte’ (Fig.24) and Van Gogh’s (1853-1890) ‘The Café Terrace on the Place du Forum, Arles, at Night,’ (Fig.25)

Monet, Renoir, Van Gogh and Seurat show us cafés, popular countryside resorts of late 19th-century Paris and also how they respond to the optical theories of that time.

In the early 20th century, Cubism emerged as the first form of abstract art in the West. It evolved in response to a world that was changing with unprecedented speed. Cubism was an attempt by artists to revitalize the tired traditions of Western art which they believed had run their course. It challenged conventional forms of representation, such as perspective, which had dominated painting since the Renaissance. It was a new way of seeing which reflected the modern age. Cubists such as Pablo Picasso (1881-1973) and Georges Braque (1882-1963) deconstructed and reconstructed objects using many fragmented pieces. They, with many Cubist painters, rejected the inherited concept that art should copy nature and that they should adopt the traditional techniques of perspective, modelling and foreshortening. Instead, they emphasized the two-dimensionality of the canvas by reducing and fracturing objects into geometric forms and by realigning them within a shallow space. Objects were analyzed, broken up and reassembled into abstract forms. Instead of depicting a subject from one viewpoint, a multitude of viewpoints were observed. By putting many vertical, horizontal and diagonal lines over a two-dimensional picture plane, it avoided the perspective and realism that previous artists had used to create the illusion of three-dimensions.

There is a clear connection between the emergence of Cubism and scientific breakthroughs of that time. Relativity explained the fact that in order to observe an event, it is necessary to observe the other events which have influenced this event as well. Because an event is usually a result of the influence of several events, it couldn’t be understood when considered in isolation. This resulted in a new idea: when you attempt to describe an event, you must describe all relevant parts of it. This new idea inspired Cubist artists such as Picasso and Braque, who in their paintings began to represent their subject matter from various angles and multiple views. Therefore the emergence of Cubism could be considered as the response of certain artists to new developments in the period in which they lived.
After World War II, American artists continued to investigate Modernity and the effects of industrialization. Pop-Art artists such as Andy Warhol (1928-1987) and Roy Lichtenstein (1923-1997); painters such as Don Eddy (1944-), Richard Estes (1932-) and Ralph Goings (1928-) depicted the rapid pace of the developing metropolis in their work.

The development of Pop-Art in the 1950s, represented the characteristics of the social environment even more directly. It presented things that had never been considered as art material before into the Fine Art field such as the soup can; Coca-Cola bottle; industrial products and portraits of politicians and celebrities to symbolize the joy and routine of the mundane lifestyle in America.

In his well-known masterpiece, ‘Campbell’s Soup Can’, Pop artist Andy Warhol filled the whole picture with two hundred Campbell’s soup cans. (Fig.26) Warhol painted things he held close at heart. He enjoyed eating Campbell’s soup, had a taste for Coca-Cola, loved money and admired movie stars. They all became subjects of his work. His daily lunches in his studio usually consisted of Campbell’s Soup and Coca-Cola, and thus his inspiration came from seeing the empty cans and bottles accumulate on his desk.32

He claimed that:

> What’s great about this country is America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you can know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good.33

He also said:

> I love America and these are some comments on it. The image is a statement of the symbols of the harsh impersonal products and brash materialistic objects on which America is built today. It is a projection of everything that can be bought and sold, the practical but important symbols that sustain us.34

From above statements, we can surmise that Warhol agreed with rampant consumer culture. For him, everyone participated in American culture through consumerism.35

Cartoons and comics were also a typical part of mundane culture in the 1960s, as they were quite familiar to the general public. Another famous Pop artist, Roy Lichtenstein embraced the characteristics of cartoons and comics. His early appropriation of the aesthetics of American popular culture made him integral to the development of Pop Art. His most recognizable series, ‘Whaam’ (Fig.27) evolved from imagery drawn from advertising images, war-time comics and pin-up portraits, as well as traditional painting genres such as landscapes, still life and interiors. He constructed his work using a sophisticated strategy of image selection, reinterpretation and redefinition. His work explored clichés, icons, the ersatz and the manufactured. He developed a principle that became a potent formula: an ability to identify over-used cultural clichés and to repackage them as monumental remixes. Through this experiment, he brought the comic-style aesthetic into the realm of fine art. Furthermore, his subject matter and technique made his work fashionable and appetizing to both refined and popular tastes.

Don Eddy’s (1944-) work ‘Gorevic Silver’ (Fig.28) explores our fascination with new modern materials such as mirrors, steel and glass and the Western world’s obsession with excess. From his experience, the reflection from the glass and silver products in storefront windows
was a typical scene of that time. American art historian Virginia A. Bonito (1947-) has indicated that the apparent ‘reflection’ in the glass countertop on the left is a mirror image of the top left shelf, which Eddy arbitrarily flipped. The audience suddenly finds themselves, like Alice in a magical world, where although their normal reference points are no longer useful, they are fascinated by curiosities and complexities. In Eddy’s view, this is exactly the situation of people experiencing a modern city like New York.

Richard Estes’ paintings also capture the dynamism of late 20th century cities through the manipulation of traditional perspectival systems, employing multiple vanishing points and transparent and reflective surfaces (metal and glass), which enable the viewer to read complex, multiple viewpoints at once (Fig.29). In terms of replicating pictorial surface and mastering illusion, Estes could be considered to be the contemporary equivalent of Canaletto (1697-1768), Bellotto (1721-1780) and Guardi (1712-1793).

Ralph Goings, an American photorealist painter, responded to the impact of industrialization and American material culture. He depicted diner accessories including salt and pepper shakers, ketchup jars, mustard and relish containers and sugar bowls (Fig.30), which he appropriated from advertising and daily life. His works remind us of the classic still life compositions of Chardin and Braque which were created in their own cultural and socio-economic context.

From these American artists, who worked in a similar time period and environment, we can identify common characteristics in their work – modern city views, mundane lifestyles and popular culture had become their new subject matter. From the above examples, it can also be seen that there were a number of modern artists who aimed to represent what they have observed in their environment through their work. They provided the views of the 17th century Dutch, 18-19th century France and 20th century America. This illustrates that the trend in the progress of still life strongly refers to the life style of the moment.

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Figure 28: Don Eddy, 1976, Gorevic Silver, Acrylic on Canvas, New York.

Figure 29: Richard Estes, 1967, Call-Box, Acrylic on Canvas, New York.

Figure 30: Ralph Goings, 1994, Relish, 111x162 cm, Oil on Canvas, New York.
Therefore, in my opinion, not only the modern subject but also the particular tendency of choosing the subject could be the major element of modern still life. For example, I am interested in issues concerning the industrial impact on the environment and also the texture and shape of industrial products. So, instead of presenting all categories of the ordinary modern product, I focused my concentration on one category and made it play the leading role in my work to present my concern of contemporary society. In my works, the industrial products have been composed as living things; the badly rusting surface also implies their living features. It shows a strong contrast with organic objects from nature in the picture. Thus, my arrangement presents the audience with the issues of industry in our environment. There are two reasons involved. Firstly, the objects I select are limited to a particular field such as disused machines, rusted engines and steel wire or outmoded computer monitors. Secondly, I usually combine them with some organic objects such as dry flowers, moths or even parts of human bodies. This has shaped the ordinary objects into a non-ordinary form by a meaningful artificial operation. The meaningful operation here means that I place things together in a picture in order to present my ideas, even though they wouldn’t necessarily be placed together in our usual daily experience. For example, there are usually no steel wires around a human’s hand; also the ears of wheat are not usually placed on a rusty metal piece. But when I set them together, it presents the relationship between those objects and implies the industrial issue I want to talk about; the industrial products can be a threat to us, and we are so fragile in this environment, as illustrated in the image below where a human hand is surrounded by a sharp barbed wire (fig.31,32).

The method of applying metaphor has separated my works from previous modern still life such as Photorealism and Hyperrealism. Although I basically keep the almost-real effect and the notion of responding to the environment I live in, unlike Photorealism and Hyperrealism, the views I present in each of my works are not visible in the real world. In other words, by building an artificial subject which contains metaphors, instead of directly responding to the appearance of my circumstances, I choose to present my personal understanding of it. For example, I am cynical about the current tendency of building un-naturally large sized structures which might cause the destruction of the natural environment and animal habitat, hence I have named my work with some indication such as “The Babel Tower” and “The Song for Bucher”.

Figure.31: YuLunWu,2011, 
The barbed wire, 53x45cm, Oil on Canvas, 
Figure.32: YuLunWu,2012, The Maple, 70x72 cm, Oil on Canvas, Beijing.
Secondly, I do not utilize the traditional still life structure, which settles all objects in the picture just as they appeared in ordinary life. Neither do I just copy a part of a scene from daily life in the way that Don Eddy, Richard Estes and Ralph Goings did. Instead, I deconstruct the structure of traditional still life and the 1960s modern still life works. The reason why I chose to discuss their works is because their choice of subject matter has elements in common with mine; we all chose in our work to respond to a society that has been highly affected by industry. However, I want to develop my own form for this subject matter. For example, in my work, there is no table in the picture to carry the objects. Also, the objects in the picture do not just lie on a table or reflect an everyday scene. In contrast, I free my subject matter from this convention, which enables me to position objects in any possible way, such as floating in space (fig. 33); or to fabricate each object together according to my draft (fig. 34). So, with these two conditions, I have aimed to establish a new personal and modern still life language, which differs from the long tradition of classical still life.

Figure. 33: YuLunWu, 2011, The Bud, Oil on Canvas, 100x55 cm, Taiwan.

Figure. 34: YuLunWu, 2012, The Babel II, 200x90 cm,
The Industrial Revolution was the transition to new manufacturing processes in the period from approximately 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840. This transition included going from hand production methods to machines; new chemical manufacturing and iron production processes; improved efficiency of water power; the increasing use of steam power and the development of machine tools. It began in Great Britain and within a few decades had spread to Western Europe and the United States of America.

The earliest use of the term "Industrial Revolution" seems to be a letter of 6 July 1799 by French envoy Louis-Guillaume Otto (1753-1817), announcing that France had entered the race to industrialize. After the industrial revolution, there was a rapid change in social and economic organization resulting from the replacement of hand tools by machines and power tools and the development of large-scale industrial production. This progress enabled modern industrialized countries to establish their economic development more easily. Although it is only about 200 years from the beginning of industrial revolution till now, the amount of industrial products created by humans during this period was several times more than that produced over the previous one thousand years. In economical aspect, the industrial revolution is the most important event in the history of humanity since the domestication of animals and plants. It allowed modern people to have increased material wealth and an improved life style than before.

As technological and economic progress gained momentum with the increasing adoption of steam-powered boats, ships and railways, the large-scale manufacture of machine tools and the increasing use of steam powered factories in about 1870, the standard of living condition significantly increased. For example, In Britain, food supply had been increasing and prices falling before the Industrial Revolution due to better agricultural practices; however, population was increasing as well, advances in agriculture soon led to an increase in population, which again strained food and other resources, limiting increases in per capita income. This condition was finally overcome by industrialization; the use of machines in agriculture has lowered the requirement of labor power.

Industrial products have remained in an extremely close relationship with humans since they were created. They are everywhere in our environment and affect the way we live. For example, machines are now used to plough and sow, where previously it would have been done by hand. Machines have enabled humans not only to save a lot of time but also release themselves from heavy physical labor. This freed people to engage in other kinds of activities such as music, opera, science or other entertainment. This brought about changes in life style and the constitution of society. As a result of the significant improvement in the quality of life and positive effects such as the development of cars, trains and ships that extend the convenience of transportation, humans

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increasing rely on industrial products. The industrial products not only replaced the old, natural ones, on the other hand, some tools which did not even exist in the past were created as a result of human need. It is a fact that industrial products have contributed to an entirely different world from pre-industrial times.\footnote{David Lewin, Bruce Kaufman, \textit{Advances in Industrial and Labor Relations}, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2012, p.323} However, there were also negative effects that people soon noticed. Some new issues arose which closely followed the convenience it brought to us. Take the environment for example. The expansion of industry has compressed the natural living habitat.\footnote{Clarence Darrow, \textit{Industrial Conspiracies}, Otto Newman, Portland, 1912, p.32} The products of industry generated an entirely new relationship with the natural world. Horses have largely been replaced by cars; watchdogs have largely been replaced by security systems; and cows are attached to robotic milking devices to suck fluids from their bodies. From the above examples, it can be seen that the natural world has been compressed, replaced or cooperates with industrial development.\footnote{Peter N Stearns, \textit{The Industrial Revolution in World History}, Westview Press, 2012, pp.192-193} Therefore, as far as I am concerned, the emergence of industrial products can be considered as a threat to the natural life and the environment. To express this concern, I started to compose scenes of a combination of industrial products, making them pose as though they were alive, in order to imply the role they had played in modern world. Then gradually, some living things began to be introduced, to respond to the major aim of expressing the relationship between industrial products and living things.

In the beginning, I composed the basic shape, composition and perspective of the work in the draft. Then according to my draft, I utilized various materials such as metal bars, steel wire and engines to build models, which were much bigger than traditional still life in size. Despite the size, the way all of the elements I select are combined, aims to contribute to a meaningful shape, such as the famous skyscraper, Taipei 101 in Taiwan, which is a symbol of a highly industrialized society. Unlike the traditional way in which all of the items were composed separately in the picture, the relationship between each item in my work has been bonded together by steel wire and glue, as I consider that industrial products would have a more aggressive stance in the composition and steel wire and glue can be used to bond objects together. In the process of painting, I spend a great deal of time depicting the texture of the industrial products, in order to show the feeling of cold non-humanity, hardness and sharpness; all typical characteristics of these objects.

In the paintings that followed, I aimed to extend investigate more specific influences of industry. In many cases, plants and animals do actually co-exist with industrial matter as much as a human may do. The difference between their situation and that of the humans is that the plants and animals rarely benefit from the industrial products they live with, whereas the benefits and convenience usually lies with the human.\footnote{Giovanni Dosi, \textit{Economic Organization, Industrial Dynamics and Developments: Selected Essays}, Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd, 2012, p.211} Industrial devices don’t always offer a better quality of life for plants and animals. Hence, I have depicted the negative impact on the lives of plants and animals in this series of works.
Related Artists

During the late twentieth century, the new theme of still life has developed into an important genre. A number of outstanding artists present a modern style and entirely different quality to traditional still life paintings in their work. This provides me with excellent examples from which to explore new still life forms. I am particularly interested in the work of the Chinese artists Leng-Jun and Shi-Chong.

Although these artists’ motives differ from mine, the underlying rationale for their work offers additional inspiration for me in this research project. For example, Leng-Jun’s critical position towards industrialization and concern about the environment; Shi-Chong’s use of various materials and the form of a large stage setting. Additionally, both artist’s expressive use of realism; the observation of the delicate texture of an object and the use of a cold color tone which closely relates to modern visual experience more than a traditional color tone, are all qualities that have informed my work. Leng-Jun’s works presented me with further possibilities through his objective depiction, which resembles a photographic image and his attention to texture. This is due to his personal motive: reflecting the modern industrial environment through emphasizing the characteristics of the industrial products in order to express and exaggerate the differences from organic life. Finally, Shi-Chong’s use of a large stage setting; use of various materials and his exploration of a metaphoric language in his works have also contributed to developments within my own work.

Leng-Jun (1963–)

Leng-Jun was born in China in Hubei province. He studied Fine Arts at Wuhan Education College in Hubei province from 1980 to 1984. After graduation, he was employed in the Painting Department. His work focuses on super-realist still life. His works are based on traditional skills however, unlike other realist painters of that time, he insisted his works had to be done in an almost real effect. This has led to some criticism from other artists who claimed that the painting shouldn’t be depicted in as realistic a manner as photography. However, his extremely detailed depictions provide us with a clear expression of his personal themes and style.

From 1990s Leng-Jun began producing a series of still life paintings that show a highly realistic visual effect and critical position that allowed his excellent technique to play an integral role in the theme of environmental concern. Leng-Jun’s works express a concern for contemporary issues in still life genre. In the past, most still life artists introduced a moral metaphor in order to educate the audience, with the idea expressed in an obscure way while the artists paid great attention to presenting the gorgeous visual effects. Leng-Jun, on the other hand, expressed the theme of contemporary issues as the major concern of his works. Each element of his paintings was
determined by the issue he intended to express and not merely as meaningless decoration. For this reason, the structure and composition of his works seems much more concise than traditional still life both in its visual image and metaphor. Leng-Jun attempts to create strong first impressions on viewers through the use of bold, and simplified compositions that depict a few objects rather than the traditional method of including many objects. In traditional still life, the artists were trying to incorporate as many objects as they can to enrich the picture. On the contrary, Leng-Jun believes that his work would be much more concentrated and powerful through ensuring there were no meaningless objects in the picture.

Through his outstanding painting skills and his alternative idea about the object arrangement in still life, his works create a concise and almost-real effect, simultaneously giving the impression of sensuous and organic associations. His work commences as a basic idea from which he then starts to select some related materials, based on the available materials to reconsider how the model would be shaped. In the other words, the artist had to build whole the specific model before the painting work starts. (Fig.35)(Fig.36) With this process, the contents have been selected to match the concept the artist wants to present. This provides a possible way to discuss modern issues rather than traditional concerns.47

![Image removed due to copyright restrictions](image.png)

Figure.35: Leng-Jun, 1992, The Scene of the World vol.1, Oil on Canvas, Beijing.

47 Liou-Tzun, 100 Chinese Classical Oil Paintings, Baihua Literature and Art Publishing House, 2006, pp. 298-299
With further manipulation of the models, such as the construction of a world map out of steel bars and concrete, and the placement of several children’s toys which have been pressed in to a flat shape, these works are further transformed into a refined modern form endowed with the capability to express contemporary concerns. Although Leng-Jun’s works present a synthesis of photographic work and modern sculptural form, this doesn’t mean that he discards the emotional part such as his strong concern about society. He has considered how he presents the model most appropriately through his painting technique. He evokes the sense of touch by emphasizing the textures of the industrial materials, which helps to express his perspective on the role industrial products play in the contemporary world. Therefore, the emotionless visual effect doesn’t mean that the artist denies personal passion in the painting process indeed, this is exactly the emotional feeling he wants to present on the theme of industrial issues. The idea of presenting the model through a motionless attitude and the interest in industrial issues in civilization has led me to consider that the still life form could present a potential way of integrating contemporary issues with realistic painting skills.

Furthermore, another notable point of Leng-Jun’s work is his use of a computer printer. (Fig.37) In the process of developing his works, there was a period where he was choosing to put the model in the printer and scan it instead of taking a photo of it as in his previous works. After the scanning, he used a needle and ink to paint on the paper he printed out. These works are categorized under mixed media but not painting. In his opinion, his aim is to explore different methods and tools in his creative process. However, these works have also presented me with the possibility to re-consider the space in still life. Therefore, I compared the space in Leng-Jun’s work and traditional still life. The space in traditional still life was always set in a particular corner of a house such as the kitchen or living room. Whatever the place was, the traditional still life artists gave it a clear description or provided hints to point out the location that the still life objects were set in. This arrangement shows that for the traditional still life work, the objects and the space in which they were located were inseparable and integral. However, in Leng-Jun’s computer printer series of work, information

Figure 36: Leng-Jun, 1993, *The Scene of the World vol.3*, Oil on Canvas, Beijing.
about the space was missing. There was no clue or hint of where the objects were located, and the visual effect was even better. Because of the lack of information on the background, the audience wouldn’t be distracted to focus on areas other than the detail and the textural effect on the object. Hence, the illusion looks stronger. Leng-Jun seemed less interested in the effect of simple backgrounds, and discontinued this series. However, this has provided me with an idea to explore the space in still life in this project.

Figure.37: Leng-Jun, 2000, The Faucet, Multiple Materials, Beijing.

Shi-Chong (1963-)

Shi-Chong, a famous oil painting artist in China, was born in Hubei province. He graduated from the Oil Painting Department of the Hubei Institute of Fine Arts in 1987. After graduation, he was employed in the college to teach oil painting. He is now teaching in the Painting Department of the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsing-Hua University.

In his early period, Shi-Chong was a traditional oil painter. Then he became attracted to Expressionism which emerged in the early 20th century. Expressionism refers to artists who prefer to express their inner feeling rather than represent the appearance of the subject. As a result, they usually exaggerate the characteristics of the subject or transfer them to an abstract form to express their emotions. Most of the emotions in Expressionism were fear or depression, so the positive theme is rarely seen. Expressionist influence on Shi-Chong came through in his paintwork, particularly in the way he began to spread the paint more thickly and accentuate it’s texture. This practice of creating expression through the use of texture became a motive in his realist painting.48

The most noticeable characteristic of Shi-Chong’s work is that he brought modern art forms such as Live art and Action art into realist painting. Live art and Action art emerged in the 1960s and were defined by the works of artists such as Vito Acconci(1940- ), Hermann Nitsch (1938- ) and

48 Zu-Ping, Shi-Chong the research of China contemporary artist, Hu-Bei Fine Art Press, 2001, pp. 10-12
Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). These artists created the art form as an event, which was considered a reference to the Dadaism of the early 20th century. The artists associated with Dadaism believed that Dadaism is not one of the forms of Fine art. On the contrary, Dadaism was conceptually anti-Fine art. Dadaism denied any kind of rules, principles, or meaningful subject of Fine art, choosing instead to celebrate the meaningless, impromptu and accidental part of it. The reason the Dada artists were against the old rules is that they believed the old rules and values caused the outbreak of WWI. They tried to destroy the old rules by rejecting them all. Since the influence of Dadaism, the forms of Live art and Action art also have the feature of being anti-tradition. They emphasized the process of creation, which the traditional artists used to ignore. Also, they challenged the conventions of where an exhibition takes place and used alternative locations such as theatres, coffee shops, bars or even a corner of the street to replace the traditional exhibition spaces such as museums and galleries. The form of Live art and Action art was usually presented as a performance, the entire work being about the process of performing. There would be nothing left after the performance was completed. However, Shi-Chong preserved the process of performance, which was considered not able to be caught. With the assistance of photography, he depicted the performance of Live art and Action art as the subject of his realist painting. This is a significant change from previous realist painting. (Fig.38) (Fig.39)
Shi-Chong’s works usually begin as a simple sketch, which sets the basic composition and selection of the materials to be used. Then he spends a lot of time building the model. In the process of model building, unexpected and uncertain effects might occur that he couldn’t predict in the sketch, such as the texture of the material he used was not seen as well as he planned in the sketch. As a result, he might need to adjust or change some parts of his early sketch work. Because the model building work can almost be considered as the final result on the canvas, he has to make sure each part of the model was set in the most appropriate situation for the following painting work. After the model has been totally completed, he takes a photograph of it and then depicts it on canvas in an extremely realistic way. In this kind of work we can observe how Shi Chong, reconsiders traditional realist painting with new modern art concepts such as Living art and Action art.

Shi-Chong was personally interested in the form of living things. Unlike other artists who try to emphasize and highlight the vivid characteristics of live things, he chose to present the solid state, the motionless situation of them, as can be seen in his works ‘The Sun-Dried Fish’ (Fig.40) and ‘The Walking Man’. (Fig.41) He prefers to re-present his living subject in a material, non-organic perspective and with this point of view, the passion and saintliness of life, which can be seen in previous realist paintings, were blocked. The way he re-presented the body provides the audience with a brand new experience in observing life. In ‘The Walking Man’, he took away the living body and only left the plaster cast of the outer human-shape. The life was treated as just a symbol or a material, a metaphor for living things or human beings in his work. The changed role of living things in his works allows him to explore the language of the form from the traditional portrait and still life works.
Shi-Chong’s pursuit of a modern concept through using model building as a major source of inspiration, informs my work. In my view, the purpose of introducing a modern concept and taking model-building work as a necessary step in the whole process, is not meant to copy other modern art forms, it can be seen as a breakthrough from the routine of previous realist painting either in portrait or still life genre.

Therefore, when the works are developed by methods used in modern art forms and express modern concepts and issues, they are no longer referable to the original aesthetic any more. They present themselves with an entirely different art language and style that are endowed by the artists.

Moreover, Shi-Chong retained the original attributes of classical realistic painting techniques during the painting process and these attributes became partial elements of the form of his paintings. For example, Shi-Chong’s ‘The Stage’(Fig.42) and ‘The Portrait in Someday’(Fig.43) express the subject with sophisticated textures which require highly traditional realistic painting techniques. We can see that ‘The Portrait in Someday’ displays a complex visual effect of water reflection upon the human body. Even though the water reflection is not his main focus of expression, it becomes an important formal element as a metaphor of the whole work. It shows both the attractive visual effect and the particular personal perspective of the artist towards the subject.

Therefore, the use of traditional realistic painting techniques to represent the detail and almost-real effect of the model is necessary in this kind of work. For example, the model could include the rough texture of rusty engines, the fur of animals, or the fiber of clothes. I would not be able to deal with these difficult details without the knowledge of traditional painting techniques.
Figure 42: Shi-Chong, 1997, *The Stage*, Oil on Canvas, Hu-Bei.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 43: Shi-Chong, 2000, *The Portrait in Someday*, Oil on Canvas, Hu-Bei.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions
Chapter III

Model Building

From the development of realism in the history of painting in 17th century, there are a number of artists whose works are closely connected to their observation of nature such as Vermeer, Chardin and Louis David. Basically, the process of making a realist painting could be concluded as a translation of nature in some way. For example, the classical artists present nature based on the light-dark contrast, whilst on the other hand, Impressionist artists believe that the application of color was intended to replace the light-dark contrast in translating nature. No matter in which way they decided to express nature, they didn’t alter or even create their model. However, considering the theme that I am interested in is industry, there is no similar works in the still life genre for me to refer to. Therefore, I have to create a new form to fit this subject. In my consideration, the issue I want to discuss concerns the influence of industry on living things. I have looked for similar topics in other art forms such as photography. For example, the work ‘Early Morning, West Hartlepool’ (Fig.44) and ‘Industrialization’ (Fig.45) are classical forms of presenting the industrial issue in photography. By setting a human being in front of the industrial background, both photographers presented the loneliness of human beings in a highly industrialized environment, and also how much we have changed the natural scene due to pollution. Although this form works well in photography, the photographic work is shot from the real scene, so it can only show us a range of real views to indicate the impact of industrialization on the environment. Although the topic is similar to mine, I prefer to use the surreal space to guide my audience to view industrial products as living things that threaten us. As a result, the method of photography which directly takes images from a real scene is not suitable for my work.

Figure.44: Don McCullin, 1963, Early Morning, West Hartlepool, Photograph.
This is why I abandoned this method and in order to create a form which enables me to introduce an appropriate metaphor, I decided to build my own models. Once I established this method, I could no longer rely on the natural scene but could only take those parts that could be applied as an element in my model. The writing of critic Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574) records that the use of models could be found in the 15th century. The Italian painter, Piero Della Francesca (1414-1492) used to make models of the human form and cover them with wrinkled clothes in order to help his observations. The Chinese painter Chan Yi-Fei used a model of the human form in his work ‘The end of Jun Dynasty’ to assist him in making the correct perspective. These examples of the use of models show how they were used to help the artists make accurate depictions of their subject matter. However, in my project, the model building takes on a more significant meaning as it presents the whole idea of my creation. My work usually starts from a simple draft (Figs.46 and 47), which roughly decides the composition, the perspective, the light setting and the possible materials to be used. When I start to collect the materials listed on my draft, it is not always possible to find a particular material, or the one I found doesn’t seem as suitable as in my draft. In this case, I might have to make minor changes to my initial draft. For example, in the work ‘The Desert’ (Fig.48), I planned to have various computer parts in the work, however eventually I just applied a couple of them in the final model.
In addition, despite the problem I have met in the process of model building such as occasionally being unable to find a material that totally matches the same material that is in my draft, there were some surprises that came to me unexpectedly. For example, in the work *The Song for Bucher* (Fig.49), the newspapers I had stuck behind were fluttering in the wind, which added an interesting contrast to the other motionless objects. This effect wouldn’t occur to me until I started to build the model. Therefore, though I have decided the broad shape of the model in my draft, I still have to keep making adjustments based on the actual effect in the process of making the model. Sometime the effects come by accident and provide an even more impressive effect than I planned in the original draft.
Once the model has been made, I take a photograph of it from the most appropriate angle, and then tear it down. In my opinion, the best way to display my idea is not to directly show the model itself. This is because the actual model is three-dimensional. Unlike the illusion in my painting, which could only provide one viewing angle for the audience, the model allows the audience to walk around it, which means the audience could view it from any possible angle. However, my idea and ideal visual effect couldn’t be expressed if the audience was able to view the model from an angle that I didn’t intend. For example, the model of the work ‘The Desert’ (Fig.50) was basically shaped by wire netting (Fig.51), then I covered it with dirt and flyers (Fig.52), so the structure of the whole model was empty inside and this would be noticeable if the audience went behind it. Besides the structural problem, the light source also works only from the angle set in my draft. In most of my works, there was only a single light source, therefore, any angle apart from the one I want to present would be confusing to the audience. As a result, if I do not restrict the way the audience views the work, the subtle metaphors I set might be lost if viewed from other angles. This might mislead the audience and lead to a misunderstanding of my works. This is the reason why I do not present the actual model as an expressive method in my creation.
Figure 50: YuLun Wu, 2011, *The Desert*, 164x130 cm, Oil on Canvas, China.

Figure 51: Example of shaping the wire netting.
into a board structure.

Figure 5.2: Example of covering the dirt and flyers on the wire netting.

In traditional still life, there is no artificial model involved. The models were ordinary kitchenware, daily commodities and natural things that could be easily seen in daily life. They imply nothing beyond being functional tools or food, until the artist depicts them in a still life painting. So the act of creation is considered to begin at the moment when the painting work starts. In this kind of creative process, the expression of the work relied highly on the artist’s painting techniques. It reveals to the audience how the artist turns ordinary things into a fascinating still life work and provides them with the sense of illusion.49 On the other hand, the main aim of my work is to discuss the influence of industrial products on living things, so depicting ordinary, daily objects is insufficient to express my subject. What I need for discussing the modern issues are specific models that contain more metaphors and information than the traditional still life and photographic works. For this reason, I decided to create my own models to form the content of my paintings.

In the process of building the model, I made most of the decisions and adjustments such as choice of materials; positioning the light sources and shadows; dealing with the texture of the materials and deciding the perspective, hence my model could be seen as the first manifestation of my draft. Once I have taken a photograph of the completed model, most of my ideas in the draft have been expressed in the picture, the rest of work is to start painting it on to the canvas and making the final adjustments. Though I do make small adjustments to the picture in the painting process, it doesn’t mean that I was trying to modify the models through my painting

technique in the way that traditional still life artists did before. In fact, it was most likely to fix any small flaws in the model. For example, in the work ‘The Desert’, the photographic documentation of the model was close to the final image in the painting (Fig.53). The small adjustments in this work involved adjusting the mess on the floor and removing the dirt mark on the front monitor.

![Figure.53: Comparison of the photograph and the finished painting. The left picture is the photograph, the right one is the oil painting: YuLun Wu, 2011, The Desert, Oil on Canvas, China.](image)

Clearly all the materials, shapes and textures have already been decided in the process of model building. In other words, the main difference between previous still life works and my own work, is that my creative process starts before the actual painting begins. This is evident in my work ‘The Babel Tower’. The process of making the model almost included every decision and adjustment that informed the subsequent painting. Firstly, I designed the board structure in the draft and calculated the length of each rigid frame (Fig.54), then I sanded them until they became rusted as well as I wanted (Fig.55). Then, according to the shape I designed in my draft, I installed them together and accompanied them with some concrete debris and steel bars (Fig.56). After all the elements were set together, I had to consider the harmony with each line of steel bars to make sure they reached an appropriate balance in the whole picture. Finally, I adjusted the light source to create enough contrast for the model and checked the final harmonious effect. For instance, after considering the placement of line, I decided to break the third frame in case all of the horizontal frames were set in the same angle and looked boring (Fig.57). Finally, I completed it in the painting (Fig.58)
Figure 54: Example of board structure and relevant calculation in the draft.

Figure 55: Example of making the rusty texture with sandpaper.

Figure 56: Example of adjusting the angle of each steel bar.

Figure 57: Example of adjusting the angle of the third frame.
The use of model building differentiates my work from previous still life painting. From the above description of my creative process, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, what is represented in my paintings has been constructed by myself, whilst many other still life artists represent natural things and articles for daily use. Secondly, the models I create are made to express contemporary issues, they have no other roles apart from aesthetic expression. On the other hand, the objects of traditional still life works were ordinary things which could be seen in daily life and all of them have their own roles in the real world. Because of this, it is difficult to find common implications between each of them when they were arranged together and this could be quite limiting in the range of metaphors they could express in regard to modern issues. In other words, the industrial issue such as the negative effect of industrial products on living things could only be discussed in still life with the application of artificial models. This informs my decision to create my own models. Finally, many traditional artists have shaped their ideas during the painting process. My ideas, however, have developed while assembling objects into a still life model, a working method that differs from previous still life painters.

Although my ideas have almost been entirely realized in the process of model building, they are finally presented to the audience through my painting. The painting process of the whole project could be seen as a filter, it blocks all angles apart from the one I consider as the best way to present my model. Thus, my model and my painting work inseparably in this project.
Chapter IV

Development of Works in Studio Practice

In this project, I attempt to seek a potential development of expressive form in a stylistic presentation of realistic still life through the introduction of the theme: the negative effect of industrial products on living things. I selected appropriate visual and formal elements, acting as a metaphor of industrial issues and conflated them as a harmonious and organic unity, such as a tower, a tree, or an animal, which was made of industrial products. Basically, the series of still life paintings produced in this project developed through three successive phases. The first development focuses on the exploration of almost-real and illusion effects. This leads to more consideration that emphasizes the texture as an important expressive element. The second phase establishes a new still life form - artificial model and non-gravitational space. This results in a strong visual effect and expressive possibilities of composition. The final phase consisted of an exploration of a modern theme: the impact of industry on living things.

The project commenced with an exploration of almost-real visual effect as a method to present an illusion. From researching the commentary and theory of classical still life, the almost-real visual effect is the most significant characteristic of still life painting and the audience's longing to be tricked by the illusion. To some extent, still life is regarded as a three-dimensional illusionistic form which could be interpreted as a replacement of a real scene, if the still life itself possesses a life-like visual characteristic which convinces the audience in the same way that a real scene does. Thus, for creating this effect in still life, I enhanced the feel of the texture and the detailed presentation. This method of application is inspired by Diderot's comments to Chardin, because his critical works explain the psychological situation that viewing a still life work relies on the illusory effect, which leads the audience to perceive the still life paintings as though they are a real scene and become enchanted by them.

Thus, deliberate details and exaggerated rough texture in my still life paintings are quite often used for creating a vivid effect to suggest the physical characteristics of the real object. This is because the common difference by which people can tell a realistic painting from the actual real scene it depicts, is through the detailed presentation. In most cases, realistic painting doesn't present detail such as the texture of the objects. Therefore, when people get closer to the painting and are unable to see the detail they expect, the illusion no longer exists. I also utilize the sense of touch to help establish the illusion. Generally speaking, still life usually pleases its audience through establishing a vivid illusion. So selecting suitable objects that have noticeable characteristics to depict is an important concern in my work. If the still life was to work in the same way as a

50 J. Leymarie, Dutch Painting, Albert Skira, New York, 1986, P184
52 J. Leymarie, Dutch Painting, Albert Skira, New York, 1986, P184
computer monitor that presents a virtual image to the audience, to present the clear detail of texture is likely to produce a high-resolution image. Thus, a still life painting is similar to the screen that presents the information the artist wants to show the audience. For this purpose, the scientists and development engineers have tried their best to raise the resolution of the screen. Once the resolution has been raised to a high enough level that we can view the image without noticing it was formed of a mass of pixels, the illusion effect would work successfully. The pattern works the same way in a still life painting. The subject should be re-presented in a very detailed way such that the audience would not notice it was formed by realistic painting techniques. When the appearance of painting has been cut off, or hidden by delicate skills, it will naturally produce an almost-real effect. This results in a direct appeal and arouses a suggestive sensation of viewing the real scene. For example, a rusted metal part in my work ‘The Bud’ (Fig.58) produces a fantastic rusty texture, which is even more conspicuous than the original photograph. This contributes to the strongly implied realistic characteristics and strengthens the sense of touch to support the visual illusion.

Figure.59: ‘The Bud’
Comparison of the photography and the painting works
The upper image is a photograph, the lower image is the oil painting.

Furthermore, the formation of the noticeable texture is usually accompanied by the thick spread of color using materials such as Gesso and Gel to help contribute to the thick and rough effect. However, though these typical methods have commonly been used to present the strong texture to the audience, they also cause the surface of the painting to be uneven. An uneven surface usually works against the illusion, however, it is unavoidable when using a thick spread of color or other material technique. As a result, I abandoned this method and chose to present all the texture by direct painting, where I have to depict all of the textures such as the fibers of clothes or the rust of metals by tiny pens. This is a very time consuming process, but the advantage of this method is that I can keep my painting quite flat without the interference of a rough and uneven surface. This creates the perfect illusion of a rough texture effect while keeping the painting surface flat. (Fig. 60) (Fig. 61)

At the beginning, I started experimenting and tried to seek out a proper method to express the conspicuous effect of surface textures. Many different methods were used for creating the texture that I have set in my draft but which did not exist in the actual material. For example, I applied both hydrochloric acid and sulfuric acid to corrode the metal parts to create a rough and colorful rusty effect (Fig. 62). Moreover, in terms of the fascinating textural expression, some burning strokes had to be added as well, by applying a torch to burn imprints on the metal surface. (Fig. 63)
In terms of the presentation of texture, the application of signs of erosion and rough elements derives from the close observation of objects. I found many industrial metal products have the potential to express an attractive and colorful texture. This is far different from how they appear when new, with a cold, even, monochrome surface. However, as time goes by, their surfaces become uneven and full of warm-cold color contrast; characteristics which I consider to be indicative of life. I have previously mentioned the artist Shi-Chong and how he attempted to remove the characteristics of life, such as the characteristics of muscle, which are supposed to be soft and movable, through making models that appear to be living out of some solid, inorganic materials. In other words, he created a contradiction through erasing the living features from the living things. When the audience experiences this contradiction, they would feel strange and this would lead them to be aware of the value of those absent living features which have been purposely removed by Shi-Chong. Whilst my own work refers to Shi-Chong’s method, the way I did it is to reverse this process which still effectively works. I added some living features to the industrial metal products that they were not supposed to own, and composed them as though they were living and consciously alive. This also provides the audience with a strange feeling and reminds them that these industrial products are not supposed to be alive. In my conception, the illusion of life in these industrial products could be seen as a metaphor for the negative effect of industry. Therefore, the exaggeration of the texture not only gives me a profound inspiration for dealing with it through delicate painting techniques, but is also helpful in setting up emotional metaphors to the audience.

With the constant application and experimentation of texture and details, color was also taken into consideration to interpret the characteristics of the industrial subject, because it is one of the special features of oil paintings. Also, Leng-Jun’s oil painting, which has a limited range of color application, provides further impetus for the consideration of color. However, I do not totally follow his approach of creating photographic color tone and light. What I am concerned with is how to utilize color and light in order to appropriately convey the characteristics of industrial objects. When I considered the color tone and light of traditional still life such as Chardin’s work, I found it was suitable to depict the candle-lit environment. One feature is that the light source was set far away from the objects. This causes the bright contrast to be soft and mild. A rough texture such as the surface of a rusty engine wouldn’t be stressed.54 Another feature is that the color tone was warm-based due to the candle as light-source.55 Thus, in considering appropriate expressive qualities to fit in with the theme of modern and industrial circumstances, the warm tone from a candle or in some rare case such as a Vermeer painting where the light comes from outside through windows,56 are not adopted in this project. Instead, in order to re-present the visual experience that fits the modern living environment, the cold color tone of a fluorescent light source is introduced to set up a contrast to the traditional light effect and color tone, because the fluorescent light has a colder tone and is set closer to the objects to be illuminated. This leads the uneven surface texture to be more strongly emphasized than from a candle light-source or natural light source. Even the unobvious wrinkles or tiny dents

55 Munro T, Form and Style in the Arts: An Introduction to Aesthetic Morphology, Press of Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, 1970, p 177
would be sharply high-lighted in this light-source. It presents the characteristics of texture much better than the traditional light-source. Besides the effect of making the texture prominent, I also attempt to limit the application of color and avoid a strong color tone in my work, because strong and emotional color application such as that used by the Impressionist artist Vincent Van Gogh (1853-1890) (Fig.64) were particularly appropriate to a natural light source. It expresses the natural scene in a humanistic way and results in the confliction of contributing an almost-real illusion, because the emphasis of the color implication also means the objective observation and depiction couldn’t be set up in the same time. However, illusion is the necessary effect in my still life work, hence my decision to abandon the strong color application and choose the cold color tone which is more representative of the visual experience of modern life.

In my painting process, I alter some parts of the initial photographic image in order to emphasize the rough texture. In other words, I have changed the original appearance of my model just like the Impressionist artists did with the natural scene. However, the greatest difference is that although my work differs from the photographic image I refer to, I aim to increase its realism through purposefully emphasizing the parts that are helpful in building the illusion. This is based on my personal experience in expressing the detail in realist painting, as I have found that not all the information and detail in the photographic image has a positive effect in contributing to the illusion. Sometimes, ignoring some elements that are not helpful in contributing to the illusion, leads to a better almost-real effect than an exact copy of the photographic images. For example, in my work ‘The Ancient Pledge’ (Fig.65), the photographic images show the detail in the dark area very clearly. However, I chose not to present this, choosing instead to focus on the detail in the bright area, leaving the dark area unclear. This alteration fits the preference of human sight: the detail in the bright area is much easier to identify than in the dark area, so it expresses the almost-real effect better than the photographic image.
In addition, in order to further create a corresponding relationship between the space and composition of the objects, I have to consider the meaning of the space in my work. In the traditional still life works, the description of the space is quite obvious, because the scene was supposed to be somewhere in the house. In this project, I prefer to build a model for myself and since the model is not an object from daily life, it doesn’t have to be located or placed in a real location. As a result, I removed any hint or description of the space in which the objects are set. Thus, in the initial photographic image, I usually adopt a black background to eliminate any information of the space, so that the model appears as though it is floating in a dark place. (Fig.66) This perfectly expresses the compositions that couldn’t be presented in traditional still life works. On the other hand, this rejection of the actual background also declares a position that in this theme, it is not at all important where the models were located. What I want to focus on in my work is the situation of the model. The composition, status and the way I combine them are seen as metaphors of the roles they play in modern life; their situation in my work is never the same as how they are actually seen in the real world. For this reason, it doesn’t make any sense if I define an actual place where they were located in the manner of traditional still life. Therefore, I locate most of my models on a dark background in order to increase the focus on them. At the same time, it also provides an excellent contrasting visual effect. (Fig.67)
Therefore, in this phase of the formal exploration, I did not only focus on the model, but also reconsidered the application of the background. The black background is created to reject any specific notion of place, which doesn’t help to correspond to the theme in my work. In my view, ‘less is more’. The method which traditional still life artists took of setting a lot of objects in the painting doesn’t enrich the theme and make it clearly presented in my case, (Fig.68) it actually confuses it and weakens the characteristics that I aim to emphasize.
Therefore, I shifted the model from a location in actual space to a sort of surreal space. In my view, the depiction of actual space gives some stereotypical view of the object. A bowl or piece of wheat in the kitchen, could not avoid to be recognized as kitchenware or food in the space where they are commonly set. Therefore I decided to isolate the object from the realistic place. It would be much easier to recognize them apart from the role they used to play in daily life without the interference from a realistic background. This is helpful for me to utilize them as an art material to guide the audience to imagine the industrial products as being alive and also a threat to nature.
Chapter V

Conclusion

In order to explore a potential development of new still life form, the subject of the negative effect of industrial products on living things was introduced as a main basis for formal exploration in this studio-based project. This has contributed to the formation of model building and an investigation of composition, texture and shape within my still life, according to my concerns regarding how industrial products are threatening living things.

In this research project, I have set out three research questions:

- How can I create a different expressive style of still life painting through consideration of composition, texture and alteration of the subject matter?
- How can an understanding of the history of still life painting inform this process?
- How can I present my concerns regarding the relationship between Industrial products and living things, through a series of new still life paintings?

In response to question one, through the investigation of a selected range of artists whose work addresses similar concerns to my own, I have come to understand how each artist developed an appropriate method of expression in relation to this topic. However, unable to find a precedent in the still life genre that I could follow, I found that I needed to establish one for myself. I decided to build artificial models which expressed my ideas perfectly. During the model building process, I am able to select materials and adjust the light source, position and texture of each element of the composition. Inspired by Shi-Chong’s model building process, his use of diverse materials and large stage settings, I have found great freedom in being able to select my own method of making models without needing to find a classic form to follow.

In response to question two, through the investigation of art history and related artist’s aesthetics, I gained an understanding of the important development and features of still life, especially its ‘almost real’ effect and use of metaphor. This has informed my method of expression. For example, Chardin applied the ‘almost real’ effect to accomplish the illusion; Diderot pointed out how the sense of touch might also help to convince the audience as well as sight. Hence I decided to apply the effect of illusion in my work. Furthermore, through researching each period of painting, I found there were many artists who decided to respond and represent the environment they lived in, such as Vermeer, who responded to scientific developments in 17th century Holland, Louis David’s concern about the political events in 18th century France, Impressionist artists Renoir, Seurat, Van Gogh and Monet responded to the fast changing societal and scientific environment of the second half of the 19th century, and also the typical view of their time; modern life and
the way that ordinary people spent their free time in Paris, the development of Photography and its optical theories. The Cubist artists Picasso and Braque responded to the physical theory; the Pop artists Warhol and Lichtenstein responded to the routine of a mundane life style in America; Photo-realist artists Eddy, Estes and Goings responded to the view of New York city and late 20th century material and techno-culture; Leng-Jun’s critical position towards industrialization and concern about environment. Researching the work and concerns of these artists provided me with profound sources of inspiration and influenced the way I responded to my own thematic concern: the negative effect of industrial products on living things.

In response to question three, through the understanding of the use of metaphor in still life, I have developed a series of works that present my ideas and concerns through the use of metaphor. For example, I regard the circumstance of traditional still life to be limited by its choice of space, and the manner in which objects were presented on a table. Whilst it strengthened their role in daily life, it narrowed the range of metaphor they could imply. Therefore, I positioned the industrial products as though they were alive to imply the role they play in our environment. In order to emphasize the relationship between industrial products and living things, I created compositions where industrial products, such as rusty engines, were combined with organic objects, such as dry flowers, moths or parts of human bodies. The texture and rust on the industrial products were emphasized in order to make viewers consider the ‘living’ and ‘growing’ nature of industrial products. I aimed to reinforce the concept that industrial products can be a threat to living things.

For me, the completion of this project does not close my interest in the issues investigated, on the other hand, it represents a beginning of my exploration of a new form of still life and I look forward to further potential developments in the future.
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Appendix

Appropriate Durable Record

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YuLun Wu, 2011, The Ancient Pledge, 53x65 cm, Oil on Canvas, Beijing.
YuLun Wu, 2011, *The Gift*, Oil on Canvas, 53x45 cm. Beijing
YuLun Wu, 2011, *The Babel Tower*, 265x95 cm, Oil on Canvas, China.
YuLun Wu, 2012, The Babel Tower II, 200x90 cm, Oil on Canvas, Beijing.
YuLun Wu, 2011, *The Desert*, 164x130 cm, Oil on Canvas, China.
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YuLun Wu, 2012, *The Maple*, 72x70 cm, Oil on Canvas, Beijing.
YuLun Wu, 2013, *Evolution*, 100x100 cm, Oil on Canvas, Taiwan.
YuLun Wu, 2013, Mount Sinai, 140x75 cm, Oil on Canvas, Taiwan.
Author’s Curriculum Vitae

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2013: ‘The Quality of Painting- 2013 China Oil Painting Exhibition’
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2012:
‘Sensation’, RMIT School of Art Gallery, Melbourne
2011:
1st Prize’The Nowaday China to Artist-China Oil Painting Exhibition 2011’
Guan ShanYue Art Museum, Guangdong, China
‘2011 An Exhibition by Chinese Famous Oil Painters’
Invited By Beijing Fine Art Academy and Beijing Artist Association In Capital Museum, Beijing, China
2010:
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2009:
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2007:
‘2007 An Exhibition by Chinese Famous Oil Painters’
Invited By Beijing Fine Art Academy and Beijing Artist Association In Capital Museum, Beijing, China
2006:
2006 Art Galleries Association R. O. C., Taipei, Taiwan
Gold Medal of Oil Painting, ‘New Century Art Exhibition’
2005:
1st Prize, Oil Painting, ‘17th Art Exhibition of Republic of China’
3rd Prize, ‘4th National Large-sized Oil Paintings Exhibition’
‘59th Taiwan Fine Art Exhibition’
2004:
‘7th Union New Talent Artist Exhibition’
1st Prize,’Chinese National Art Association Exhination’
‘58th Taiwan Fine Art Exhibition’