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### Letian Luo Thesis Statement

Letian Luo

*Claremont Graduate University*

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I make works that integrate positive and negative space. Finding the balance between the two is like making opposite elements cooperate and work with each other and create harmony. But at the same time, I love the beauty of unbalance. I admire the beauty of the combination of opposite elements as fire and water in nature or Yin and Yang in philosophy. To achieve such contrasts in my art, I work with black and white. These two colors give me a mysterious feeling of past and future. When I connect this feeling and the content of Yin and Yang, I think of life and death. In this way, death is not simply the end. It is part of existence and cycle of life. I often picture the Yin and Yang symbol as the spirits trying to break out from the frame of physical form and set free into the world. That idea motivates the marks I make. They are like a steam of energy floating freely. Created by my subconscious, they seem to be chaotic but there is also order within them.

I work with paper cut out. The qualities of different kinds of papers I use affect both the process of making the cut outs and the end result of the cut outs. I experiment with papers that have different weights, textures and softnesses. I started with 18" × 24" drawing paper. It is thin and easy to cut. But if I need to make very delicate detailed cuts, which are close to each other, it is very easy to tear up the paper. Stonehenge paper has a surface that is very smooth, even flawless. It is thicker and stronger than drawing paper. It is made of cotton, it allows me to make very delicate cuts that are very close to one another without worrying about tearing the paper

apart. I also experiment with Chinese rice paper. It is usually used for calligraphy. It comes with many different thicknesses. I work with the kind that is very thin. Holding that paper almost feels like holding thin air. Light can easily pass through it. Because of its thinness, little pressure is required to cut through it with a blade. However, it is extremely fragile and easily damaged. It requires great attentiveness and control of the blade.

At first when I started doing paper cut out, I like to use white paper and lay the finish piece on a black piece of paper to create strong contrast between the piece and the background. Later, I began to hang the cut sheets of white paper on the white walls. Although it is slightly more difficult to look at it than it is on a black background, that challenging and encourage is important to me. It makes my work more subtle. Also, the gap between the paper and the wall creates shadow. There is much more going on than there is with the black background.

I also take references from traditional Chinese paper cut out art. Even though the traditional Chinese paper cut out is mainly for decoration purpose, ornament walls, windows, doors and mirrors representing good luck like the Chinese Luna Festival or Marriage, I love the idea of using red paper and I want to adopt it to my cut out. There is much more possibilities. Placing them on the wall using push pins allowed their sculptural presence to be more evident. The shadows become more important, giving them three-dimensionality and the suggestion of volume. I am able to manipulate the amount of space I want between the wall and the piece giving me greater range. For example, if I want the left side to have more shadow than the right

side, I can put a push pin on the right side to hold the piece down. The dynamic it creates is interesting.

To me, cutting out paper feels like drawing with a knife, except that one's mistakes cannot be erased. Every mark is permanent. The first cut I make affects every cut that follows. A single tiny slip of the blade can ruin the image. A sweaty hand might destroy the paper. An unintentional move of the elbow can tear up the paper. I need to be extremely careful of every decision I make and it feels like I become a doctor performing a surgery.

My work originates in my dreams. I keep a journal about my dreams. Every morning I wake up, the first I do is sit on the side of my bed and think, trying to remember if I had a dream. Then the dream sometimes started to run again in my mind bit by bit. Unfortunately it does not replay as smooth as a movie but good enough for me to write down some words or sentences. My dreams are very intimate and private. Sometimes they reflect what I saw or what I did earlier in the day. Sometimes they are about what I want to but cannot do in real life. In most cases, my dreams are irrational. The things I do in my dreams do not make any sense. There was a time I dreamed about going to the top of a mountain and fishing with a tennis ball bat. The places I visit in my dreams do not exist, like the parking structure in my bedroom with the size of half of a football field. I often relate the things I wrote down in the journal with my personality and my experience of life. I dream about driving a car which I use the bicycle handlebars to control it,

climbing a mountain with an almost vertical slope furiously and collecting candies that pop up after I hit fish on the way.

Most of the time, when I start a new piece, I follow the feeling. I work intuitively. I am not concerned to depict social or historical events, nor do I focus on current events. My own solitude is the only thing that matters when I sketch out my abstract images. Unlike sleeping and having dreams, I have control of my creation of images. Sometimes I draw lines and shapes that are soft and move very smoothly. At other times they have sharp angles and seem violent. There is no particular reason behind those decisions, I am just following my mind. That is the reason I make my images abstract. The element of uncertainty of the dream is shown by the abstract style of my cut outs.

Many people look at my work and think there is a story going on. I like to ask them what they see first rather than telling them right away. Their answer is usually nothing close to the dreams I originally have. I am happy with it because I am not trying to recreate my dream as image but to convert to feeling of the dream I had through the cut I make. It is almost impossible to retell my dream to another person and the person will understand and feel the same way as I do with my dream. When I look at my works, I know that is my dream. The paper is the dream. It is characterized by the nature of the paper, the fragility, the uncertainty of cuts. One thing I realize during the time I keeping my dream journal is I can hardly ever remember any color in my dream. It feels like the whole “dreamy” world is in grey tone, or like the Yin Yang symbol.

In this case, it is not referring life and dead but the reality life I am living in and the subconscious dreaming world I travel to.