

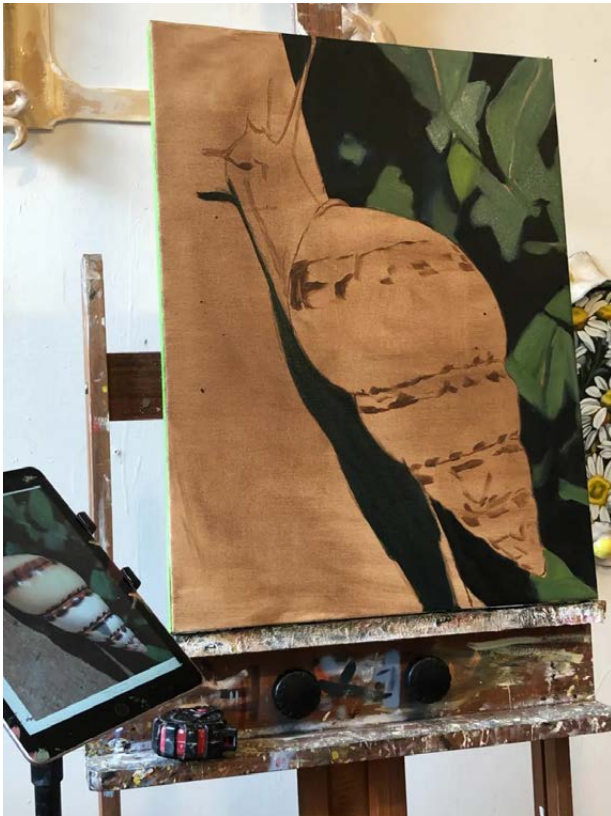
## Stephanie Temma Hier | Upset the Applecart

Yang Yini



**Yang Yini (YY):** Your works remind me of the experience of surfing the Internet: input an object into the google search box and rectangular images each with an aspect ratio of 3:4 appears on the screen flat, equally spaced; images are often zoomed-in, like close-ups in movies. Canvas in your works often cut in such ratio, and your objects are always cropped and zoomed-in. Considering the age of images, may I consider that your painting practice is imitating some kinds of Internet perception? And when this imitation is moved into museums, this contemporary perception will be emphasized. Are you doing this on purpose? I read that you search images on the web for inspiration.

**Stephanie Temma Hier (SH):** The internet permeates all aspects of contemporary life and so it is naturally part of my practice as well. As an artist who is concerned with images, I have honed in on the way images are mediated through digital spaces. As I traverse the endless scroll of google images searches, I start to feel a sense of history flashing before my eyes. This snap-shot sensation is really well captured by cropping images. The viewer can see just what I chose to show them but their minds can fill in the gaps and imagine what is just outside the frame. Online, this process happens instantaneously but in my practice I slow down and affix the ephemeral stream of fleeting images into hand-wrought processes like painting and ceramic. In a world over-saturated by images consumed digitally in hyper-speed, my work offers the viewer a chance to slow down and process our world in real time. It is in this slowness that I begin to untangle the complexities of our contemporary visual system.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Clasped by Light*, 2020.  
Work in progress. Courtesy of the Artist.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Clasped by Light*, 2020. Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture. 86 x 61 x 13 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Vacancy.

**YY:** Looking back into the age when photography emerged, it's easy to notice that paintings are affected by the experience of photographing. Like dancers of Degas, your surfaces seemed to be influenced by the computer/smartphone screens. Or to say, instead of using real "apple" as your object, you choose the flow of "apple" pictures, which is cropped, zoomed-in, lack of depth, and perfect like advertisements. Why do you choose these online pictures to represent? Is it your intention to indicate that the screens are shaping our aesthetics and perception?

**SH:** The mimetic qualities of images represented by digital photography really fascinates me. One can get the illusory sense of knowing something or someone so intimately through the internet without having ever felt their physical presence. This uniquely contemporary experience can be simultaneously beautiful and eye-opening while also being alienating and disillusioning. Inevitably, the pervasiveness of digital imagery shapes our aesthetic sensibilities and in turn, though perhaps more tacitly, influences how I decide to represent these processed scenes of nature.

**YY:** The pictures of "apples" vary, ranging from those in Dutch still paintings, Christian paintings, animations, tattoos, real-life photos and other pop culture, while they will appear on the same screen and store in our mind as mental images. In Claire Walsh's short essay, *We haven't any and you're too young*, you named this experience of image consumption as "flatness of possibility". May I connect it to the practice that you overlap several layers on the same surface? For example, in *Yard Sale* (2015), there are at least five layers if the title and the frame are counted: the jean canvas, the cropped and zoomed-in figurative picture of a woman's hand, a Disney animated hand of Preston Blair, the frame and the title.



**SH:** I think my work speaks to the millennial experience of growing up in an era when the internet has offered us endless possibility at our fingertips. Nothing in history feels remote when you can see, experience and read about anything your mind can conjure, or maybe more accurately, anything the algorithm puts in front of you. The specific feeling of scrolling online through news, advertising, memes, art and images from all corners of the time and space is something I explore in my work. When I layer digitally sourced images with their ceramic counterparts coupled with the conceptual baggage that my materials carry and nested in riddle-like titles, the complexities of our contemporary visual system come into relief. For me, the work acts as a sort of reminder that we mustn't consume images with an uncritical eye, and that nothing in our world exists in a vacuum, rather the world is very much a tangled mess.



Image from the Internet.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Once a Day, All Day Long*, 2019. Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture. 37 x 28 x 5 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Vacancy.



Pieter de Ring (Dutch, 1615-1660), *Still Life with Fruit*, 1658.

**YY:** Now let's move on to the ceramic frames. (1) The first thing I got curious about your frames is that sometimes they will be similar to the painted image, the object you've chosen. The typical one is *Always on the Sunnyside* (2020), in which both the form and color have similarities. May I ask how do you choose the image for the frame? Do you intend to deal with the relationship between your painting and sculpture? As I've mentioned in #3, your frames are another layer. It's like if you search for daisy on the net and the algorithm may give you poached eggs due to their similarity, though they are totally different things.

**SH:** My process actually begins in ceramic. I start by creating clay frames which are fired and glazed in my ceramic kiln. My process is quite intuitive and although I often reference the same types of images as I depict in paint, I often let the materials guide me in terms of color and form. Once the sculptures are finished I photograph them and bring them into the digital to start manipulating them through internet image searches and layering them with my huge catalogue of saved images. This is when new relationships emerge, just like an internet algorithm, my eye catches on visual similarities and new narratives start to form.

**YY:** (2) The second interesting thing I found about your frames is exactly your emphasis, your choice of zooming in the element of frames. In a previous interview with Sarah Messerschmidt, you mentioned the history of craft culture relating to your frames. And the choice of hand paintings instead of prints may also be relevant. Can you elaborate on your considerations? Why and When did you start to make frames in a more expressive way, and how do you think of frame?

**SH:** As a self-taught ceramist, I feel that physically framing oil paintings in expressionistic ceramic sculptures exist as a deeply feminist protest to the canonical history of art. Like many artists and writers, I have long lamented the backgrounding of craft practices in the scope of the art historical hierarchy. My work arises adjacent to this critique and aims to create a non-hierarchical space for historical mediums, such as ceramic and oil painting, to commingle in a single work. I feel that the way in which my ceramic frames physically consume the paintings they house is an apt metaphor for their commentary on historical painting. I have always been interested in examining these structures in art history and society at large and I have a particular fascination in how they shape dialogues surrounding art. In my formative years of training I was taught classical painting and noticed an emphasis on the study of the Eurocentric painting canon. While I owe a debt of gratitude to the awe-inspiring master works of antiquity—indeed they struck a passion in me and a desire to master the craft of painting—I always struggled with the sense of dogma that they imposed on our understanding of painting, even in our contemporary discourse. This feeling gave way to my interest in ceramic and its capability of metaphorically reframing conversations about painting.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Always on the Sunnyside*, 2020.  
Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture. 51 x 51 x 8 cm.  
Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Vacancy.

**YY:** You admitted that consumption was your major theme. To what extent do you relate consumption with flora and fauna? If more rigorous, the images of flora and fauna. Compared to real-life plants or animals, it seems to be more like the patterns, the stereotypes, the daily impressions in your works. Are they relevant to your use of the concept consumption?

**SH:** Yes, the crux of my work deals with consumption. I think when you consider the many ideas we've been discussing, such as digital representation as it pertains to food photography, art historical references, material considerations and their implications in everyday life, a common thread which comes up time and time again is consumption. In our contemporary world we are constantly consuming products, advertising, natural resources as well as art. In a lot of ways this mirrors the cycles of nature which in turn permeate my work. Not only do I depict the interconnectedness of food and animal systems but these cycles are recreated in the physicality of my work: the ceramic frames physically consume paintings while the paintings depict images of consumption, which in turn are referenced in the frames. With this, my work attempts to lay bare the deep entanglement that exists between humans, the natural world, the internet and art.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *License my Roving Hands*, 2020. Oil on canvas with glazed stoneware sculpture. 137 x 107 x 15 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Vacancy.



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Wonderful for Other People*, 2020. Oil on linen with glazed stoneware sculpture. 50.8 x 43 x 6.35 cm. Courtesy of the Artist and Franz Kaka.

**YY:** Your concentration on hands really catches my eye. Hands appear in your work in several ways: sculpted, animated, painted, as empty signifier, as frames, as subjects, as edges on the canvas, etc. Hands, in your works, are always with other elements: the painting brushes, the gloves, some actions, etc. Why do you choose the motif of the hand, and what do you wish to express through it? Do the meanings of hands vary?

**SH:** Hands are a significant symbol for me. As an artist, I am working daily with my hands and I believe the presence of my hand is visible in all my work whether its fingerprints in clay or direct brush strokes on canvas. By the same token, images of hands exist in many areas of life, such as



street signs, in advertising, in cookbooks and in art history; these are powerful symbols of creation, seduction and manipulation which vary based on context.



Work in progress view. Courtesy of the Artist.

**YY:** Animation, which is also an important element in your works. Some critics associate your reference of Disney animation with other young artists, whose works reflect the media narratives created by Hollywood for children and the disillusionment of adults. What do you think of your use of the Disney motifs? The hands, the brushes, the squirrels, the snails, the ants, etc., all of them are quoted from the animation contexts, while relating to quasi-natural elements. Are you emphasizing the quasi state of flora and fauna, or are you reconstructing the contexts?

**SH:** Cartoons are often prevalent in our formative years and as such I think they offer a powerful symbolism for my generation. We've all created psychological connections with the anthropomorphized animals or inanimate objects animated from our childhoods. Through our naive trials and tribulations we learned and grew alongside characters who never aged. This idealized version of reality, where cartoon squirrels danced among flowers and birds sang their joyful songs, where friend and foe repeatedly chased one another with sticks of TNT - never to face mortal peril - has defied the vicious logic of nature and left us to face contemporary economic and social realities without forewarning. Much like the internet, cartoons offer a form of escapism which reference the natural world but bare no real similarities. By appropriating cartoon motifs, my work attempts to negotiate the real with the artificial, in the contexts of animation, digital representation, sculpture and painting.



Work in progress view.  
Courtesy of the Artist.



Image from the Internet.

**YY:** *Swallowing the Pit* (2020) is your first exhibition in Asia, in the eastern context. Although your work concerns the contemporary semiotics and media culture, which are global symptoms, the discrepancies are still obvious. For example, it is hard to translate your titles. How do you see this incommensurability?



Stephanie Temma Hier, *Swallowing the Pit*, 2020, installation view, Gallery Vacancy.  
Courtesy of the Artist and Gallery Vacancy.

**SH:** Since this was my first exhibition in Asia, there were many unexpected layers which emerged in this show and brought a new richness to my work. The translation of the exhibition title and the work titles encouraged new meanings to come to the forefront of my work which put further emphasis on the way I already appropriate imagery. For example, when I pull images from their original context into the lexicon of my work, their meanings change and they fuse with the other layers in my work to become something new; this is fundamentally an issue of translation. As it turns out, this idea is amplified as my work translates through different languages and cultures. It has been a profoundly interesting experience to learn how my work has been received in Asia and honestly it's quite thrilling to see new interpretations emerging, adding further depth to the meaning of my work in a global context.

**YY:** Tom Tierney, Preston Blair, Jan Švankmajer..., curators and critics are interested in your sources of inspiration. Can you elaborate on which artists or artistic actions influence you the most?

**SH:** So many artists have been deeply influential for me. I draw inspiration from film, TV, animation, literature and art. My childhood love of classic animation by the likes of Preston Blair, Disney, the Fleischer Brothers, Ralph Bakshi, Tex Avery, Bill Plympton and countless others has made a lasting impression on me and continues to influence my work. I'm interested in film makers like Jan Švankmajer and his Czech New Wave contemporaries for their aesthetic innovation, humor and social critique. Although there are far too many to name here, some of my favorite visual artists include Amelie von Wulffen, Betty Woodman, Julia Wachtel, Allison Katz, Nina Beier, Francis Picabia, Gina Beavers, Ken Price, Jana Euler, Kerry James Marshall, Charline von Heyl, Wood De Othello and Brian Rochefort. All of these artists have found ways to interpret the world around them through their own lens to have created works that transcend cliché and they've each put forth something truly original. I'm someone who is committed to mastering my chosen medium and when I spot this obsession in other artists it sparks in me a deep sense of admiration.



Jan Švankmajer, film still, *Dimensions of Dialogue*, 1982.



Betty Woodman (1930-2018), *The Portuguese in Japan*, 2000.

Source: Art Shard

Writer: Yang Yini

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Date: November 4, 2020