Central Saint Martins student, Jazz Szu-Ying Chen, is one of the chosen artists exhibiting at the Made in Arts London (MiAL) Capsule exhibition, the third annual independent exhibition showcasing art and design from UAL students and recent graduates.

Artefact caught up with Jazz to find out more about the work she will be exhibiting at the Capsule show and what inspires her intricate designs.

Tell us a little about your background and why you decided to study an MA in art and science.

I’m from Taiwan and came from a fine art/illustration background. I decided to study an MA in Art & Science because I am very interested in the anatomy – specifically Italian anatomical wax models and anatomical illustrations of the 16th/17th century. Aside from that I am currently looking at photographs of bat fetuses – I venture into zoology specimens sometimes!

How would you describe your work?

I work in fine details, my works tend to be quite ornamental but I like to believe that they aren’t just there for decorative purposes – they also serve an anecdotal purpose. I am a maximalist – so tend to add details on top of more details and enjoy creating very dense images. It’s the reason why I picked printmaking as a medium – for instance I could mix different uncontrollable textures with my very controlled, heavy drawings of flayed bodies.

What drew you to your chosen style? What inspires the work you’ll be showcasing at the Capsules show?

My teenage obsessions with Japanese manga definitely contributed to my style – figurative yet stylised. I remember looking at drawings by Ogure Ito and Thores Shibamoto and thinking: “I want to do exactly that!” So since I was 16 I trained myself to be able to work on a drawing for a longer period of time to achieve that type of intricate aesthetic.

Thinking about reconnecting with my Taiwanese roots inspired the works that will be showing in the April show. A lot of people find a disconnect between me and my works – they didn’t think a Taiwanese person made the works! It made me think about my approach in art and how I could incorporate Taiwanese characteristics in Taiwan without going for the clichés. So these two works are about cultural insecurities and the culture clash between the East and the West.
What kind of themes do you like to explore in your artwork?

At the moment I am looking at Julia Kristeva’s Abject theory, which is about social boundaries and how we police those social boundaries. In *Abject Of The Night*, I incorporated that with the Taiwanese childhood tale *Auntie Tigress*, which is basically another version of Grimms’ *Little Red Riding Hood*, except the kids get eaten!

The main focus differs from piece to piece – but they are usually social commentaries on modern life and culture clashes between UK and Taiwan. In some of the pieces I also sneak in references to *Game of Thrones* and Hayao Miyasaki’s *Princess Mononoke* – I like using influences from my daily life in my art.

What did you learn from your course and how have you applied it to your work?

The course has been great – the tutors came from different aspects of art and science so they provide new input to my art practice, both technically and theoretically. My coursemates have been wonderful as well, not all of them are from a fine art background and I find that particularly refreshing. Aside from my own course I also find the technicians in painting and printmaking helpful – they are always happy to help and offer advice on how to execute your work and constantly encourage you to try different methods. I would’ve been dwelling in my technical comfort zone if I never dropped in.

Which artists do you find particularly inspiring that has transferred onto your work?

Recently I have been obsessed with Clemente Susini’s and Gaetano Giulio Zumbo’s wax works, Jaques Fabien Gautier D’Agoty’s anatomical mezzotints, and Joel Peter Witkin’s photographs. I use them as subject references but stylistically I reference artists such as James Jean, Makoto Aida, and Francesco Goya.

Which other styles of art have you considered branching out into?

There isn’t a specific style that I am seeking to branch out to, but I have been looking to experiment with abstract backgrounds – it’s a challenge for me as I’m used to working on blank backgrounds. For years I’ve been focusing on tiny details and make it as meticulous and intricate as possible, so I’ve been trying to loosen up a bit with lithography! After my degree show I’d like to go back to painting – I have been rather out of touch with colours so it would be good practise for me.

How do you use your work to tell stories? What stories do you like to tell?

I use symbolism within my work to tell stories subtly, I avoid being too upfront and narrative. When I work on my pieces I tend to come up with new symbols that hint to different aspects of the story. I like to make work about my experiences in the UK as a Taiwanese student – and compare the social values of Taiwan and UK. Aside from that I also enjoy making work about life created from death.

You can explore more of Jazz’s work on Facebook (http://www.artefactmagazine.com/wp-admin/www.facebook.com/narcoleptiq) or follow her on Instagram (https://instagram.com/jazzszuyingchen/).
The Capsule exhibition will run from Wednesday 8th April – Sunday 12th April.

Capsule celebrates the journey of MiAL’s artists as they work towards their careers as creative practitioners, and the journey of MiAL in supporting them to do so. All the work on display will be available for sale, offering a unique platform to collect affordable art and design pieces from some of the emerging stars of London’s art scene, and the next generation of artists.

Location: Embassy Tea Gallery, 195–205 Union Street, London, SE1 0LN

Opening Times: Thursday – Saturday: 10–6pm, Sunday 11–5pm

Images courtesy of Jazz Szu-Ying Chen.