

# The Him in My Eyes

When I first met Jianjun An, I only knew him as a young man who loved to complain. It was the start of first term of the first year in university. While all the other new students were still immersed in the thought that they were, in fact, university students and feeling proud of themselves, he came into my sight, a dissatisfied expression on his face. I remember the first assignment we received in class was the sketching of characters. The majority of the students picked up their pencils and began scaling the model in earnest before sketching it on paper. But not him. With the rice paper spread out on the floor and his painting brush aligned with the model, he swiftly painted a few strokes and gave the female students in the class a look of disdain before walking away.

Arrogant and egotistical were my first impressions of him. However, after a few lessons, many of his works were pinned up on the walls by professors as samples for other students. Yet, not only was he not proud of himself, he also felt as though he had been placed in a class lower than his level. In front of those of us who worked hard at pencilling drafts before going over them with brush lines, he would always remark harshly on our practices. I secretly gave him a nickname, “the grouch”.

It was after half a year that I actually got to know him better and we became genuine friends. Through extensive interactions, my impression of him slowly changed. Back when he was still applying for the Central Academy of Art and Design, he was placed seventh in his specialisation but unfortunately, his English grade was three points off, so he could only attend our university. He felt reluctant, he felt wronged, and on top of everything, he was sent to our class where there were no worthy rivals, which only served to intensify his discontent. I, myself, was still in the process of getting to understand him.

While he always seemed to not have a care in the world, in reality, he had a strong urge and desire to learn within his heart. Every time after the end of our class, he would stay behind for the sophomore class. In order to spend more time working on his oil painting skills, he, with a few close friends, rented a house outside the campus. Even then, An still displayed outstanding creativity and artistic abilities among the students in our class.

In the blink of an eye, thirty years have passed. From beginning university to entering society, from working for others to establishing his own company, then immigrating to Canada and founding his own college of art and design, his life has changed many times. Each change led to a metamorphosis and each metamorphosis left him closer to his goal in life: To become an artist who is free, not being held down by anything in the world. Learning interior design certainly had

not been part of his original goal, yet it stirred up his creativity and allowed him to show his self-worth through many wonderfully crafted projects such as Yao Temple in Linfen, Shanxi or the library at the North China Institute of Science and Technology.

Over 10 years ago, we immigrated to Canada; what was once his moment in life became glories of the past and he had to start again from scratch. Through endless years of hard work, he finally found himself again and founded the NPC College of Art and Design in Vancouver. The past decade has been a roller coaster ride for him, to put it simply. In China, he had reached unimaginable heights but immigration left him back at the bottom and it was only through his own hard work and perseverance that he was able to slowly climb back up to the top. But these experiences added to his life and influenced his thoughts, becoming one of his many sources of creativity. He carefully recorded each and every one of them with his hands, embedding these memories into his works. They contain his feelings and progress in each stage of his life, his memories of himself, of other people and the world around him. Within these 10 years, the contents of his works have slowly changed along with his self-developed artistic style, and even now, he continues to challenge himself to reach newer heights, to improve and achieve new breakthroughs.

Li Feng, May 2018