Fall 2015

Leon Sun

Linda Hanes

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/international_faculty

Part of the Fine Arts Commons, Interdisciplinary Arts and Media Commons, and the International and Area Studies Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/international_faculty/18

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Haenicke Institute for Global Education at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Faculty Researchers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
Living and working in two countries provided a cultural contrast that has greatly inspired and influenced the art and design of Yuanliang (Leon) Sun, an associate professor of art at Western Michigan University. Sun joined WMU’s Frostic School of Art in fall 2009. Originally from Tianjin, China, his work is deeply rooted in his personal living experience and observations in both Western and Eastern cultures. His main research areas are the hand-crafted experimentation in design methodologies, the exploration of dimensional and spatial design elements, and the use of digital technology as a creative tool and medium for visual communication.

After being trained in Western art and design and working as an interior designer in China for eight years, Sun discovered the beauty of West Michigan when he visited his wife in 2000, who was in the United States pursuing a master’s degree at Grand Valley State University. “I fell in love with Michigan’s autumn season and was so inspired by the fall color, I knew I had to stay and create art,” Sun said. The couple decided to make the United States their permanent home and Sun now says they are true “Michiganders.”

Blending his eastern background with the more recently acquired western influence, Sun creates his work by juxtaposing the two cultures through fluid abstract design. “The major portion of my work has been three-dimensional posters and artist’s books that promote appreciation and understanding of diverse cultures, ideas and ways of thinking,” he said. “In my creative process, the meaning of material, the hands-on experiments, and the exploration of dimensional and spatial design elements are always a major source of inspiration for me. The use of three dimensional elements and the handcrafted design approach in my work not only leads me to achieve my design intention through discovery and making, but also allows the viewer to become immersed in an interactive experience that implies the importance of cross-cultural awareness.”

Cross-cultural graphic designer and artist
By Linda Hanes

His most recent project, Wind and Moon, explores meaning with Augmented Reality technology, a live view of a real world environment in which physical elements are augmented through computer-generated input. In this way, Sun has married two disparate forms of culture, East and West, as well as technology and art. “Conceptually, the project transforms the metaphorical nature of classical Chinese poetry into an immersive visual experience for the viewers,” said Sun, who also serves at WMU as the coordinator of the Graphic Design Area. “This unique creative approach and the use of modern technology have led to my work being included in the 12th Annual International Digital Media and Arts Association exhibition, discussed at the 2014 Hawaii University International Conferences on Education and STEM, and presented at Beijing Institute of Technology’s School of Art and Design in May 2015.”

Sun has been making art for as long as he can remember. When he was young, his grandmother taught him how to make traditional paper cuttings for the holidays, a method he still incorporates in his art today. Sun grew up in an analytical family made up of doctors but still found support from his parents to follow his creative dreams. He said he was, “always doodling,” and he began formal art training at the age of seven. He expressed concern that funding is being cut “left and right” in schools and university art departments all over, even though art and design have an integral importance in our culture and society. He believes it is his mission to perpetuate that notion wherever he might be.

“To me, art/design is not just for entertaining audiences, it is not even just for developing individual’s creativity and expressing their feelings,” he said. “Art and design can positively shape our culture, facilitate dialogue between groups of people, and stimulate innovations that can effectively solve our social, economic, and environmental challenges. Art education fosters critical thinking, problem solving, collaboration, and innovation; it is necessary for everyone, not just for art students.”

sunsart.com