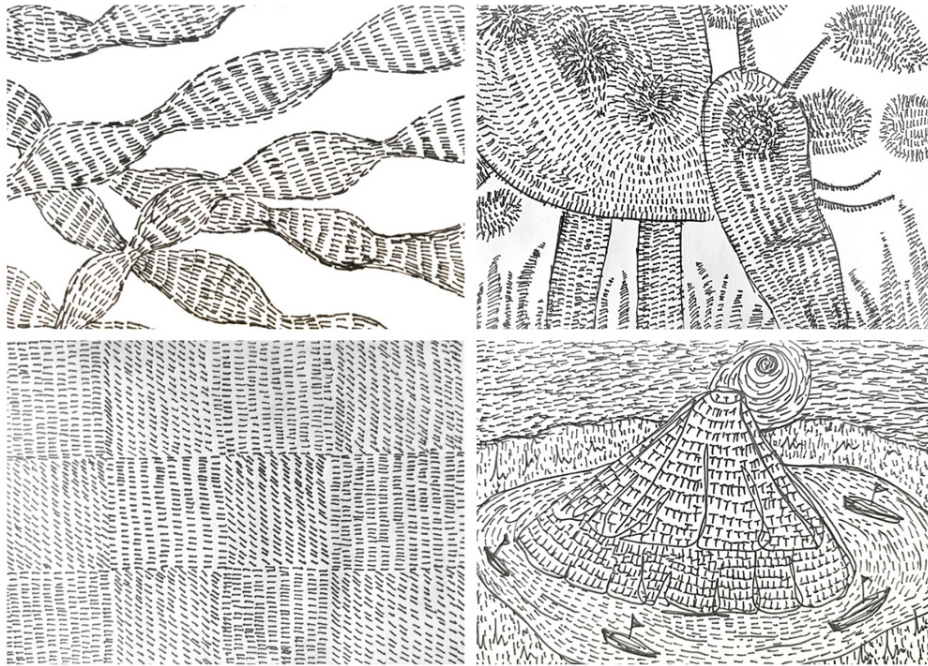


Meditative mark-making: A flow in chaos

Li June Han



Li June Han, *Sanctuary in Lines* (#1,2,3,4), 2022, ink on paper, 100 x 150mm.

Keywords

Mark-making, drawing, anxiety, repetition, flow, mindfulness.

Artist statement

Blank pages lure my chaotic mind. A mind carved in threads of doubt, tied in knots of worry, and weaved in folds of anxiety. As my pen scratches the porous surface of the paper, making its first marks, a torrent of threads gets released like a deluge of waves. The waves of a restless mind form a sea of black lines, markings, and lacerations across the page. I feel the body of the paper recoil as I strike, negotiate, and slice it ferociously. I sit enthralled by my trance-like fixation on the drawing process. I make marks, more and more repetitive lines, till they begin to fill the page. I allow the spurt of energy to control my hand and its fervent movements till the transfer process feels complete. When I look at all the pages as I take a step back, chaos appears to have been sublimated into dynamic visuals. They mirror back

messages of coherence, order, and form. I feel replete with satisfaction, peace, and find rest. My mind has emptied its burden. A familiar sense of clarity returns once again.

This meditative mark-making process has been a close companion in recent months. I take to pages regularly to find release. I am surprised by its ability to transport me into another world and transform my emotions. This effect of using art to distract has been recorded by Forkosh and Drake (2017), noting that drawing has a unique ability to distract as it is a cognitively demanding task. Translating unformed ideas into a two-dimensional space through drawing involves planning and envisioning, albeit at a subconscious level in my case. A suitably engaging task that brings challenge yet is not cognitively straining, like mark-making, enables the artist to temporarily distance from negative thoughts and concerns (Van Dillen & Koole, 2007), bringing respite.

Sandmire, Gorham, Rankin, and Grimm (2012) share that a trance-like state of relaxation occurs when art-making takes a “bottom-up” approach. Non-verbal, tactile, and visual methods which involve repetitive muscular activity set the optimal conditions. With a bottom-up approach, the process, not the finished product, is most valued by the maker, akin to a mesmerising “flow” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Being in flow enhances my feeling of well-being and reduces tension and anxiety.

Like other meditative exercises, repetitive mark-making allows the maker to organise their experience at that moment, developing mindfulness. A focus of non-judgemental attention and acceptance of the moment brings about a mind-body connection (Carsley & Heath, 2020). My emotions, expressed through intricate lines, communicate to my body the need to slow down, pause, and reflect, setting off a cathartic acknowledgment of how I truly feel.

Meditative mark-making has been a discovery for me. It is a process that brings distraction, relaxation, and mindfulness. I am glad to have gone with the flow and followed the direction of the lines, led by my inner impulse. It has turned out to be a most liberating and enlightening practice.

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Li June is the founder of A Little Blue Studio, where she collaborates with artists and mental health professionals to bring art to the community, fostering creative expression, emotional growth and social diversity. She is concurrently an art therapist at the University of Social Sciences, Singapore, where she is part of an inter-disciplinary team at the University Counselling Centre. Li June's art practice is inspired by memories and experiences of people and places. Writing about the travails of her life and sharing her art connects her with people from all walks of life. Li June lives and works in Singapore.



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