

國立交通大學應用藝術研究所

碩士論文

Strangeness Between Us

我們之間的陌生



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中華民國九十八年十一月

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in
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Strangeness Between Us

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Institute of Applied Arts
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Abstract

Being alone in a foreign place has changed my life; it got started with a single object, a single emotion, and a single fear. These combinations gave awareness to look out for oneself and yet is a witness to view the world and be an actor in it to be a part of everything. We all have multiple tasks.

My thesis is based on my life as a foreign student in Taiwan. The people I met and the places I moved about are the main source of ideas. I saw similarity and differences at the same time. I felt belonging and distant altogether. The warmth and the cold co-exist, unable to be separated, makes one confused. But this is how everything works.

As I interpret my thesis, I have intended to give the thesis three dimensions of looking at myself. Searching, evolving and continue searching. The illustrations are the process of these dimensions in my life. There are no absolute answers but there is a life long time to keep on searching for an answer for the stranger hidden in me, whether for the world or for myself.

我們之間的陌生

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摘要

獨自在異鄉的生活改變了我的人生，醞釀於小小的物件，小小的情感，小小的恐懼。這些因素總和起來使我產生跳脫自我向外在世界凝視的興趣，然後成為萬物宇宙中的某個角色。我們都有著多重的使命。

我的論文是以我在台灣異鄉的留學生活為基礎，以我在這遇到的人 我所居住的地方為靈感來源。我總是同時感受到相異與相同，歸屬感跟疏離感，冷漠與溫情，他們如此不可分離，令人困惑。雖然這就是萬物的法則。

當我為我的論文作註解，我刻意將論文分為三個角度審視我自己摸索，成長進化，然後繼續摸索。那些圖示都是我追尋自身生命層次的過程。沒有必然的解答，卻有一生的時間去追尋，去瞭解我自己都不瞭的陌生的自己。不管是為了這個世界還是為了我自己。



Dadicated and Special Thanks to
Professor Wendy Lai Wen Shu

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Prologue

A friend is here,
A friend is gone,
There is no sympathy,

There is a chase,
There this a place,
Then you are misplaced.

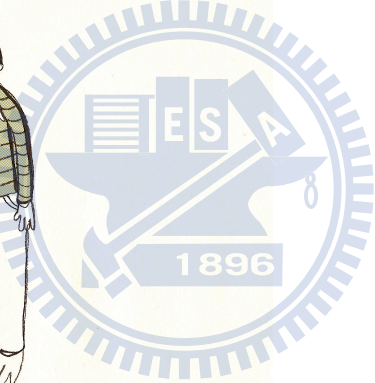
She stood right there,
She ran towards,
She was shot.

A simple night
The sky is bright
The stars stood below the grounds.

No one survive.



He was mine, and
he let him be mine.







Chapter 01

(Inspirations)

The clouds are moving at every moment; yet never once have I seen the same shape, color or tone of cloud. They are never identical, even when they all look the same. However, there is always a time when we can spare a moment to stop and admire just how beautiful they really are, because we know that in a split second, they can change without being noticed. In spite of all we take for granted, the next beautiful cloud will come to us. And when it doesn't, we simply look somewhere else for its charms.



The feeling of needing or looking for strangers when there is nobody in the world but you

Strangers in My Book

(The story of Orion, and how it relates to me)

My illustrated book of Orion depicts an ordinary boy of an unknown age. Orion could be thirty-five years old or he could be only twelve years old. His appearances are casual, but curious to the outside world. Orion is a character that reflects much of how I see every stranger on the street, or the people I know but have grown apart from. Every day I meet different people from different backgrounds; we walk past each other, maybe with a glance or maybe not. Few leave an impression, and vice versa. If so, we would never know unless we are being told. In many circumstances, phases pass without our recognition, we are not in control of the people we meet every day, and this could be one of the reasons why life is so beautiful when things are not laid out for us in a plan. We walk, we see, we dream and we change.

Orion is a lonely character that spends a lot of time by himself. Orion is a unique boy, feeling like he is special and there's no one like him. Actually, there aren't many people like him. He is very comfortable on his own. Solitude and loneliness are never a problem for him, or so he thinks. His closet is filled with the same type of shirts and he wears the same color pants and a backpack every day. He carries a backpack because he wants to keep his hands free in case someone comes near him (he would use his hands to push them away). Yes, random people scare Orion. In every way, Orion looks nothing like the type who would need a lifetime companion. He seems comfortable in every situation, best on his own. Maybe he is living his life in denial, as it's hard for him to find attraction in others. However he is only trying to live his life. Orion will not be happy until he gets the courage to face his inner self and be brave enough to admit what he needs.



There is another character that appears in my book: Oreo. He looks almost identical to Orion, yet totally different. He is everything Orion is and is not. Orion sees himself in Oreo, maybe in the back of his mind; he thinks it would make him a complete person if he could be with him. This is a hideous thought, that one could make another a complete person. I would never believe that we could find someone to complete us. We came into this world alone, and nothing lasts forever. If we were to think that anything that starts with a motive can complete you, this initiative wishful thinking has gone in the wrong direction. It's only secondary to have someone who moves at the same pace as us, but primary to be able to stand-alone and remain the principal figure in our own lives.

Orion was never prepared to meet Oreo, but once he found Oreo, he would not let him go that easily. The story develops as a metaphor of how two people meet and find one another so similar that they can claim there is another 'I' in this world. I'm guessing this is a dream for many of us, and not just me. In the phase of seeking one's soul mate, we tend to see what we want to see. Blinded by our own longing, every aspect of what we see is turned into the visual we project in our minds. That is how Orion sees Oreo, everything seems right and everything fits into place. As Orion and Oreo get closer with each step, they are still blinded by what they simply want to see. The initial drastic move Orion makes is to consume Oreo, so that he can have Oreo all to himself. Orion 'eats' every bit of Oreo so that they can be together forever. Perhaps this drastic measure was agreeable with both parties, but it is an obscure action, about which, each reader will have his or her own set of conclusions after completing this story. I end it with this: despite all his desires and expectations, Orion just stands there alone.

Even though I'm the creator of this story, every time I re-read it, I come up with a different conclusion. The emotions of the reader can influence what they see at that moment, and eventually, they partially change their mentality or thinking. This story is based on my own experiences of meeting strangers; some left a mark while others became a forgotten past. Past and present strangers whom I have met have somehow changed my life and let me create a metaphor for what I am today. There are no obligations to meet strangers in the street; we can look at them with a care-free attitude and not have to bear any responsibility. However, if we choose to get to know the person, it's a whole different story altogether.

Perhaps Orion knows the advantages of meeting strangers would give him space for imagination or perhaps freedom from desire. We all need to have space for imagination—the bigger the space, the greater the freedom. The people we meet and the places we go to accumulate will morph in different ways. This is not just a simple gesture of life, but it is also a work of art, because we sometimes affect others with our feelings and this may influence or inspire them in one way or another. It is a mutual interaction with numerous possible outcomes.



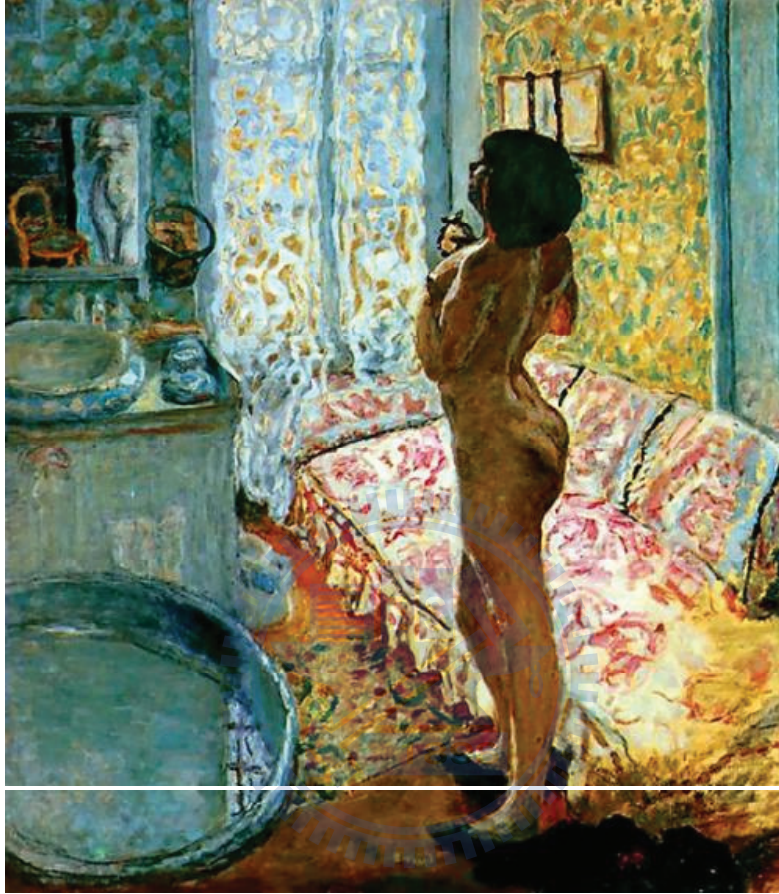
Techniques of Storytelling

My primary approach in this book was aimed at having very subtle lines to define the shape of the characters. There are no details in the figure, as I needed to have a clean visual at the beginning in order to flow into and be a contrast for the brutal part at the end. The subtle lines with fewer details also made both characters easier to identify and leave an impression. This is my first time using Chinese brush and ink to do an illustration. The speed of the strokes needs to be consistent, and I need to draw it quickly because the ink dries out fast. Chinese ink strokes are very beautiful, however they require much patience and skill, as there should be no broken lines. Once there is a broken line and I overlap the lines, there will be a huge black spot appearing on the newsprint paper. Newsprint paper works amazingly with Chinese ink because it deeply absorbs all the ink at the speed of light and one is able to make bold lines without drawing over them two or three times. By using this ancient eastern material to illustrate something more contemporary, I believe I can bring out more foreign characteristics in the visuals.

Artist Cover Story

As Pierre Bonnard, a painter from the late nineteenth century, was walking down the street in Paris, he spotted a young woman, sixteen years of age at most. She was a nervous looking girl, about five feet tall, with bones that seemed as though they would break as she walked. The fragileness drew Pierre to spy on her daily. It wasn't till a decade later that Pierre learned her name: Maria Boursin, who sewed artificial pearls onto funeral wreaths as a career. She was no longer sixteen. Little did Pierre know, the day he met her, she became an object he would paint and draw endlessly. He thereafter considered that period as the birth of his identity as a painter. If he had walked along a different street that day, he could easily have met someone else, and pursued a different life entirely. Maria married Pierre; they had a little house, a garden, and a breakfast room. Pierre never stopped drawing Maria.

*Few of us are like Pierre. He lived a life with only art in his mind.
and life itself is indeed a kind of art.*



*A painting drew by Bonnard of Maria,
their everyday life after marriage.*



Hello my friend

Are you lonely?

How about telling you a story?



Once upon a time, there were 2 clouds



One of the clouds was white.



The other cloud was black.



A dinasour .

The white cloud like to make shapes



A big grape.



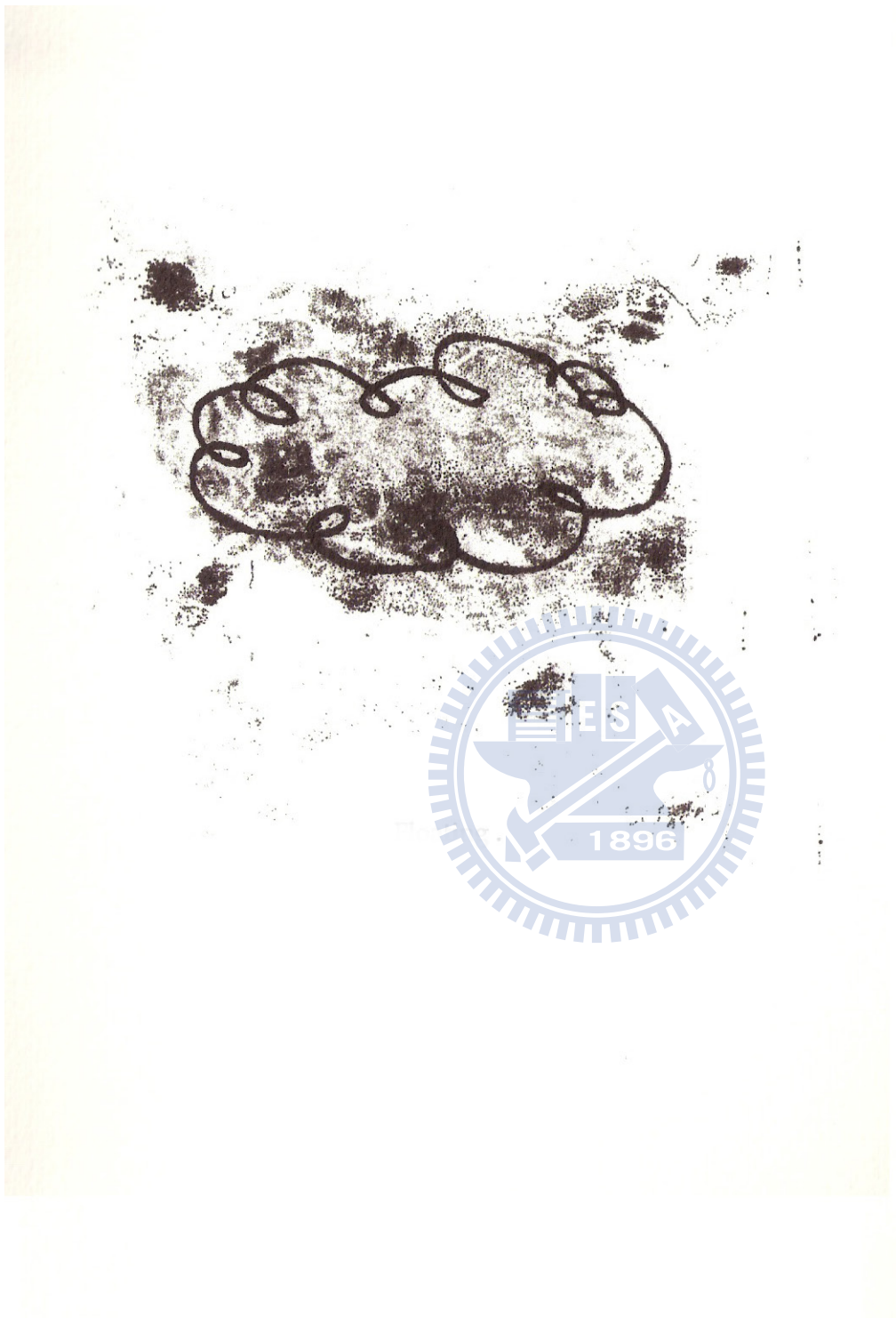
A big mouth.



The black cloud didnt like to do anything.



Floating.



Floating.



No matter what...

No matter what they did...



they will just float.



Their life...you know is like reading
3 boring story books continuously.



The black couldnt tolerate anymore.





He cried.



He cried.



He cried.





If there are only two clouds in the world, can they accidentally meet one day?



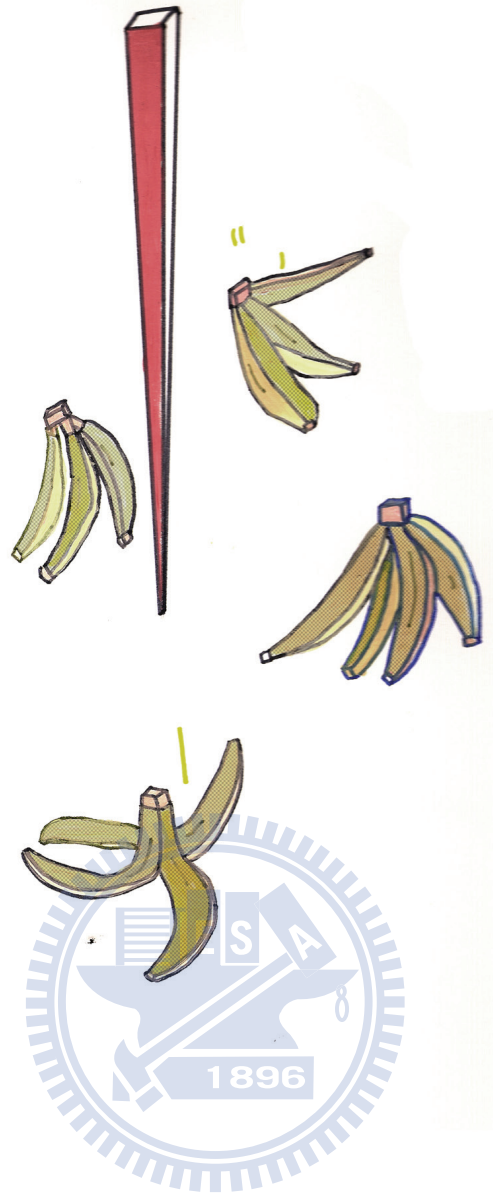
The white cloud floated.

End of Chapter One.



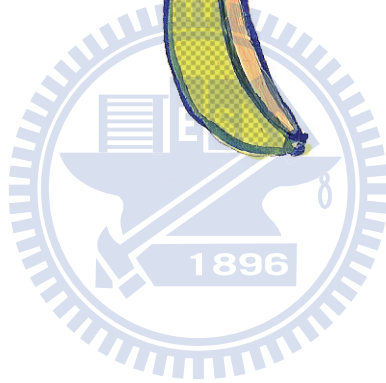
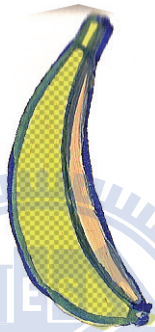
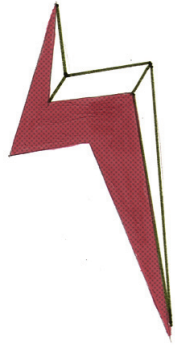


Chapter 02



(Inspirations)

I assume most of us were taught to collect when we were young. We probably started off by collecting stamps, stickers, drawings or cartoon heroes. Teachers in school encouraged us to have a hobby, and most of us would start collecting something: anything from vintage objects to insects to whatever we think is worth keeping. This act itself is one of the gestures of finding order in our chaotic lives. Unfortunately, not all of us are gifted as an artist, but we can still transform our lives into an everyday living masterpiece. It is not the art itself; it is the life we are going through that makes us artistic. The outcome of this particular action of collecting and organizing will eventually turn out to be an eye opener, because a collection has the beauty and the heart of a collector, if not just the amusingness of the objects. We can create something wondrous out of a hobby; by collecting wholeheartedly and looking and seeking beyond the object, we can find ourselves. It is a process of searching within ourselves, and experiencing self-revelation and self-entitlement. The contentment and obsession gives meaning to our lives.





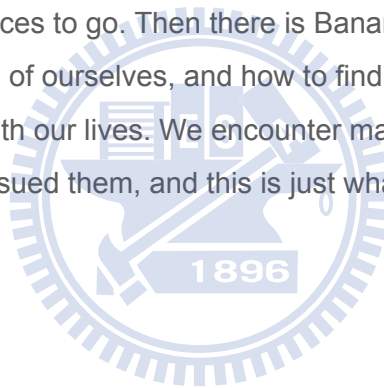
Strangeness of not knowing who you will accidental meet in life

The Banano Book

I created this book to document the phases of my life within this society. The phases I have been through in my life are similar to a collection of experiences, and collecting ourselves uses the same method as collecting objects as a hobby. As a designer, there was always a time when I felt that while being a part of this society, I should also try to blend in, in order to survive. However, there is a huge part of me thinking that I shouldn't head in this direction. The opposite direction is always watching me with a strangeness and unfamiliarity. It makes me wonder if I am just a stranger to society or if I'm a stranger to myself in my own world.

The book starts off with Banano, a banana who has the idea that he could have a better life, and not just be a banana. The introduction begins with the concept that anyone in this world can make changes in their life, but that it takes the most courage and effort you could possibly imagine. Banano wants a change, but he is not sure where he should go or where he belongs. Banano's journey begins here.

I often feel each of us have missing pieces in our lives. We are in many places already, yet we seek out even more places to go. Then there is Banano's story, which tells us a lot about how uncertain we are of ourselves, and how to find a way where we can collect things in order to be content with our lives. We encounter many opportunities that could change our lives if we only pursued them, and this is just what Banano did.



This book demonstrates the flow of possibilities Banano goes through after the escape of being an ordinary banana. The samples of activities shown in the book are the basis of our society. A dream can be simple, and in this way, we are similar. Most of us wish to excel in a certain field, ergo we have the intention of being successful. However, most often we are blinded by what society has led us to believe is good for us. There is a hidden truth behind all things, such as in our dreams or how this society forces us to survive. We will never forget the truth and we will only get better by lying. Banano goes through many metaphors and phases, and we can take this as a kind of humor in life. With everything Banano has done, he is the only performer, and the only audience to himself. Meanings cross when I project the life we are leading and the fact that we are our own audience in this performance.

Banano tries many activities, from being a sport star to a hero to a model. He wants all the attention in the world because he feels there is nobody like him in the banana world. He wants to stand out among the others (and, oh, how hard he had tried)! Upon the ending of the story, I implicate the idea that we are always too busy to understand ourselves with the excuse that there is never enough time. Up till the end, Banano had discovered something that he had never encountered before: himself.

As often as we rush into the things we want in life, we should first ask ourselves: do we truly want them? What makes us want what we want? Will we be happy if we live our dream and believe there will always be a morning to wake up to? Why do people wish to be in a higher place day after day? Where each building is constructed, the next block will only be taller, and soon there will be an even higher building next to that one. We have walked this path, and yet we are strangers to ourselves. If we never stop discovering, perhaps we will never see the 'stranger' side of ourselves. We walk each day, and collect what we feel we need to make it to the next day. Right, wrong, true or false, it is completely objective and open to all.

Some of the ideas from the book are derived from Doctor Hick's light bulb collection on how we seek ourselves in the things we do as a hobby, or even as a career, it is a process of self-discovery. I was once actually very inspired by the things we often see abandoned in the streets. Objects are left either accidentally or intentionally, and they deserve to be noticed by passersby. I have seen many objects abandoned in the streets. While some are claimed by their rightful owners, the rest are merely waiting to be substituted. The objects range from keys to shoes to bags, and even include brooms and toys. Big or small, they all have a story to tell. I believe each one of these stories reflect many dreams, experiences and futures. These abandoned objects somehow give me hopes and dreams because of their uncertainties and the space they leave me for imagination, and this helps me analyze human behavior, which is to leave every possibility to each and every other thing we come across. We search, we encounter and we act upon.

Along the same lines as picking things up that are left by our parents, our ancestors, or strangers, we are also picking up what is in store for us when we discover others. I believe we can all see and feel things differently from what we are taught, because we are a living being and we lived. It is a process that may lead us to truly understand ourselves, and by doing what others do, it will bring our own perspectives into it. I am often lost in the process of seeking myself.

My dreams are substituted and influenced by the enforcement of reality. I had one true belief, and in wherever place I am now or will be going in the future, I will think it's about the dream I have to fulfill now in order to preserve a package of a new land, which consists of problems and happiness still. However it is not a reason not to go for it.

Techniques of Storytelling

I mainly used acrylic paper in this book. The colors are pure and devoted to the small range so that it could acquire the usual tone of direction for which shows consistency in my work. I like works that speak quietly but leave a mark on those who seek the same kind of solitude I need in my work. The story of Banano comes in a very direct and organized format of storytelling. It is subtle enough for anyone to either remember it or forget it—whichever they choose. The story does not scream for attention and it seems to just sit there with the same conclusion every time you pick the book up. I made it in such a way that goes hand in hand with the message I intend to convey. It is a situation where everything is the same, however, you can also look at things from a different angle if you want. The decision is yours; whether the journey is a round one or you on a one way road. There are many mistakes in life, but these mistakes are what make the whole trip worthwhile.

Artist Cover Story



Once I heard a touching story from a friend. He told me there was a dentist who turned his house into a clinic. He had regular customers, his life was going as planned, he was married with a daughter and lived to be an old age. Along with a regular life, he had a rather irregular hobby. He loved to collect light bulbs of all different kinds and models. He placed them all in his basement and enjoyed showing them off to his patients after their regular check-ups. They were so amused when he lit up his basement. Soon after his death, his daughter donated all the light bulbs to the local art gallery. Only after his death was he identified as an artist. I later learned his name was Hugh Francis Hicks.

Upon hearing this story, I knew that art was different from any other kind of activity. Therefore I wondered, does art require knowledge of art beforehand, or does it come naturally to each individual, through his or her personal experiences and background? Art is a freeing activity and allows us to be individualistic. Since art became such a crucial source of spiritual expansion, everyone could thus be affected by a work of art. To determine what art is differs from person to person—it is unpredictable. I believe if art were created or discovered intentionally, it would not necessarily be a creative venture. Accidents that happen along the way are metaphors for the artist and the creation; there is a heartfelt connection between them. Doctor Hicks showed me how to live life to the fullest, how having a hobby as a life-long creation can mean so much more. He showed me how appreciating ordinary objects and collecting them as a hobby can be considered an art in itself.

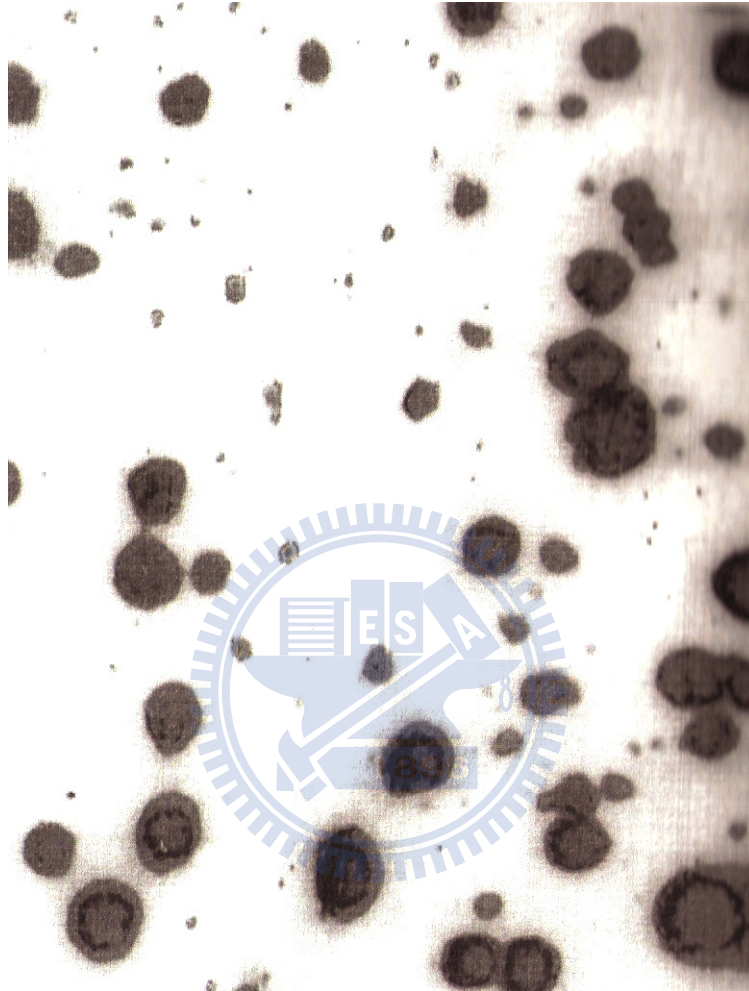
Every day can be a living masterpiece.



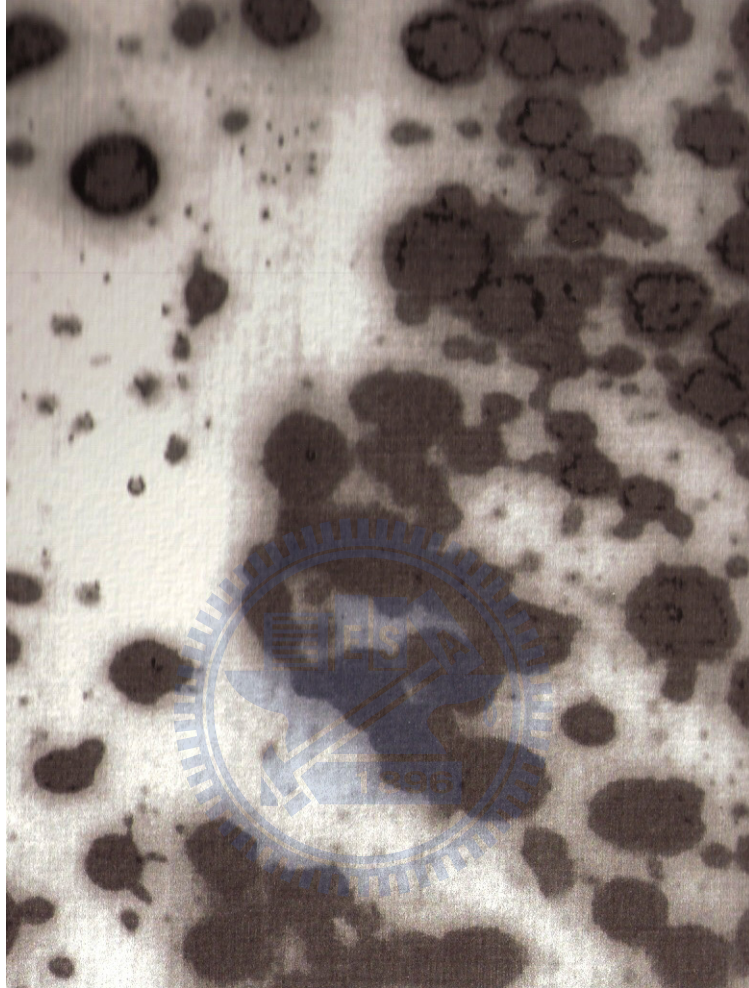
Hello my friend
Are you lonely?
How about telling you one more story?



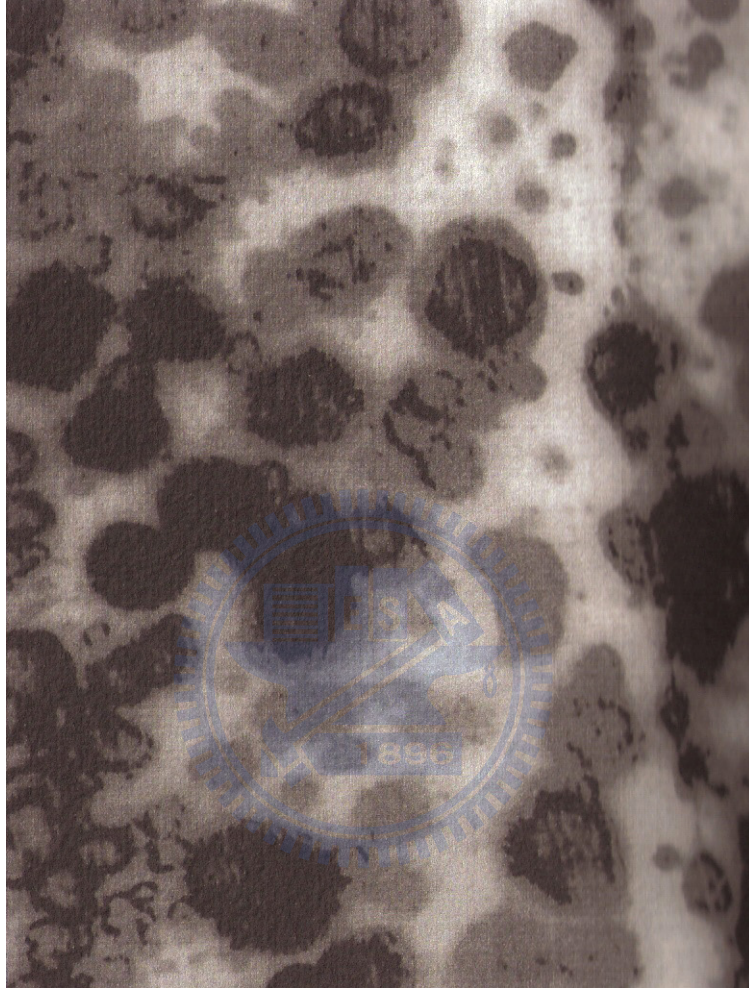
Once upon a time,
they were lots of bananas.
The story began with Banana 1.



I am Banana 1.



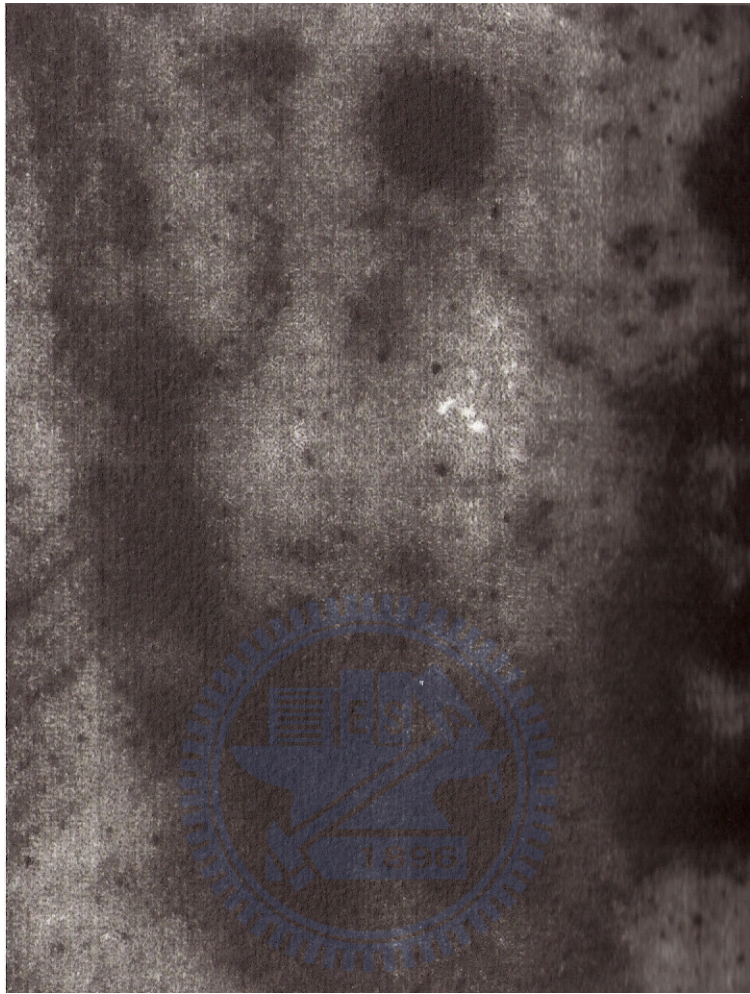
I am Banana 2.



I am Banana 3.



I am Banana 4.



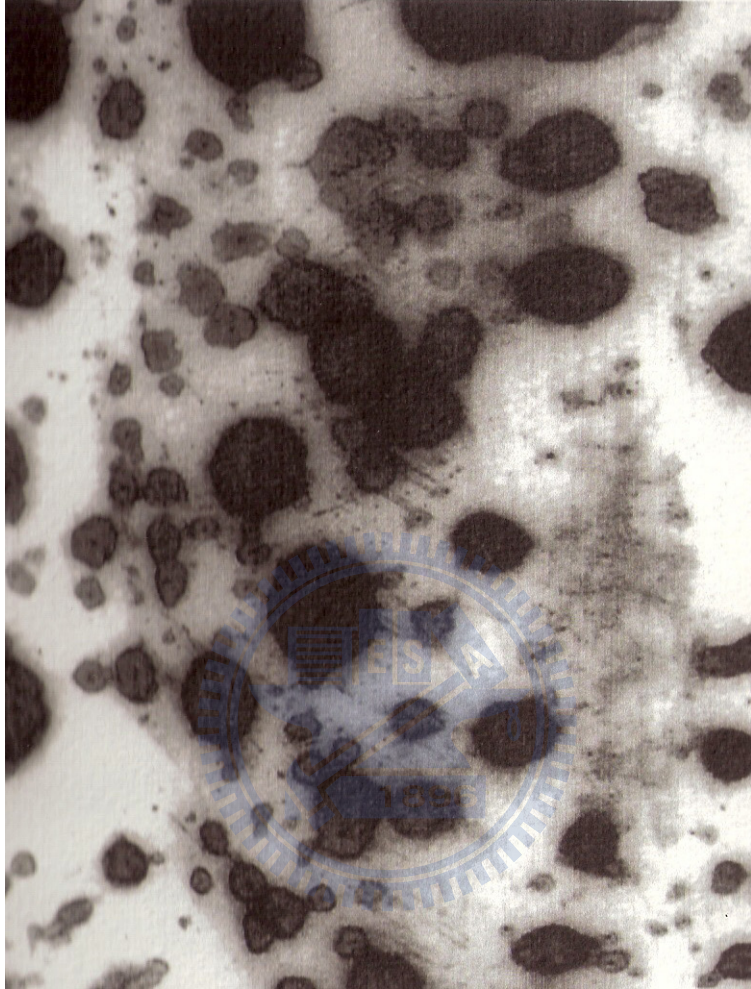
I am Banana 5.



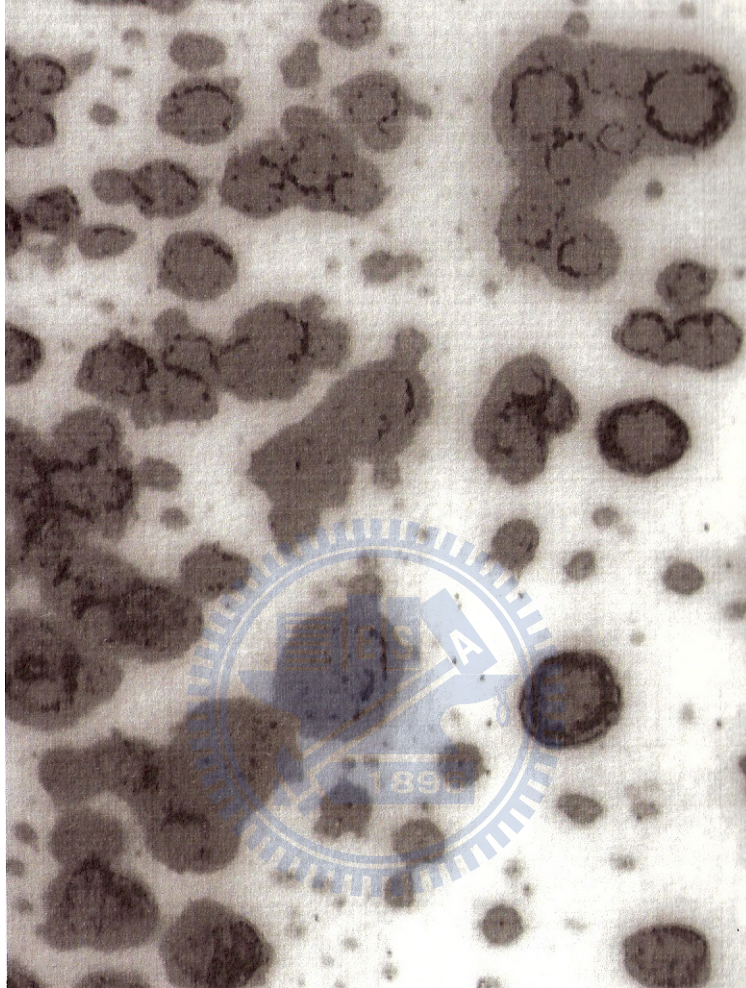
I am Banana 6.



I am Banana 7.



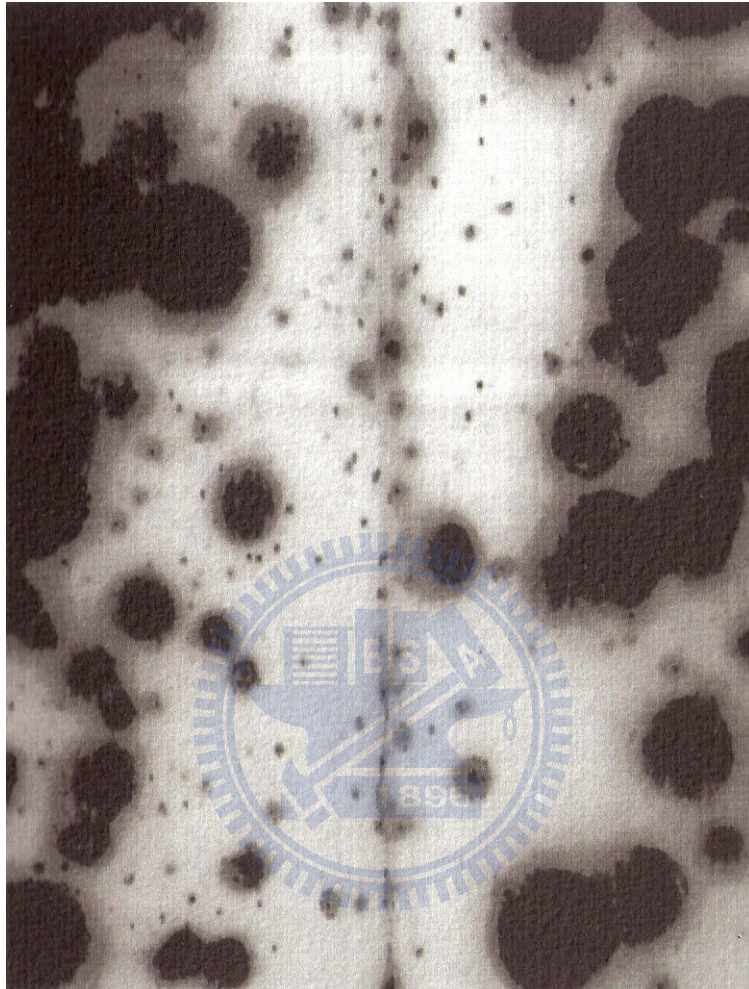
I am Banana 8.



I am Banana 9.



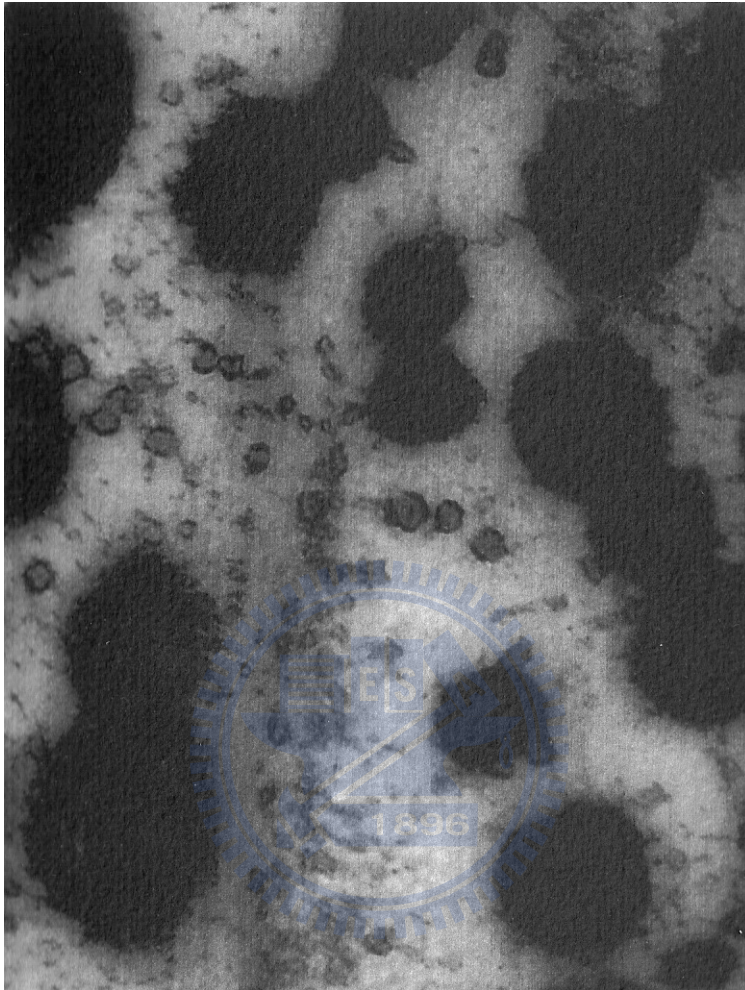
I am Banana 10.



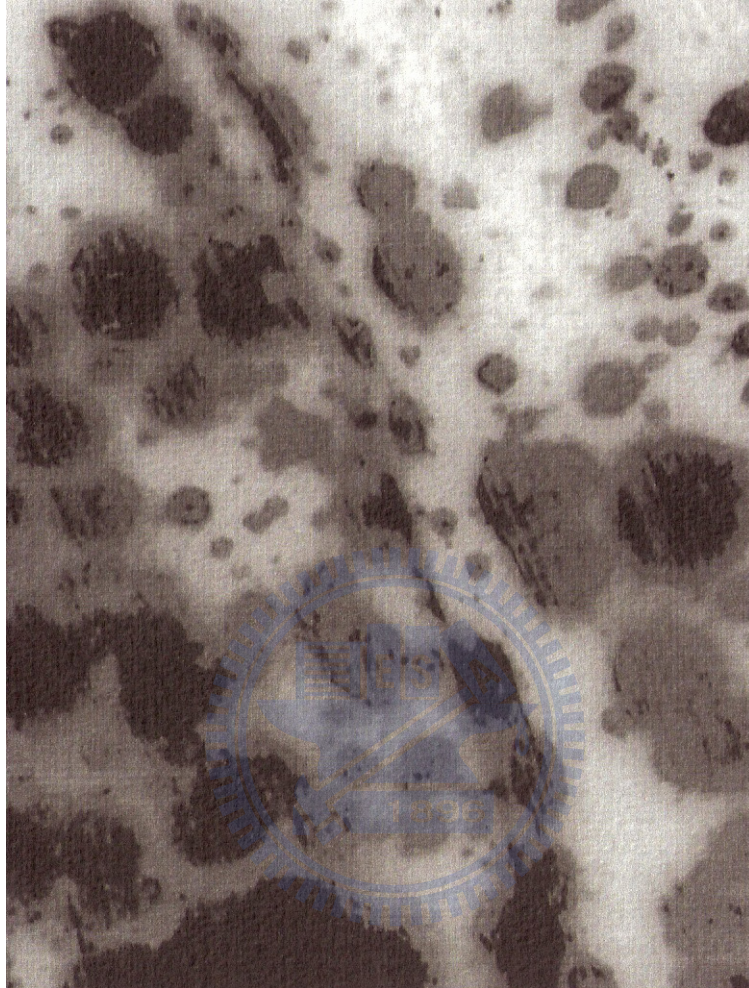
I am Banana 11.



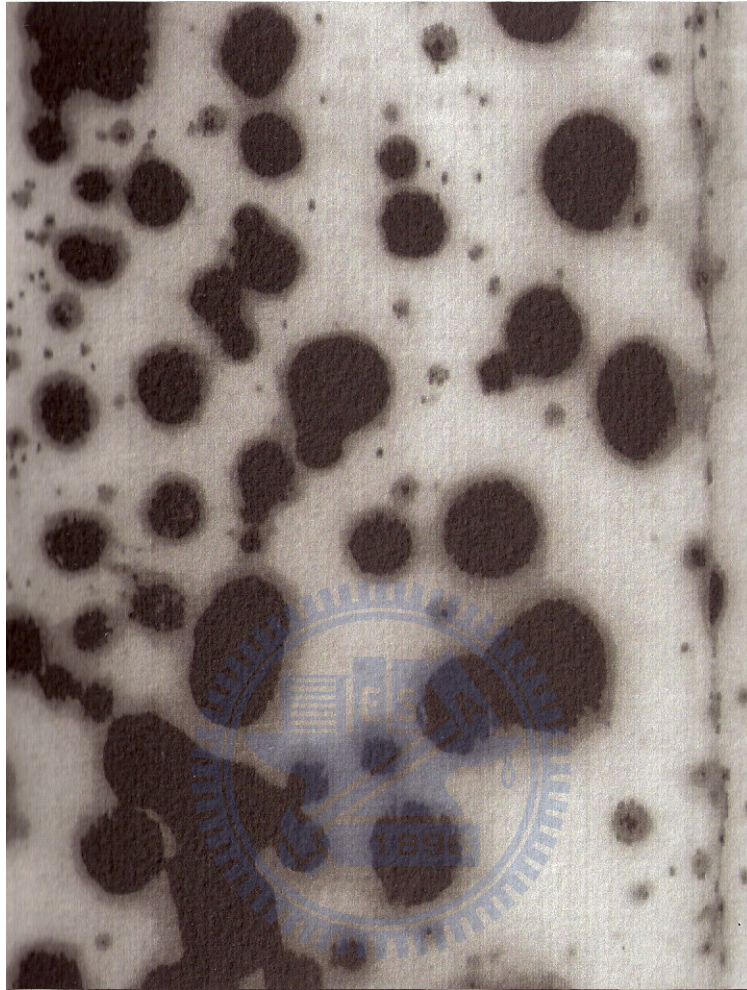
I am Banana 12.
Bananas kept on counting with no answer.



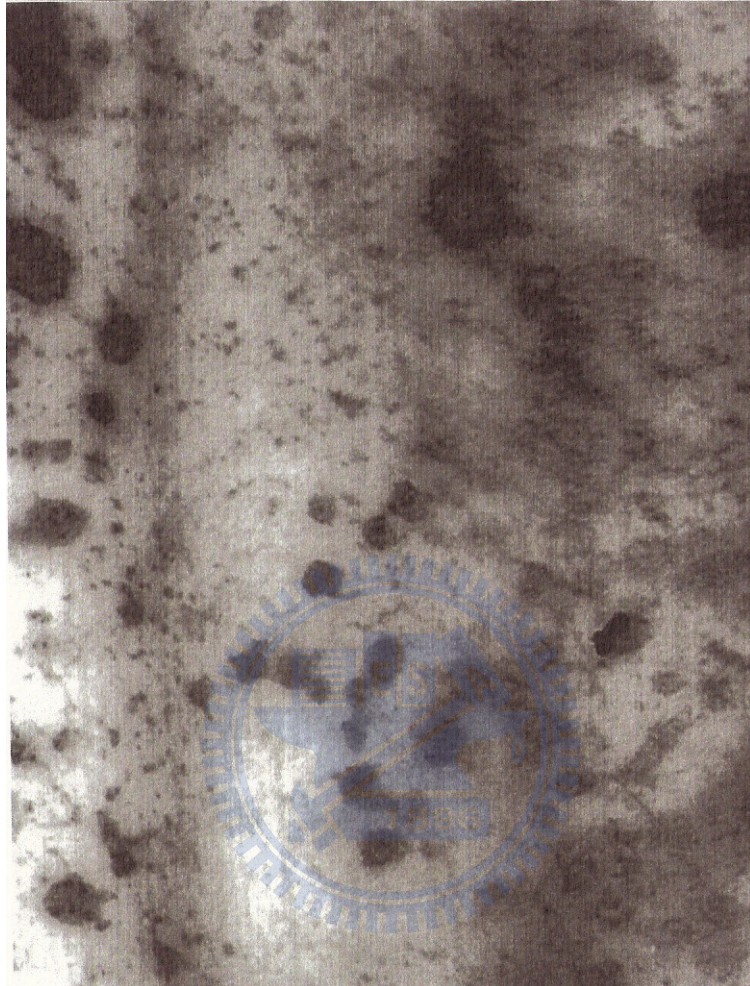
I am Banana 13.



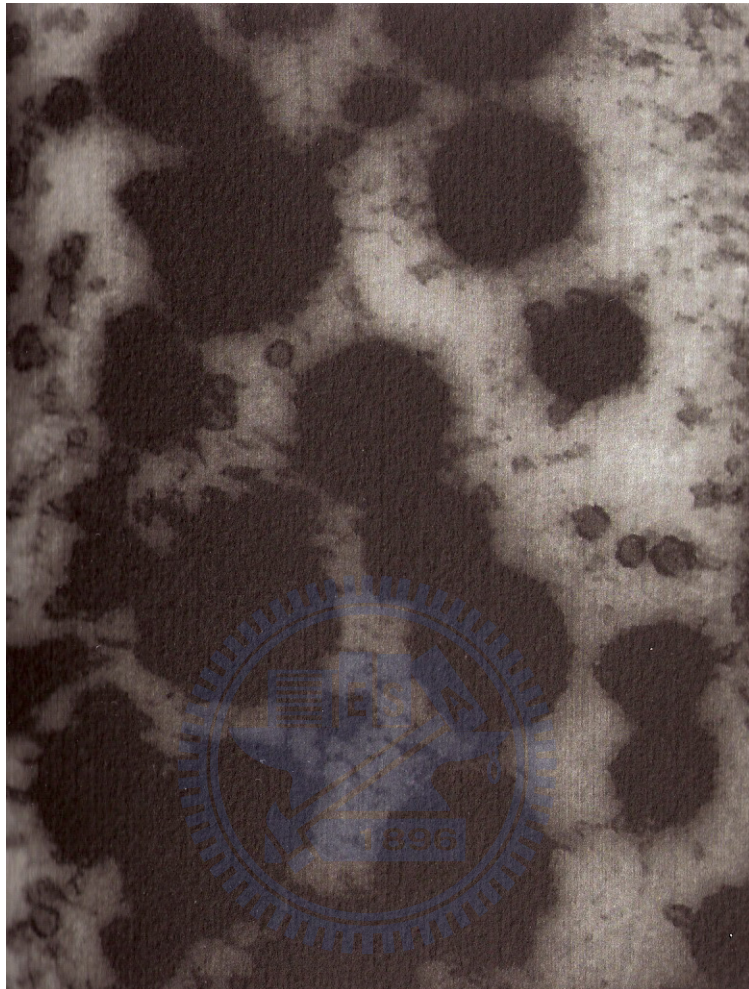
I am Banana 14.



I am Banana 15.

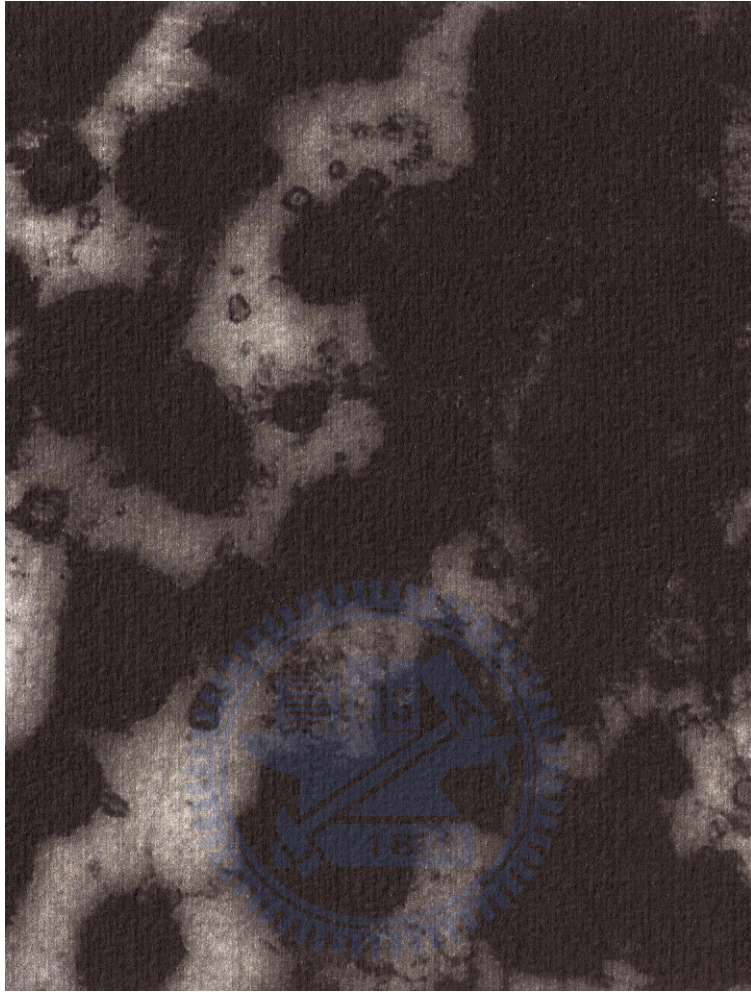


I am Banana 16.

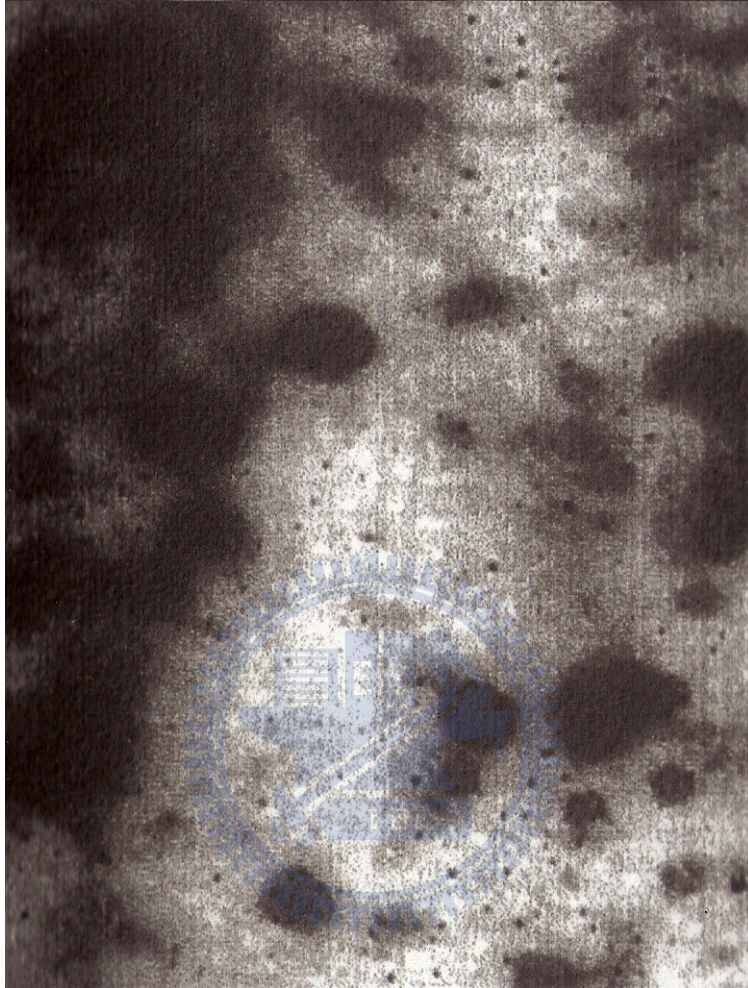


I am Banana 17.

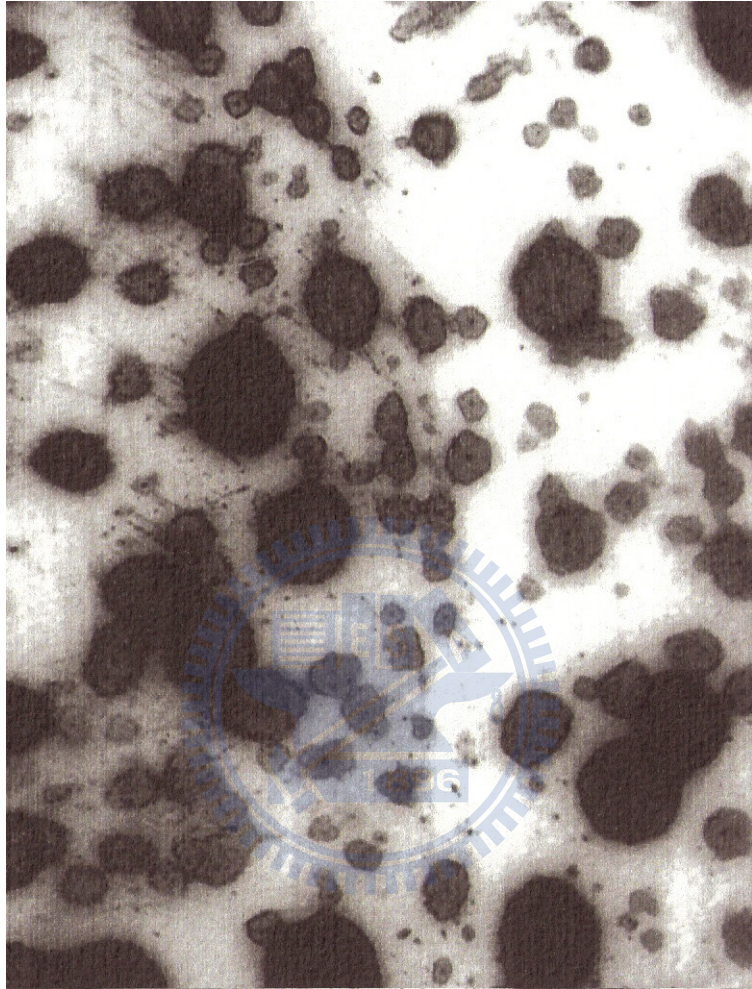
Bananas kept on counting with no specific reason



I am Banana 18.



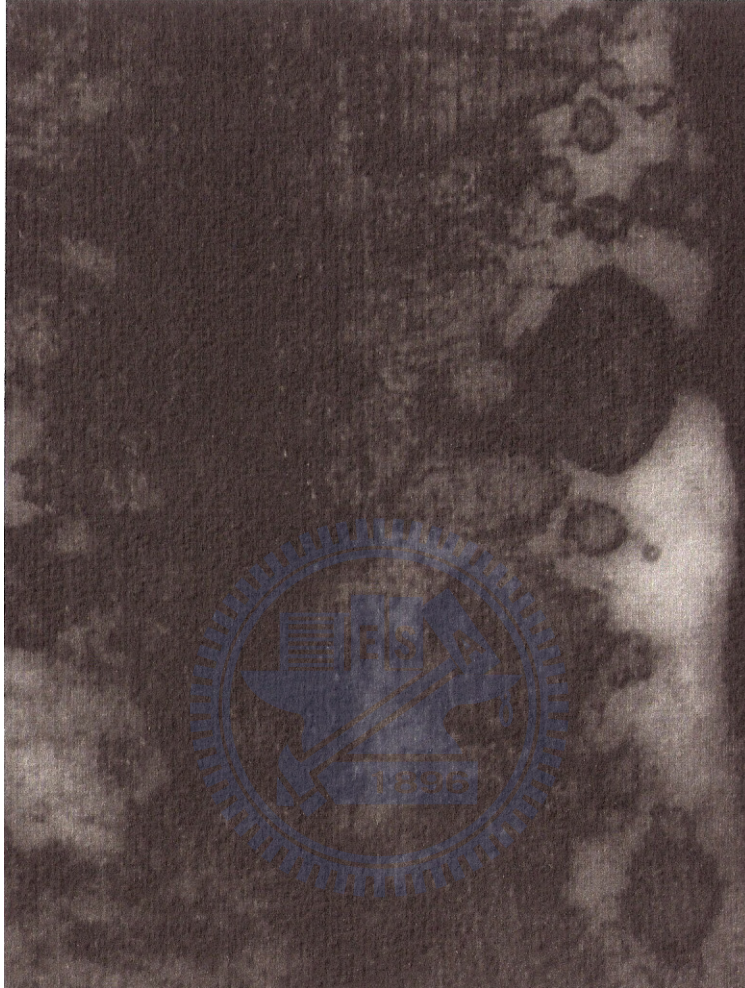
I am Banana 19.



I am Banana 20
Bananas kept on counting and counting



I am Banana 21
...as if there was a never ending story with a
never ending count of bananas.



I am Banana 22



“ If there are 100 bananas in the world, which one will I meet accidentally one day? asked Banana 1, who was bored like those who count and count and count..

End of Chapter Two.





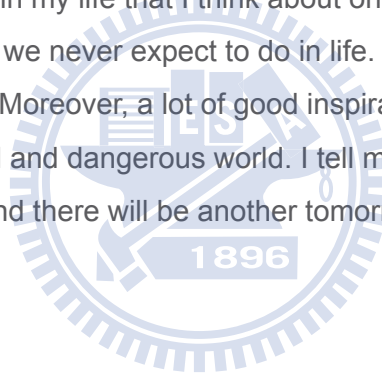
Chapter 03

Finding Myself When I am Lost



(Inspirations)

There are always some figures in my life that I think about once in a while. They remind me of the many possible things we never expect to do in life. They keep hope alive in this stressful and dangerous world. Moreover, a lot of good inspirations can be brought out in people because of this stressful and dangerous world. I tell myself that we live in a huge place, I can stand here today and there will be another tomorrow.

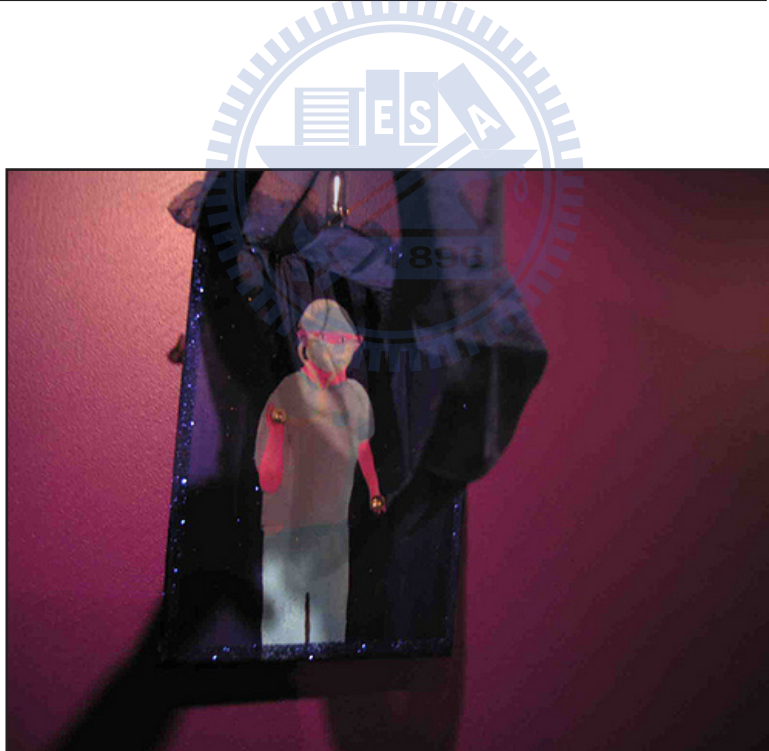
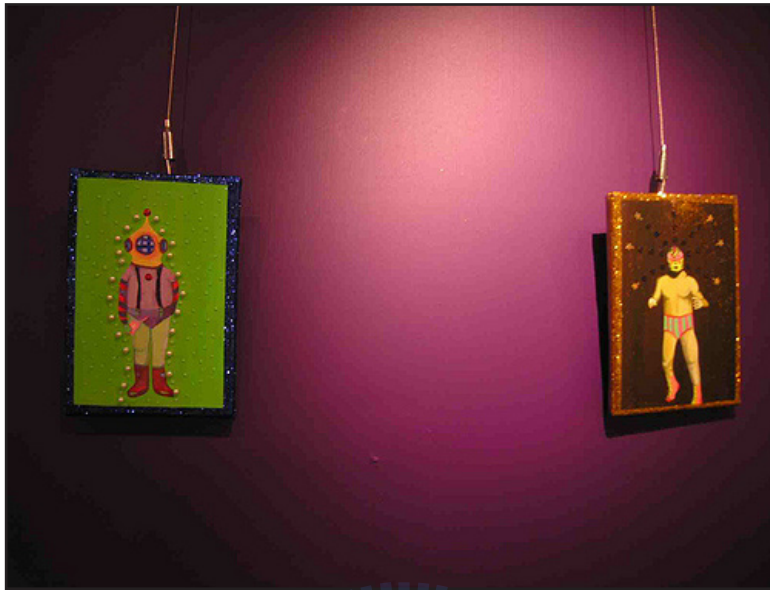




The Human Pieces of my Imaginations

In the third creation of my final exhibition, I illustrated nine pieces. These illustrations depicted nine characters, defining people I have met in my life. They represent my thoughts of strangers, my hiding fears and the mysterious places these strangers would take me to. Opportunity, hope and darkness in everything were presented to me in various forms. It was a process of searching along with the aftermath. Although they appeared to be characters of different genres, each character represented an identity we serve in life. The costumes we wear to play our roles in this society, the masks we are required to wear, the fights we need to put up in order to save ourselves, and the searching of dreams in this big sea: these are the responsibilities of our inhabitation here.

The figures in the illustrations were separated into two groups: the viewers and the performers. The performers were depicted with a mask or a costume. When we put on a mask or a costume, we are automatically diving into the role we play. We recognize one another not by what a person is like deep inside, but by capturing the outlook of the person. We see no expressions because the masks cover all of our facial features, as if we could see through them once the face is revealed. It can be a way of protecting ourselves; when we hide, we just do things better, and we find more assuring security being hidden. Once we were dress up and our faces are covered, we tend to play our roles extremely well, stripping everything off, each revealing the same deep skin.



These illustrations depict how we see strangers and what role they play in our hearts. We give identities to these people, judging them by what they are like on the outside. However, we are the ones who decide what costume we can wear today in order to belong to the crowd of our choice. In a way, we are organizing ourselves to be divided and defined by our actions. It seems like a necessary act for everyone nowadays.

With such roles of as a doctor, a dancer, a circus performer or a policemen, we are to service this society. We meet different strangers each day while performing our tasks. We embrace a common ground in our daily affairs. We are bound to do a duty that is quite similar to a product displayed in a storefront window. We are dressed to sell. Most times, these are just the ways to prep for reality, as a human.

My illustrations are the reality of the admixture of everyday emotions. In fact, a mask lets us pretend and lets us hide, but in the most obvious way we are nevertheless depicting how much we need to hide, to keep us sane from this realm. In a calm method and with vivid illustrations, I just wanted to show a reality that comes with the common; a reality that is not entirely different from any of us around.



Then we come to a set of characters holding binoculars. They stand on higher ground and look far ahead. These characters are again showing no facial expressions because they are busying looking through their binoculars. They represent the other part of you and me, the part that is always standing apart from us, observing what is going on. On one hand, we are the performers who play our roles with costumes and uniforms. On the other hand, we are the viewer, the peeping tom. We stare at this world as it stares back at us. It's a mirrored situation no matter what we do; we stand, looking from two directions, and we isolate ourselves in many ways. In my sayings and thoughts, I do not intend to point out the rights and the wrongs of how I view this society. I perhaps present it in a more melancholic manner, not necessarily with a negative outlook.

As I am typing this thesis, the choice of words, the structure of putting meanings together and how I seem to be spontaneously inaccurate, there is always a mirrored sight to this. Perhaps if you do not think too deep about this and ask why, you can glimpse a certain memory that exists within your mind, a memory in which we were once standing above the ground peeping down on the rest of the world, and the world was looking back at us directly implicating all possible disguisers. The characters here are less realistic compared to others. They were meant to be sitting on the imaginary side of us, yet doing the things we all do.

Pop Culture in the sixties brought me a great deal of influences. In a way, the pop artists drew from the commercial world and celebrated the beauty of ordinary things. These ideas provided the knowledge that we ourselves are the product (in between producing and consuming goods we are producing our own complete self-image). It embraces so many of the things that are familiar to us that we use or see every day without thinking twice. However, with the presence of art, they give whole new perspectives and spaces for the mind to appreciate even more. In a similar method, I am illustrating these characters as if they were the products in the windows, well packaged and ready to go. These characters seem like the strangers that we meet everywhere, and they reflect the many sides of us surviving in this world.

Techniques of Storytelling

These artworks are illustrated in similar ways, as each canvas has a single figure. There are two canvas sizes, however the characters are of similar size, no matter which canvas they are on. They are all painted in acrylic, rich in colors and decorated with objects. They are painted in such a way as to let me express them the way they are. The performer and the audience are found in a single illustration. Each character's face is hiding behind either a pair of binoculars or a mask. Personal expressions are not reflected in these paintings. I did this so that viewers can look at my illustrations and fit in the emotions they have in mind. The strokes are rough in order to find a balance in my technique, so that all the illustrated pieces, including the storybooks, share a resemblance.

Artist Cover Story

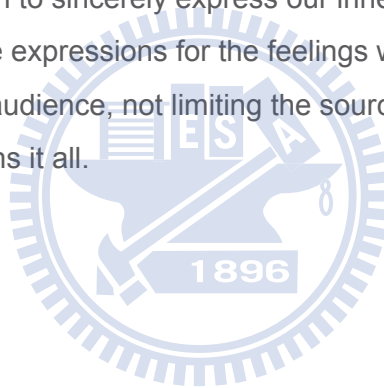
Paul Smiths, a fashion designer from the UK, revolutionized men's suit design because he strived for individualism. He never intended to become a fashion designer, in fact, he had always dreamt of being a cyclist. He trained every day, cycling at least four miles to work, until one day he had an accident. From that day onwards, he realized there should be another world besides his bicycle. His dream was shattered and was disposed of in a bin. However, life began for Paul after the accident occurred. While working in London, soon after he gave up his dream, he met his true love, Pauline. She was a fashion designer; she taught him how to design, and Paul Smith Clothing was then created.

The Paul Smith Clothing line was different from any other retail shop back in the 70s. Paul would make the shop into something more personal. He brought individuality to his clothing and created a store environment with a balance of commerce and art. Every time Paul traveled, he would bring back objects that were irrelevant to fashion. He would buy knives, funny old pens and silly notebooks, and put them in the shop. He would put a bright red toothbrush next to a cashmere shirt. Customers would eventually buy the toothbrush for three pounds and the shirt for a thousand. The opposites, the irrelevancies and the accidents: if we use our hearts and put them together, they will work in miraculous ways.

Accidents themselves can bring amazing dreams. The accidents that change our directions, the strangers that turn out to be the love of our lives, the meaning expressed in the process of our journey, every route takes such braveness to pursue. Among so many things, dreams are not for experts or geniuses, but for man. We relive a freedom by making our dreams come true.

When I look at Paul Smith's experiences, I find that the inspirations are coming from a sincere heart. We can be driven to sincerely express our inner feelings, and at the very same moment, find appropriate expressions for the feelings we wish to transmit. True and sincere work touches the audience, not limiting the source and outcome where it is from or perhaps true love wins it all.

(Referring to Paul and Pauline)





Paul and Pauline Smith in Italy, in the early 70s



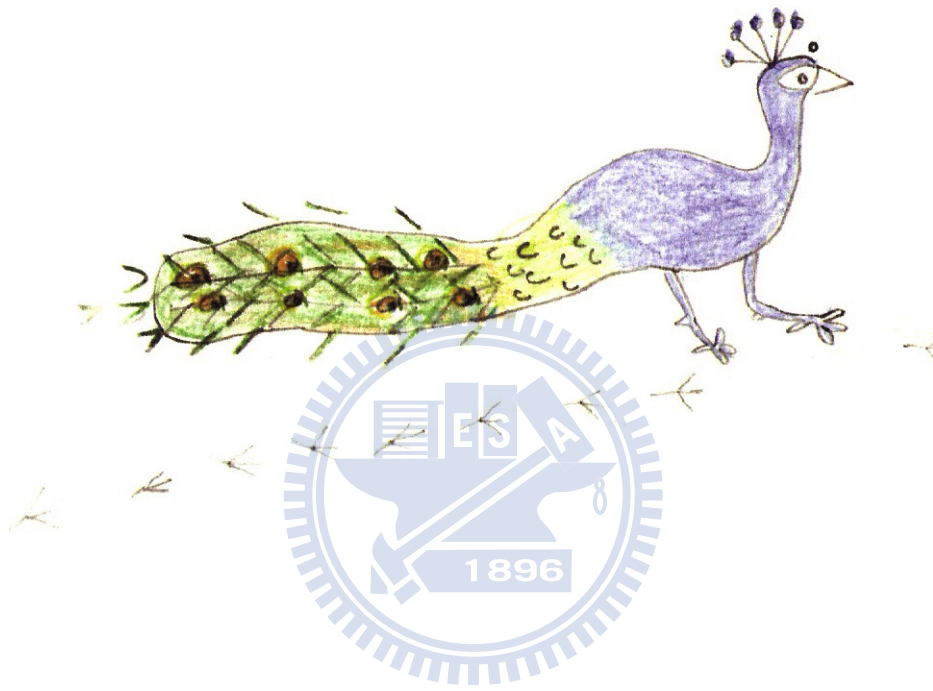
One last story ? my dear friend.



Once upon a time, there was a peacock.



Only a peacock.



He liked to walk.



He never stopped walking.



He kept on walking, with a direction .



He will kept on walking, with no direction.



He walked.



He walked.



He walked.



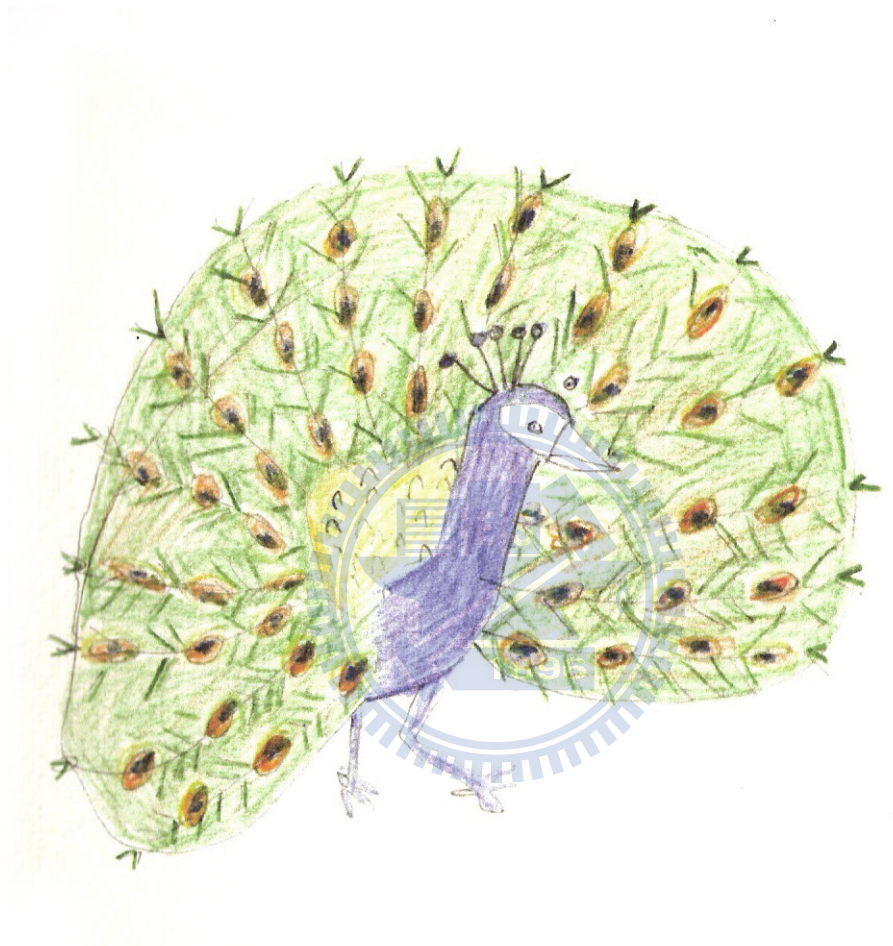
He stopped for a while,



as if he was waiting for someone.



He spread his great fan.



With his fan spread, he stood still,



as if he was waiting for someone.



The peacock started to walk again,



as if he was looking for someone.



He walked , he walked, he walked.



You can say the world is a cruel place,
you will never know who you will meet
one day.

End of Chapter Three.

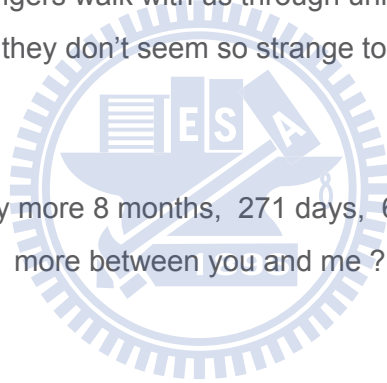


Epilogue

8 months, 271 days, 6504 hours later,
we arrived alone on a strange land filled with strangers.

These strangers walk with us through unknown paths
of our lives, they don't seem so strange to us anymore.

How many more 8 months, 271 days, 6504 hours
more between you and me ?





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