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A Conversation with Angela Han

Arc Studio #201
By Sherri Cornett



As Angela Han effortlessly and rapidly moves our conversation from one of her research paths to another, I find myself happily anticipating my own explorations into her links to more information. Her magic is that she weaves her ideas and use of palette knives and [color shapers](#) into the beautifully detailed, lyrical scenes of her oil paintings. They invite us to let our imaginations run wild. [The Nine Guardians of the Water](#), which is inspired by Chinese mythology as well as Susie Ibarra's composition [Water Rhythms: Listening to Climate Change](#), asks us to consider how we can be guardians of water. The [27 Black Women in the Arts Project](#), which she spearheads for the [Northern California Women's Caucus for Arts](#) (she is also on its board), was created to honor Breonna Taylor. And, this is just a brief sampling of her work.

Sherri Cornett: How did this intricate web begin?

Angela Han: I've always been open to exploring different ways to ensure that my voice is heard; this has included music performances, research papers, curriculum development teaching and, yes, visual art! I am a classically-trained pianist and pursued visual art and music separately growing up. It was only when I reached my early 20s that I began weaving these two genres together.

SC: One of the resulting projects features Asian women composers.

AH: Yes! Standard classical music education too often focuses on the study and performance of works created by men with little to no inclusion of works by women. This norm is slowly but surely changing and I wish to speed up the process. I made a commitment to educate the public about women in music through my art.

SC: How did this manifest?

AH: The project I am currently work on is called [Realms of Courage: Celebrating Asian Women Composers](#) and focuses on fifteen Asian women composers. In addition to creating large-scale paintings inspired by their music and lived experiences, I will be conducting interviews with each composer and facilitating discussion panels . . .all accessible to the public in 2022!

SC: Would you share a bit about who or what has inspired your creativity?

AH: Ooh, there are so many!

Music is, of course, a *constant* source of inspiration. There is . . . [Wangechi Mutu's fantastical work featuring powerful female figures](#). . . the exquisite detail in Persian and Turkish illuminations, Indonesian batik motifs and shadow theatre. . . and fantasy novels, epic poetry, and mythology. Currently, I am delving into Chinese myths about the goddess Nüwa, creator of humanity and, in my opinion, a legendary artist (see my series [The Rhapsody of Nüwa](#), inspired by the tale "Nuwa Mends the Sky"). What remains as a life-changing text for me [is The Conference of the Birds](#) by Farīd ud-Dīn Attār.

SC: Attār's poem! Thank you for introducing me to it! As I learn about you, I doubt your inspiration and motivation ever lag. Did the pandemic affect your art and your process?

AH: My response to the chaos has been to challenge myself! Though I cannot control what is happening in the outer world, I do have the power to bring life to the world within me. When my previous plans to do research in Germany were thwarted, I sought a challenge that would entirely consume me. After being juried into the 12th Annual 50/50 Show organized by the Sanchez Art Center, I created fifty paintings within fifty days centered around my chosen theme of "50 Mythical Worlds Inspired by 50 Women Composers." Intense to say the least! It raised awareness about fifty contemporary composers (see my [50/50 Show Blog](#)).

Since then, I have also exhibited works in response to climate change, developed my illustration style, received funding from the San Francisco Arts Commission (SFAC) and Asian Pacific Islander Cultural Center (APICC) and joined the Arc community. I do what I do because I value my voice, and my drive stems from knowing that I'm creating possibilities for girls and women who look like me and/or who have similar life stories.

SC: Whew! What brought you to Arc Gallery and Studios?

AH: I've been longing to push the boundaries of my artistic practice – moving from 2D to 3D, exploring interactive ideas, and experimenting with different genres. As with Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, I'm thrilled to have a space that is just mine in which to chase my curiosities and bring alive my imagination. And, to do so within a community of remarkable artists!

Angela's website: www.angelahanart.com

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