



# Per Aspera Ad Astra

Through Difficulties To The Stars

This is an amalgamation of apocalyptic scenes with elements that reference imagery from stories in the Bible, Quran, and Buddhist texts, as well as scenes, that are historic, contemporary, and fictional.

I invite you to interpret these images, and ask yourself:  
How do you see the End?

By Lezhi Wang



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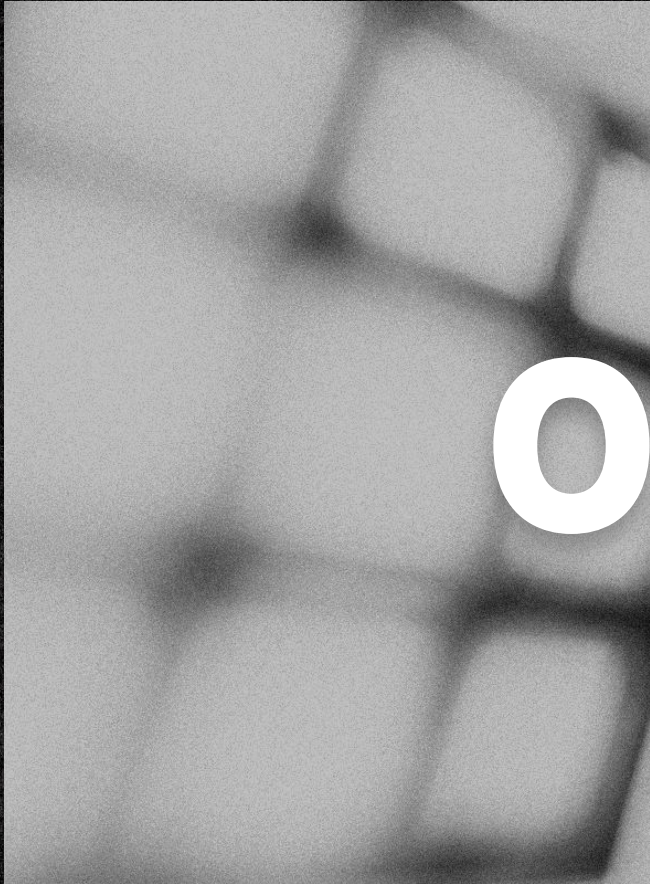
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**05**

## **Reflection**

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**01**

**Exhibit**





3C

3B







**Per Aspera Ad Astra (left)**

Oil on foam core  
30" x 40" each panel, 60" x 80" together





**Per Aspera Ad Astra  
(middle)**

Oil on foam core  
30" x 40" each panel, 60" x 80" together





**Per Aspera Ad Astra (right)**

Oil on foam core  
30" x 40" each panel, 60" x 80" together



**Artist Statement**

**02**





# Artist Statement

雷声滚滚，乌云密布，  
滚烫的怒火从碗中涌出，  
冲刷着翻滚散落的石榴，  
在这暴风骤雨之中，同疟疾与洪水奔流；

贪婪的权政，跳跃的舞步，  
为不义争夺而飞溅的血肉，  
揭预示着终末的到来，  
无法避免，同死亡、税收；

倾听吧，见证吧，  
这震耳欲聋的嘶吼，这悄无声息的呐喊，  
艳阳从西升起，先知自东而来，  
三灾七难依次到来；

脏色的云朵自地平线而起，  
灰色的物种，恐怖的怪兽，失智的患者，以及银色的枪口举行这最后的狂欢，  
彼时彼刻，你我将一同见证天启的到来。

出发吧，启程吧，  
共同踏上这艰难旅程，  
寻此苦旅，以达星辰。

Rolling thunder, clouds dense and dark,  
Fiery anger spills from each dish and crack,  
Scouring over the tumbling pomegranates,  
In raging storm like a flood's pursuit.


Greedy rulers, dancing in their delusion,  
For senseless fights, blood is a foregone conclusion,  
Every drop a sign of impending doom,  
Inevitable, like death and taxes.

Listen and witness this deafening roar,  
Silent cries that shake us to the core,  
As the sun rises from the west, and the Messiah approaches from the east,  
Three plagues and seven disasters come in streams.

When mushroom clouds rise with ash and smother,  
Grey species, monstrous creatures, deranged patients, and loaded guns  
surround us.  
We'll witness the coming of the end times together.

So set forth,  
on this journey of pain and bitterness,  
To seek the stars and our destinies.





03

# Context

Artist:

Research:



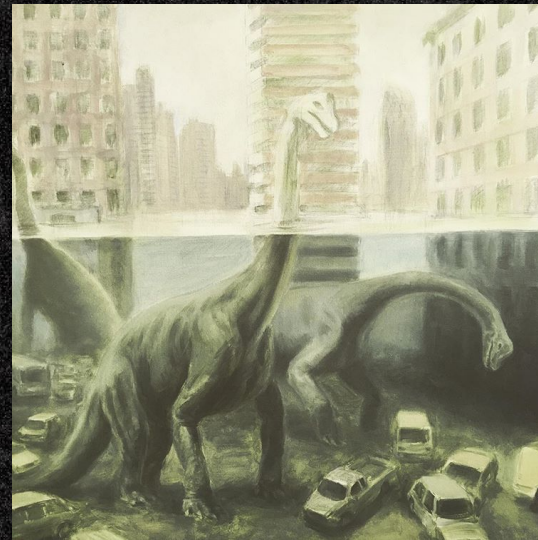
# What is Apocalypse?

Apocalypse is a popular art style in streaming media today. The word “Apocalypse” nowadays is defined as “The world existing or occurring after a catastrophically destructive disaster.” Many well-reputed streaming media like Interstellar, Evangelion, and Bladerunner are all under Post-apocalypse style. Game producers tend to publish more Post-apocalyptic games like Cyberpunk 2077, dying light, Horizon: Zero Dawn, and Death Stranding as well, and they all received great feedback from gamers. Including me, the flourishing of the apocalypse media gathered many fans. It brought up my curiosity that How is apocalyptic art portrayed in today's society, what makes it so popular, and how has its popularity affected the younger generation?



# Precedents

Michael Kerbow



Post-Apocalyptic Dinosaur Paintings by Michael Kerbow





Michael Kerbow  
**"Hothead"**  
oil on canvas  
30" x 40"

The paintings are about an imagined future without people, the Jurassic period over two million years ago, our childhood memories, 19th to early 20th century fine art painting, and, of course, the present. Kerbow can go hyper refined with the little details, but in this series he's usually used a more loose, rough style: enough to forcefully portray the images, but not so much that they're burdened with over-refinement. He painted dinosaurs marching through bleak cities in this series. Late Capitalism (as in extremely late capitalism) is the title of the series, and the paintings serve as a warning about the excesses of endless spending. The Earth is littered by an overabundance of cars. The dinosaurs are a metaphor for our own final, self-inflicted demise.

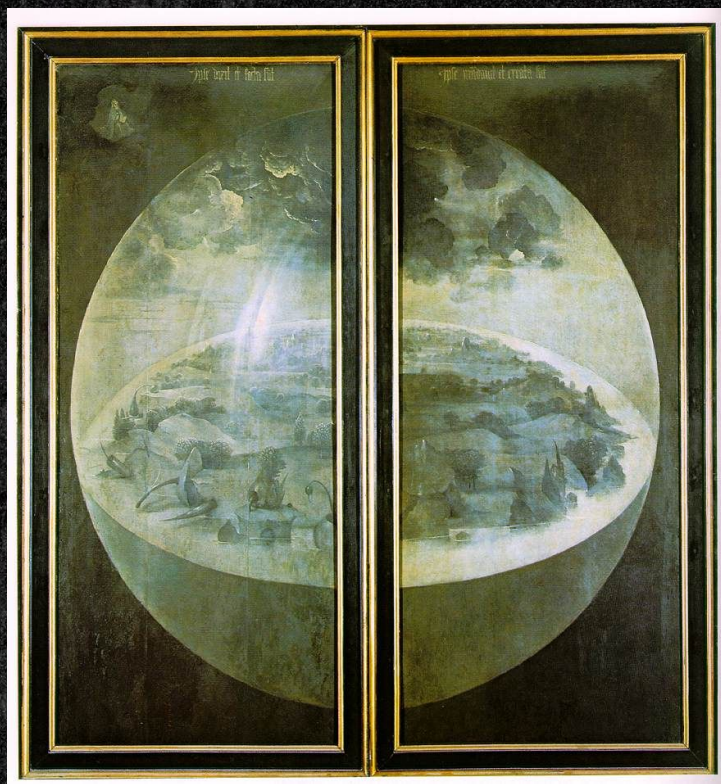
I think it's fascinating that Kerbow used dinosaurs in his painting as a metaphor for the impending catastrophe and possible human extinction in the future. The surrealistic style and absurd vibe of these paintings are what I want to achieve in my work.





Hieronymus Bosch  
"The Garden of Earthly Delights"  
(interior)  
7'3" x 12'9"





Hieronymus Bosch

**"The Garden of Earthly Delights"**

**(Exterior)**

7'3" x 12'9"

Scholars have claimed that Bosch utilized the outer panels to establish a Biblical backdrop for the work's inner elements, and the exterior image is often viewed as taking place earlier than the internal images. The central centerpiece, like Bosch's Haywain Triptych, is flanked by heavenly and infernal imagery. The events represented in the triptych are thought to be in chronological order, with Eden, the Garden of Earthly Delights, and Hell flowing from left to right. The left side depicts God as the creator of humanity, while the right depicts the repercussions of humanity's inability to obey his will.

"The Garden of Earthly Delights" is a narrative painting. To me, Bosch seemed to be delivering the audience an exciting story. The more the audience looked at the painting, the more they noticed. Although the author did not use words to introduce his art, it nonetheless entices people to read it and create their own context. The chaos and hidden analogies in this painting drive my interest to produce a picture that can communicate a complicated story while also encouraging the viewer to delve deeper to discover the hidden meanings.



# Research: *The Book of Revelation*

Before digging deeper into how the post-apocalypse influenced contemporary society, knowing the historical context helps better understand where it came from, and how it has changed over time. The idea of the apocalypse was first mentioned in the biblical context of Christianity, which worked as a parable to reality. In The Book of Revelation, apocalypticism has been frequently brought up, which explains the early Christian community's hope with the clearest and most comprehensive expression. Generally speaking, the Book of Revelation discusses how the conflict between the forces of good and evil will escalate. The evil forces will increasingly persecute individuals who pursue a path of righteousness, and in some cases, they may even kill them. When the conflict reaches its peak, God will suddenly step in, vanquish the forces of evil, establish his reign, and construct a brand-new system in which the virtuous will live forever. These things will occur at the same time as the coming of the Messiah. The "apocalypse" in the Book of Revelation refers to where God suddenly intervenes and annihilates everything wicked in the old world, and the establishment of the new system ever after.

However, people's general understanding of the apocalypse nowadays seems to be different from the biblical context.



# Research: *Apocalyptic Current Through History*

In "*Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Current Through History*," Murphy discusses the definition and the imagination of apocalypticism. She reinforced that the concept of apocalypse today is just a label of convenience that people use to organize information, and the use of the term "apocalypse" changes over time. In western culture, people usually take the book of Revelation from the Bible as a prototype of the apocalypse, which usually refers to a highly catastrophic scene, including the scene of the defeat of evil and the establishment of an eternal future of peace by divinity. However, Murphy stated the book Revelation only demonstrates a fairly anomalous example of the genre apocalypse. It has an outstanding impact on the imagination of the apocalypse among Christian and Western cultures. Therefore, In the contemporary imagination, the apocalypse is almost equivalent to "disaster" or "catastrophe" rather than divine power. This is a shift that requires some reflection.

According to the research, apocalyptic art today has deviated from the traditional understanding, while the popularity of apocalyptic culture once again made it trendy among the young generation, which even caused some of them to lose faith in humanity. but why? The next step is to find out the connection between apocalypticism's influence on the young generation and the reason it is popular today.

Murphy, Kelly J ; Schedtler, Justin Jeffcoat. "*Apocalypses in Context: Apocalyptic Current Through History*." Lanham: 1517 Media, n.d.  
[https://search.lib.umich.edu/articles/record/cdi\\_askewsholts\\_vlebooks\\_9781506416854?query=contains:\(apocalypse%20artwork\)](https://search.lib.umich.edu/articles/record/cdi_askewsholts_vlebooks_9781506416854?query=contains:(apocalypse%20artwork))



# Research : *Zombie Apocalypse*

The popularity of *The Walking Dead* is a great cut in point. As a representative of the popular apocalyptic theme TV show among young people, it reflects people's anxiety about the potential upcoming apocalypse world. The zombie apocalypse has reemerged as a topic of popular culture during the escalating political moments in the United States, and *The Walking Dead* explores this recurring modern cultural metaphor. This artistic creation is driven by existential concerns, dark, creative imagery, and intense political ambivalences that, at the very least, reveal tensions and fractures in the existing social reality that merit attention. A ragged group of human survivors in the world of *The Walking Dead* fought to protect their efforts at self-government and community against a never-ending barrage of ravenous corpses, human adversaries, and their own pride. The scene in the show matches the reality, the crowds were undermining the political party machinery as protest groups from all sides of the political spectrum brought different aspects of popular rage to the fore and wrecked party leaders' agendas.

Wadsworth, Nancy D. "Are We the Walking Dead? *Zombie Apocalypse as Liberatory Art.*" *New Political Science*. Abingdon: Routledge, n.d.  
doi:10.1080/07393148.2016.1228583.

[https://search.lib.umich.edu/articles/record/cdi\\_informaworld\\_taylorfrancis\\_310\\_1080\\_07393148\\_2016\\_1228583](https://search.lib.umich.edu/articles/record/cdi_informaworld_taylorfrancis_310_1080_07393148_2016_1228583)



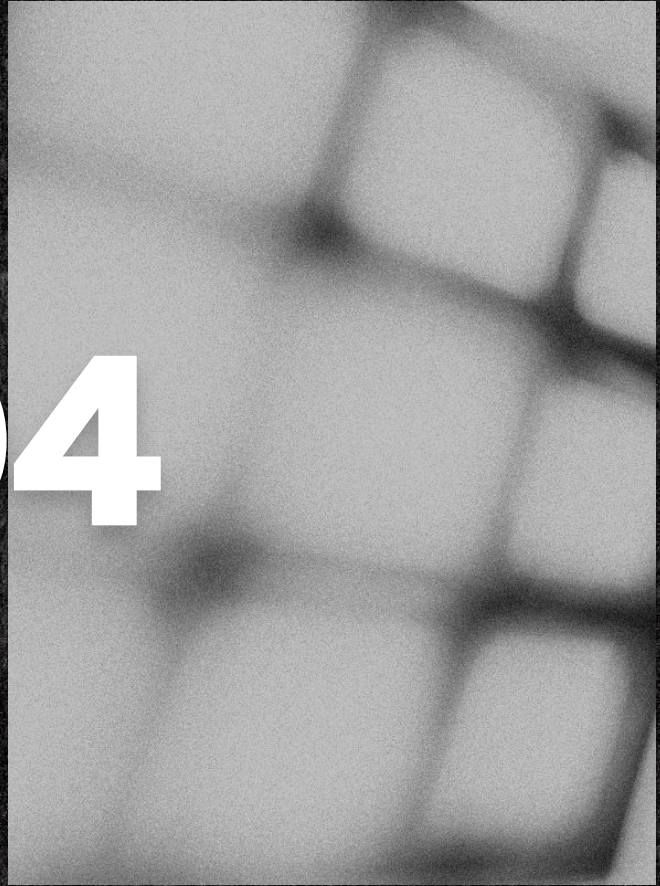
# Research: *Contemporary Apocalypse*

The presence of the apocalyptic imagination in contemporary culture might be best described in terms of “an explosion”. No matter how extensively the professionals argue its degree, the intellectual tradition and popular notions of development show that the ghost of apocalyptic conceptualizations continues to have an impact on Western secular culture. Though it can be challenging to identify any common component of the apocalyptic imagination that underlies these contemporary representations, one can choose to concentrate on the relative interaction between the focus on catastrophe and the dissolution of a potential future. But the apocalyptic imagination also helps to express the vivid feeling of the collapse of current civilizational systems.

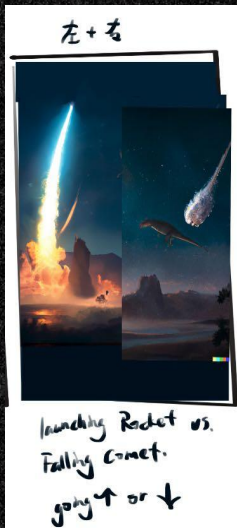
Just like the zombie apocalypse, entertainment in the 21st century frequently uses the apocalypse theme to catch the audience’s attention and calls up sympathy: “Both new social movements and the resurgence of the zombie genre find space in the cracks of contemporary society to bring to the surface shared anxieties, reflect spectacles of dominance and helplessness, critique popular culture, and experiment with alternative solutions to the power structure” (Wadsworth). The popularity of unrealistic filmographies and the renaissance of zombie apocalypse shows up the tendency that people are either getting tired or losing faith in humanity, and these TV shows provide them with a place to escape from reality. Apocalyptic films also hinted at people’s dissatisfaction with modern culture and the potential to undermine beneath the surface. It works as a symphony among the young audience, which turns the apocalypse films into a part of pop culture.



**Creative Progress 04**







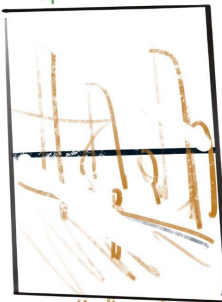
考虑:

- 起因, 过程, 结果
- 阅读顺序? 变化?
- ↳ 小画面? 数量
- ↳ 每个画面都可以调位置
- 小可就是画面。

Bubbles:



up + down



人: 土地荒漠化+高科技  
vs.  
cyber city + Rocket  
左



close + open

+ portable  
smaller angles



Earth Destiny - Apocalypse  
+ Dimity element  
vs.  
Earth Engine escape -  
Phosants?

left + right

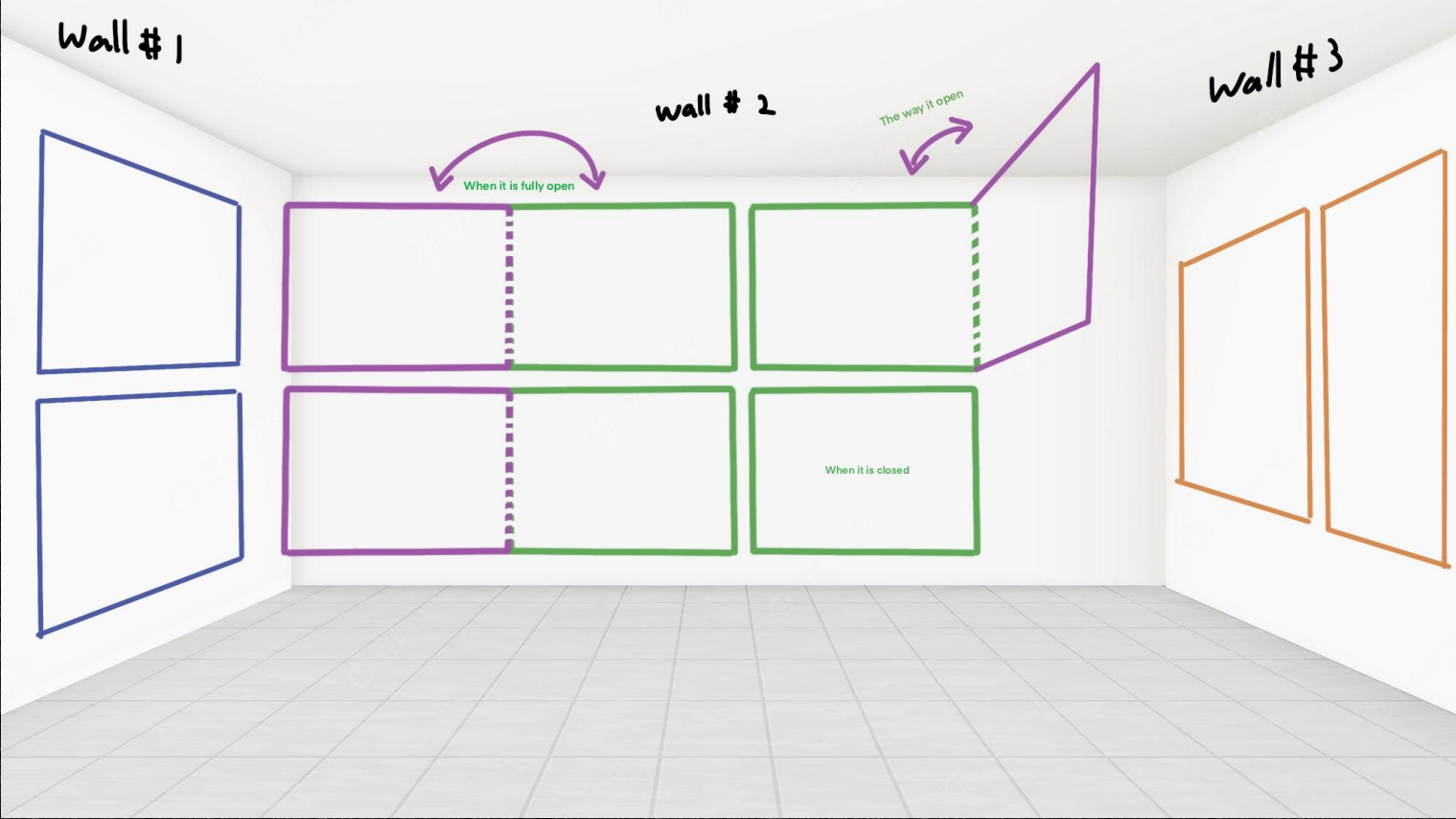


launching Rocket vs.  
Falling Comet.  
going ↑ or ↓

# Rough Ideation



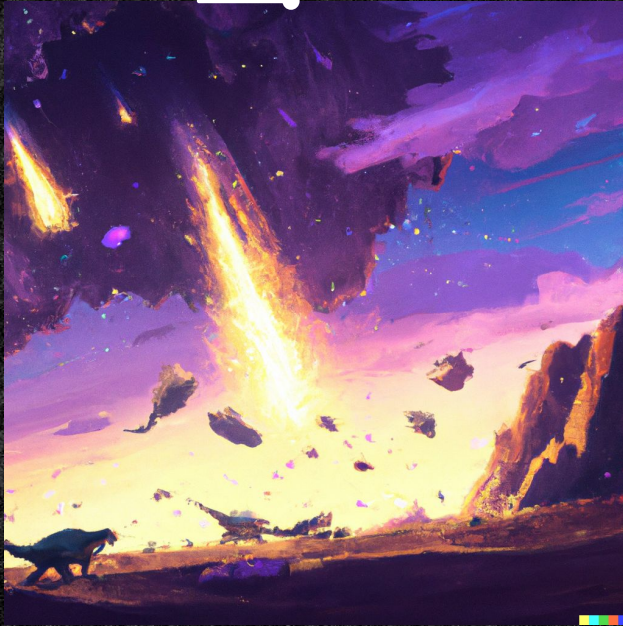
# Planning for the layout





# Generate inspiring images with AI

"bright comets falling from the sky while dinosaurs escaping, digital art"



"bright comets falling from the sky while dinosaurs escaping, launching rockets, post-apocalyptic, digital art"





**Work Progress**

**The interior of central piece**

40" x 48" each, 80" x 96" together

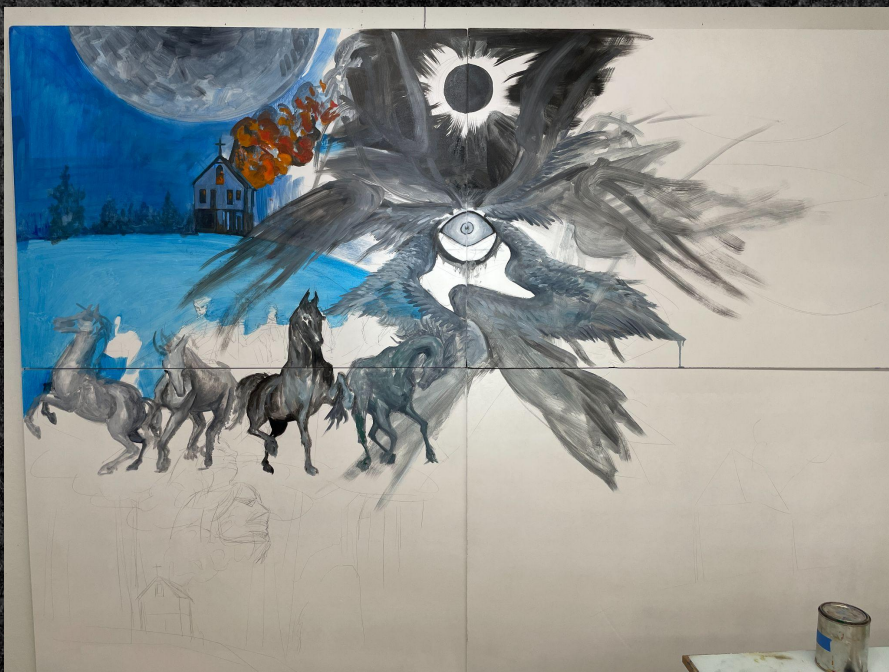


# Relaunch



In the second semester, I relaunched this project because I was unsatisfied with the material I chose in the first version (corrugated sheets). The turn out of the look in the first version didn't reach my expectations as well.





Left: The beginning stage of the middle painting



Right: A close up of 4 horsemen in progress





Left: The beginning stage of the right painting



Right: further developed right painting in progress



# A general studio shot







**Work Progress**  
**The final look of the studio**  
**before painting the wall black**  
30" x 40" each panel, 60" x 80" together (each wall)



**05**

**Reflection**



I'm pleased with how "Per Aspera Ad Astra" turned out. Finishing three large-scale paintings in one semester was a difficult task. Even today, I still think this painting is unfinished; there are so many parts of the painting that need to be enhanced and layers and details added. But, surely, a painting could never be completed right?

By the way, "Per Aspera Ad Astra" is named after a Latin phrase that means "Through Difficulties to the Stars." On one hand, it refers to the apocalyptic theme of human beings facing all kinds of hardships and catastrophes, as well as the pressure and hard feelings from contemporary society; on the other hand, I've also experienced a lot of difficulties while creating this painting, and I hope that this experience will teach me and propel me to a higher level in art making.



# Thanks



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**Art Account**

<https://lezhiw.myportfolio.com/>

