

Casey Fang  
IP Thesis  
Rebekah Modrak & Michael Rodemer  
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### A Self Portrait: The Color of My Soul

While studying abroad in London, I saw the exhibition “Death: A Self-Portrait” at one of London’s most renowned galleries, the *Welcome Collection*. I instantaneously connected with the concept for my IP thesis and it flashed brighter than the white light at the end of the tunnel. “Ding! Ding! Ding! We have a winner! And first place goes tooooooooo...Death! Sorry Insanity, better luck next time.” After deciding to embark on a project based off a concept that evokes fear in humanity I had trouble connecting to the fear it evoked in me. As I entered the first few rooms of the exhibition, I found myself immersed in a visual history of death. With an eclectic range of mediums and a variety of cultures, religious and modern views on death, the immediate mood promotes morbidity, spirituality and dark imagery. However, I looked beyond the dark tone and became more intrigued by wondering what the mystery of death entails. I studied each individual piece to gain some clarity based on myth, culture, philosophy, history and religion. I felt inspired, excited and increasingly curious.

I kept a consistent pace through the exhibition but suddenly paused when I came across a statue of the Tibetan Buddhist Monks accompanied by a brief overview of the relationship the Tibetan monks have with death. Mirroring my sentiments, the Tibetan Buddhists do not fear death. I no longer felt alone. I felt comfort in the fact that a practiced historical religion looked at death beautifully. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* was the first book I purchased for my IP

class section's summer reading group. It is defined as the first translation of this "treasure text" that reveals the secrets of enlightened living.

This research developed the imagery of *Mahakhal vs. Demon*, the first of my five wood blocks that make up a collection of separate but related, detailed visual narratives for my thesis show. The Tibetan Buddhists live their life to the fullest, connecting to their inner selves through intense meditation and chant that relate to the waiting period until death, enlightenment, and reincarnation as a god. Their belief system inspired me to find the steps towards my personal self-discovery and belief system. I compared my focus and positive outlook on life with the peaceful and enlightened sentiments of Tibetan Buddhists. When coming up with the imagery for this block, I collected images of Mahakhal, one of the many God's that heavily existed throughout Tibetan Buddhist art and imagery. In my own imagery I drew the God behind a demon-like character, which is my own representation of fear and death. I mirrored the Mahakhal's exact silhouette and stance depicted in history which coincidentally looked as if he was chocking and kicking the Demon creeping out of the hole before him. In this narrative the battle between good and evil is overpowered by the peace and harmony Mahakhal brings. The common factor between the Tibetan Buddhists' religion and myself is the appreciation of the beauty life reveals.

The Tibetan Buddhists' views that death brings a new beginning through reincarnation is the spiritual and psychedelic outlook demonstrated in my next block titled, *Divine Moment of Truth*. The visual narrative of this block stems from my research into my close friends and family's views on death. The transition of my research from religious groups to close friends and family propelled me into realizing the importance of these relationships in my life. These

relationships define my self- portrait through the bliss and gratitude they bring me. The visual narrative of the *Divine Moment of Truth* block is inspired by the most influential relationship in my life; my soul-mate. He led me to believe that fate is more than just a coincidence and our connection brought truth and meaning to my life and art. Our views merge into one as his outlook seeped deeper into mine, making this block interpersonal as well. I use the iconic imagery of a Ram and Sun in front of a forest together to depict this “Divine Moment of Truth”, which is the pinnacle point of the reincarnation of one’s soul. The two primary colors that complete the gradient that lies beneath the black lines shift from yellow into blue mimicking the sky and sun; a realm we can not physically touch but only admire.

Darkness perpetuates into the imagery of my next block and stems from another close friend of mine. Our similar tastes in electronic music and culture formed the base of our friendship, and his pioneering dedication for it leaves him as figure of my inspiration. A chain of events brought him feelings of temporary anger and skepticism towards society. After no sleep, stress, final exams and a touch of LSD, he hit a breaking point and broke down. He was placed in a psychiatric ward for three weeks. *Demons vs. Everybody* became my most inspiring block. The recycled Demon head in the *Mahakhal vs. Demon* proposes similarities between the two blocks, but in *Demons vs. Everybody* it is used to generate a fractal of Demon heads spiraling towards a dark center. This spiral leads and connects the image and mirrors my personal ‘spiraling’ towards self-discovery. Through this process, the more I discover about myself, the more I realize I have to discover, perpetuating this journey that is revealed through this block. I originally intended for the imagery to depict the unknown, the fear of insanity and death but its significance changed as I traveled through this project. As I carved the detailing, I

lost touch with the unknown, fear and death this block represents. I was distracted by the intricacies and beauty the details create and the beauty of the relationships I deeply treasure. The fractal that is commonly depicted in psychedelic art is defined as a *curve or geometric figure, each part of which has the same statistical character as the whole. Similar patterns recur at progressively smaller scales, and in describing partly random or chaotic phenomena such as galaxy formation.* The exactness of fractals commonly derived by mathematic equation, is not demonstrated in this fractal. No equation or formula can define my personal style, and the lack of exactness is replaced by my free spirited hand and thought process.

*The Lioness, The Protector, and her Cubs Beneath the Moonlight* and *Dali in The Desert* depicts the importance of attention to detail through intricate patterns. This is how I perceive the world. Every aspect of life, irrelevant of the size, exists both equally and beautifully. The mystical and playful patterns present in both blocks are intended to grasp attention towards the beauty that exists around us. The concept behind *The Lioness, The Protector, and her Cubs Beneath the Moonlight* stems from my childhood. My mother would ask my sister and I which animal we would want to come back to life as. My mom would say lion and my sister always copied her response. This familiar memory comes to life through this block and depicts the unbreakable relationship between my mom, my sister and I. The mystical geometric patterns of the mother Lioness symbolize wisdom, power and unconditional love for her cubs. This block shows my first exposure to the concept of death, which came at a very young age in the form of this imaginative, playful game and helped me realize how it contributed to my lack of fear about death.

Being the largest and concluding block, I used all three primary colors that make up my color spectrum for the underlying gradient. Orange forms as red and yellow connect, while green forms after merging yellow and blue. The merging color I chose to depict in each block's gradient results in the creation of something even more beautiful than before. The colors that lie behind the images create a rainbow-like spectrum formed from the merging of the three primary colors. When existing alone each color is limiting and still, but after merging them into gradation the coexistence provides something more astonishing and beautiful. My soul is represented through the color-spectrum gradient as well as the detailed narratives behind each print. My soul is made of limitless light, color, beauty and the people that ground my desires and beliefs. They inspire me to celebrate my creative passion by continuously moving forward towards success as well as spiraling inward towards self-discovery.

All my work and research inspired by death's feared imminence led me to see that discovery only leads to an exponentially greater amount to discover. I encountered death through literature, experiences, friends, nature, and did not become more or less afraid of it; I only became more excited to live.

I chose 10 prints for this exhibition but experimented with various printing methods and color combinations. While the gallery space is limited, my creative body of work is not. My work has no punctual beginning or end and extends to various mediums. The woodblock prints exist on T-shirts, pillows and the ram is manufactured into a pin, as the iconic logo of "Visions of Liberation". This title transitioned me from an art student to entrepreneur. The Visions of Liberation Facebook page proves the unbreakable link I have with my self-driven brand. I created the title "Visions of Liberation" in the midst of but separately from my Integrative

Project, which has provided me with constant inspiration to create. The value of “Visions of Liberation” in my artistic career is showcased in my exhibition through the printed T-shirts of the *Divine Moment of Truth* image and the “Psychedelic Ram” pin that has become my artistic emblem.

My inspiration comes from a myriad of sources but there are a few specific influences that have greatly motivated my artistic nature. The miraculous detail that exist in Albrecht Durer’s woodcut prints was even more impressive after viewing them in person. The continuous attraction I had towards fine detail was proven by my infatuation with Fritz Eichenberg’s. His book, “The Dance of Death” is filled with inspiring historic depictions of death through woodcut prints. The book closes with Fritz Eichenberg’s collection of “Dance of Death” prints where he depicts a different form of death, such as the guillotine, war, homicide, and suicide. Each print powerfully conveyed the authority of death. The attention each print commanded convinced me to take on woodcut relief printing for my senior project. As I completed my prints for the exhibition I thought back to Fritz Eichenberg’s “Dance of Death” and realized how my extensive research at the beginning of the semester subconsciously seeped into my final project. Both of our styles have intense visual narratives with iconic and relatable imagery.

The style of my work reflects similar colors, shapes, patterns, and concepts from the Psychedelic 60’s and early 70’s. Electrical Banana: Masters of Psychedelic Art is an artistry book I purchased while in London. Going through the pages, which are rich with various leading Psychedelic artists, I stumbled across Marijke Koger. The consistency of the wide ranging spectrum of color runs smooth with the Feminist perspective shown through her work.

During this time, art was intensely correlated to the rise of Rock n' Roll and the new genre of music that sparked rebellion, love, sexuality, mind-altering substances, and art. During this time, Electronic Dance Music has swept the nation extending universally evoking a similar movement that mirrors the mood of the 60's. The culture of EDM thrives off of the idea of peace, love, unity and respect demonstrated by all the inhabitants of a concert or music festival, making the environment one that welcomes and accepts all. After becoming fully invested with this culture I changed completely for the better. It brought passion to my art and a newfound love for myself, others and the environment that we live in. Psychedelic art studied from previous decades seeps into the imagery and color choices of my current work giving the term Psychedelic a new and modern meaning. Other modern Psychedelic artists that have greatly inspired me include Alex Grey and Chris Dyer.

My infatuation with death inspired me to first seek a religious perspective and then gain insight into my family and friend's conception of death. As I carved the images representing a conception of death, I became lost in details and patterns, somewhat forgetting the overall image I started with. The beauty of the patterns mesmerized me. Death scares a lot of people, but I am not afraid of it. The beauty of life lies in the intricacies of what I am surrounded by. The beauty of my surroundings overwhelms me, leaving no room for fear of death and only space to see the beauty in living. The detailing of my woodcarvings requires very fine knives and each detail adds to an increasingly intricate beauty. The little things in life are what make life important. I still repeatedly asked myself, what exactly is it about death that captivated me. There is no answer and this led and will continue to lead me through more discoveries. Confronting and encountering death through literature, experiences, friends and nature, does

not make me more or less afraid of it, but instead, drives me to discover things that make me even more excited to continue to live.

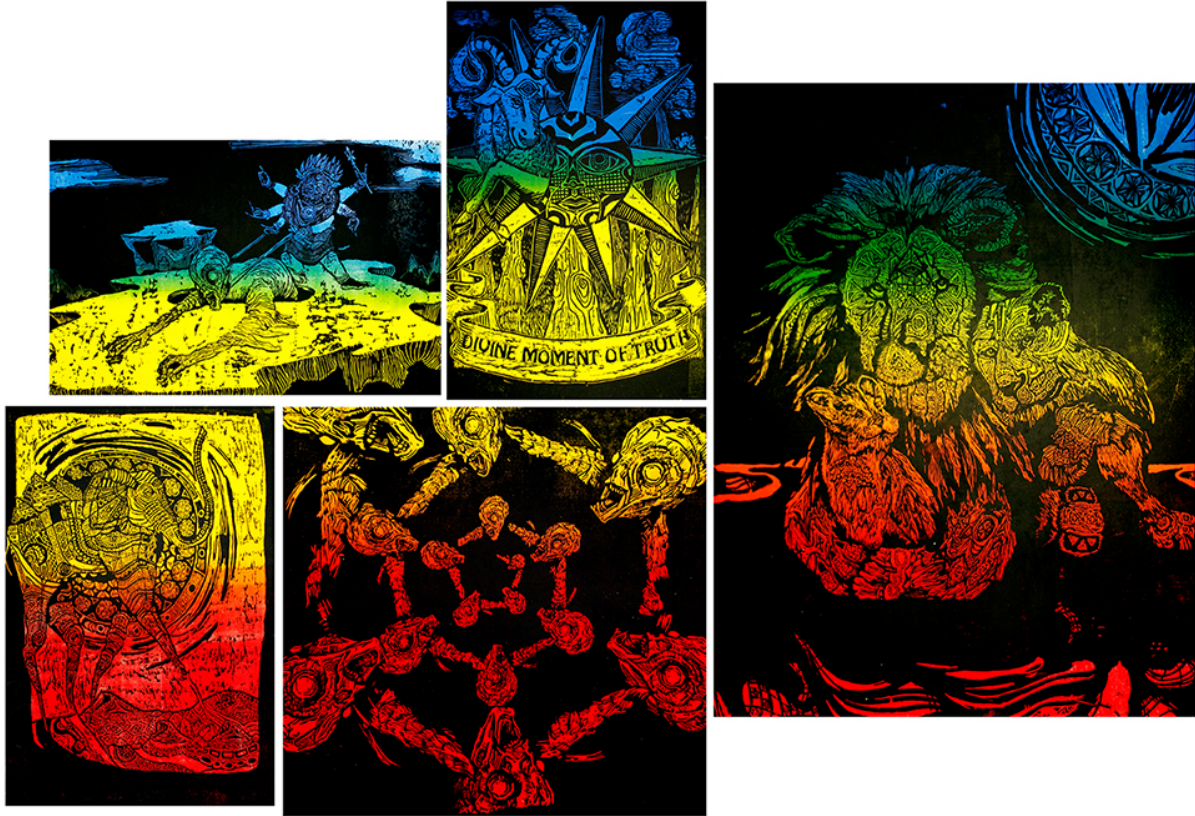


## Works Cited

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Raya, Marcos. *Untitled (Family Portrait: Woman in Yellow Dress)*. 2005. Mixed Media.

Death: A Self-Portrait, 183 Euston Road, London NW1.





# CASEY FANG

www.visionsofliberationcreations.com  
www.facebook.com/visionsofliberation

## EDUCATION

**University of Michigan / Penny Stamps School of Art & Design / BFA**  
Ann Arbor, MI / September 2010 - May 2014

**University of the Arts London - Camberwell / Illustration**  
Camberwell, United Kingdom / January 2013 - March 2013

## EXPERIENCE

### **SHEI Magazine Design Team**

Editor / 2013-2014, Editor Assistant / 2012-2013, Team Member / 2011-2012

- Responsible for laying out the entire magazine using both Adobe Photoshop & Indesign
- The Editors lead a team of 10 to build a professional working environment for the universally ranked student run fashion magazine

### **Visions of Liberation Creations**

Self Employed Freelance Artist Startup & Business / 2013 - Present

- Recruited to design flyers for Necto Night Club / Ann Arbor, MI
- Graphic Designer for DJ BOOMA / Album art, Logos, & Promotional work
- Recruited to design & build an Installation for Meta Morphosis Music Festival
- Lead various workshops including woodcut relief printing, screenprinting and jewelry-making
- Designed, manufactured (with Lifted Creations Inc.), and sold metal pins of the "Visions of Liberation" Emblem
- Experienced taking custom orders for selling prints through Etsy  
(<https://www.etsy.com/shop/VisionsofLiberation?ref=l2-shopheader-name>)

### **React Detroit / Paxahau**

Recruitment Team Member / 2013 - Present

- Responsible for promoting leading Nightclubs and Festivals in Ann Arbor, Detroit, & surrounding areas. **Nightclubs** / The Fillmore, Elektriccity, The Crofoot, The Magestic, Necto Night Club.
- **Festivals** / Movement Music Festival, Spring Awakening Music Festival
- (was just contacted by the lead recruiter of Tomorrowworld & Summercamp due to my prominent leadership skills & dedication in Michigan)

### **Natasha Morgan NYC**

Artist Intern / Summer 2013

- Natasha Morgan is a costume sunglasses designer located in Queens with a small team of interns. For one summer I was responsible for creating various images for her website, blog, advertisements and clothing using both analog and digital tools to produce a final image. Worked mostly with pencil, Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator.

## GALLERY / PROFESSIONAL

### **Senior Integrative Project / University of Michigan**

Artist & Director / 2013-2014

- Seniors in BFA program are given the entire year to plan, assemble, create, and promote a project of choice to demonstrate skills learned throughout the four years of college and applying them to themselves as well as future endeavors.
- My project deals with the concepts of channeling fears to move forward as well as self-acceptance and individuality.
- Opening exhibition / April 18th, 2014 / @ Work Gallery Ann Arbor / 6-9pm

### **Ocelet Print Shop / Bright Spot Gallery Exhibition**

Screen Print Studio in Detroit, MI Featured two woodcut Relief Prints /

### **Judge Us / University of Michigan**

Featured one woodcut Relief Print / 2013

## CONTACT

csfang@umich.edu  
caseyfang10@gmail.com  
929 Church St.  
Ann Arbor, MI 48104  
(914) 400 - 5532

## SKILLS

Adobe Suite CS5 and beyond, Adobe Creative Cloud (Photoshop, Indesign, Illustrator), Layout Design, Photo Editing, Illustration (by hand and graphically), printmaking (screenprinting, relief printing, lithography), Digital / B&W Darkroom Photography, gallery / exhibition setup & planning, marking skills through flyering & promoting through social media sites and onsite venues, designing press releases, stock room organization. Worked briefly with / wood, fibers, metals, plaster, welding, jewelry design.