

Infusing Art

Into the Everyday

BY XIZHOU XIE

As a student in an art-focused elementary school in the bustling city of Shanghai, my childhood experience was unique. The lessons were often accompanied by the sound of beginner trumpet students' scale practice in the music room down the hall. The math quizzes would occasionally be smudged with oil pastels from the previous art class. Little did I know that these unusual, distracting, and sometimes comical moments would be the building blocks of who I would become.

As a child and teen, my life was filled with art. Part of the regular curriculum of the art school was weekly dance lessons, choir practice, painting lessons, and Chinese calligraphy lessons. My "major" in school was the piano, which I rigorously studied for over 10 years. On top of all that, with an avid opera-fan grandfather and an amateur-photographer father, art education was on a daily basis.

However, art took a backseat when I moved solo to the U.S. at 18 for college, opting for a more stable major and a career as a data analyst. In 2017, post-graduation, I felt the need to do more than just work. Without a piano, I turned to painting as a creative outlet. After much experimentation in different art styles, I ended up finding my voice in abstract fluid art. I was painting in a small spare bedroom and making use of every inch of it; occasionally, for larger pieces, I worked in the garage. Even though the space was limiting, I felt profound joy in creating and sharing my work. ▶





In early 2021, after realizing Madison, Wisconsin, would be my long-term home, my husband and I purchased a house. Perfect for an artist, it came with a dedicated studio: a three-room suite on the second floor. The suite includes a main studio area, a storage room, and a workshop space for teaching. Situated in the aptly-named Greentree neighborhood, the view outside the studio windows offers a picturesque backdrop, with changing seasons on full display through the leaves of mature ash trees.

Step into my studio, and you'll be greeted by a three-tiered workstation on wheels. I paint on the top tier, and move pieces to the bottom two tiers to let dry or come back to. This workstation is the focal point of the studio and where I spend most of my time; the fact that it's on wheels (it weighs 400 pounds!) means I can seamlessly rearrange the studio, ensuring the layout is optimized for any project. On the far side of the studio under a window, there is a jewelry workspace where I create painted artisanal jewelry, while under another window is a photography area. ▶



How I Get Ready for *a Day in the Studio*

- Put on a shirt that already has paint on it
- Turn on wax melts or light a candle to set the mood
 - Grab a toy for my cat, KitKat, so she doesn't whine outside of the studio (she's too rambunctious to be in the studio —she'll try to eat everything!)
- Put on a comfort TV show in the background that I've watched many times
- Tidy my workstation (this could take hours)
- Review my unfinished projects (there are usually quite a few)
- Flip through art books to get inspired
- Start with a color study in an art journal or on loose watercolor paper





While fluid acrylic remains a constant, having a large studio has allowed me to also explore a variety of styles over the years. One of my newer series started off as a color study, but it wasn't until I had completed the series that I realized it was a documentation of my journey. I start each painting with watercolor/ink underlayer, incorporating traditional Chinese painting principles to build the foundation. Then I layer acrylic paints, pastels, and other western mediums. It is imperative that every layer complements each other so not a single stroke or medium can overtake the entire image — it is all about balance. This process mirrors my experience as a first-generation immigrant, where I create harmony and reconciliation between my Chinese heritage and American values. The studio witnesses my transformation.

Every time I step into the studio, I'm transported back to the halls of that bustling art-focused school, where everything was possible. Some days, I just want to play with a new concept or a new color palette. Other days, I lay down the most personal introspection of self on the canvas. I may lose myself, and find myself, all in one session.

Completed paintings find their way to my home gallery on the first floor. The gallery is open by appointment, and I host multiple open galleries a year. The second act of expression unfolds as viewers bring their perspectives into the interpretation. Their own personal background breathes new life and meaning into the artwork. These moments of connection, happening intimately in my home gallery, transcend what's on the canvas.



With my home, studio, and art gallery all under one roof, art seamlessly integrates into my daily life. The memories of beginner trumpets and the faint traces of oil pastel smudges were the foundations of this life I now realize I'm destined to have — one surrounded by the vivid tapestry of art.

Xizhou Xie (first name Xizhou, pronounced "She-Joe," meaning "a canoe that carries hopes"; last name Xie, pronounced "Shieh") is an abstract artist based in Madison, Wisconsin. She specializes in creating vibrant pieces characterized by vivid colors, bold textures, and dynamic compositions. Learn more about Xizhou and how to visit her gallery, Xizhou Xie Art Gallery, at xizhouxie.com. Follow her on Instagram (@xizhouxie) and Facebook (xizhouxieart). She welcomes email at me@xizhouxie.com.

Photography by Amy Lynn (amylynncreative.com).

