



MEET THE CREATIVE

Liu Wa: Me, my selfie and I

Her headfirst dive into art's deep end

Liu Wa's recent creations involve a rework of her college-era *Selfie Series*.

Inspired by the selfies and apps we encounter daily, the series of mixed-media paintings combined her self-portraits with embroideries, acupuncture needles, keyboards and bullet casings: objects that reflect the messages and culture surrounding her.

Liu says she often turns to shopping app *Taobao* for supplies and ideas, picking up finds like old wind-up toys. The bullet casings from the *Selfie Series*, however, are her own – a collection from her time in Yale's pistol and rifle club. Liu wanted to express that her "body is a battleground" where she constantly rebuilds her identity.

Revisiting her early works, she decided to give them a contemporary restoration in photo editor *Photoleap*. Before this restoration, she has created a series of short videos using iPhone apps.

"Still images and short-form videos are valuable in their own ways, but they share the common medium of the phone screen which we look at every day," explains Liu, "*Photoleap* differs in functions from the typical photo editor in that it gives users space to customise on top of artistic filters."



The app's Try QuickArt feature is an inspiration pinboard which Liu enjoys browsing: "I like many of the effects, so have tried them out for impromptu creations."

Advanced users can also go beyond the readymade and experiment with image layering, blending and customising parameters like brightness, vibrance, sharpen, shadows, structure and colour curves, to list a few.

That said, Liu appreciates *Photoleap* for its inspired convenience, and was ultimately drawn to the "broken glass" effect offered in Try QuickArt. She fine-tuned the appearance of the "shards" and augmented the angles, resulting in the whirlpool optics we now see in her reworked *Selfie Series* photos.

She loves the "dizzying feel" this gives to the original.



Liu uses *Photoleap* to transform her *Selfie Series*.

This is what art is to Liu – it can be ceremonial at times and frivolous at others, it can take an intense creative process or come naturally and effortlessly.

Liu had always seen things a little differently. Born to an artistic family, Liu had grown up in galleries. At 24, the Beijing native was listed on *Forbes' 30 Under 30 Asia 2019: The Arts*. She was recognised for her experimental work in everything from painting to installation and new media.

But as Liu says, her artistic career was never a sure thing. It was a long journey of self-discovery, one that repeats every time she creates.

To make sure that art was her true calling, Liu decided to try a different course early on. She enrolled in Yale for a joint degree in anthropology and art. The former awakened her awareness of the impact of environment on one's sense of identity, and sparked the *Selfie Series*. Liu likens her feelings upon completing the project as jumping headfirst into a pool.

“ That state [I was in] was like being unable to swim, so all you can do is to flounder around, not knowing if you're swimming correctly. ”

This self-doubt stayed with Liu. But while feeling she was struggling in the pool's deep end, Liu thirsted for the possibilities it held.

Increasingly, professional and amateur artists are turning to social media as a new creative platform. Liu often taps into video sharing app *Kuaishou* for the never-ending stream of weird and wonderful content.

“ [Social networking platforms] are epitomes of our zeitgeist. As we understand ourselves more, we also lose ourselves in an ocean of information. ”

Yet Liu also found solace in creating her video series. Recalling her earlier *Selfie Series*, *2020 Got Me Like* also blends Liu's own images with other elements to explore the boundaries of self and information – an enduring theme in her art.

In four years, Liu has gone from floundering in the pool to freestyling. “I've got a better feel for it now after watching others swim, but I still have a lot to learn.”