

What do you like about the work? Be specific.

I really loved the way that Gu's work was directly influenced by his personal life, not just research. Sometimes he would research something that was brought to his attention through an aspect of his life. You could read his entire art and writing careers like a timeline of his life even without further context.

What do you not like about the work?

Honestly, the only thing I didn't like about his work was that some of it just didn't hit the spot for me personally. I think that that has a lot to do with my inability to truly comprehend what he's gone through and where he's coming from, though. I can empathize, but probably never truly understand it to the level that a Chinese Canadian might, or perhaps an immigrant in general. It definitely made me feel empathy- like how hard it really is for immigrants still today, to enter and feel comfortable in another country like Canada where everything (language, culture, customs, etc.) can be so vastly different.

What is the subject matter of the work?

A lot of Gu's work was based on personal experience and related research. Whether he meant to or not, I found there was a kind of linking "river" metaphor throughout most of his work. He spoke at the beginning of the talk about how a river in China that he grew up near was connected to the Fraser River here in BC, and that sort of set the tone of his life's journey and career. It was fascinating how his life was interwoven throughout his work. He wasn't just making work for a researched and prepared reason, he's making work that is emotional and pulled from and inspired by a part of his life or a part of himself that he's exploring.

Describe the materials and techniques of the art.

Gu's work spans a ridiculous number of materials and genres, but his most repeated seems to be installation. When he has a show, he involves the entire room and sometimes the entire gallery space. He also incorporates his writings and poetry often into his works.

What do you think the artist is trying to communicate?

Often I find that with younger artists, it's harder to find a common through-thread of theme in their life's work because they're not as developed as older artists. Gu is an older artist, and therefore has found some common threads of theme in his work to draw from continuously. His themes include the struggles and triumphs of immigrating to Canada and all that entails (language, financial, work, history, etc.), and the ever-flowing journey of his life. He likened his life to the flow of a river, and explained that everything in his life was a constant movement through places, time, people, etc. These themes are things that he draws from into his work to find inspiration and meaning.

Does the work remind you of anything? (Doesn't have to be art-related)

His work made me think of graphic novels. I think he'd be a great subject for a graphic biographical novel, or perhaps just a story he writes and illustrates himself.

Are there aspects of the artists process that you'd be interested in incorporating in your own work?

I like the way his work is so interactive. He invites people to step into his world and exist within it- to experience his work on an often huge scale, and I really aspire to have that effect with my own work.

Did your first instinctual impressions of the work change after learning more about it?

I totally thought his work was going to be just installations, and I had no clue what it was about. I suppose that mystery is what drew me in, as well as his strong choices of colour in all of his works. The piece on the poster for this event had a red background, and I love red, so that drew me in too. His works were absolutely not all installations, and in fact he explored many different forms of art, not just fine arts. Upon learning more about the works and Gu as a person and an artist, I think I walked away from the talk with a stronger sense of what his art was about, and his stories and work inspired me a lot.