

Partners

This piece is a self-portrait depicting myself and my horse, Your Knightmare, better known as May. This was based on a photograph taken of the two of us during the summer of 2008. This photo holds a lot of meaning for me, as it is a strong representation of a very vibrant and beautiful part of my life. During that summer, I spent most of my time at the barn, spending time with May: riding, grooming, and grazing. While the days involved quite a bit of play and fun, we also spent a lot of time training very hard. We made huge progress that summer and became closer than ever. I feel we made a very strong team. I learned a lot that summer, both about riding, caring for horses, and training and about responsibility and devotion. This time in my life is very important to me and is a huge contribution to the person I am today.

Beyond just representing such a meaningful time in my life, this photo is representative of the significance of horses to me in general. There is something special about these animals that makes me feel incredibly alive and free. When I am with a horse, nothing else matters; and when I am on a horse, I can do anything. It is my hope that this work captures all of this meaning and these feelings and that, in viewing it, others can gain an appreciation for the magic, beauty, and happiness of these creatures.

This work is done with Chinese ink and vine charcoal, with the portion depicting me in a realistic Western style and the portion depicting May in a free Chinese style, where the focus is on capturing the essence of the subject rather than the exact likeness. The realism represents the way horses ground me, while the Chinese style embodies the freedom and life they bring to me.



Responsibility

This composition consists of saddle soap and tack sponges. Saddle soap, despite the name, is used on nearly all leather equipment involved in riding, not just saddles; it cleans, softens, and preserves the leather, helping to keep the equipment in good condition. Tack sponges are generally used to apply saddle soap, although they have other uses such as applying boot polish.

These materials represent maturity and growth in my life. I was sixteen when I was given my horse, May – still young enough that there was little in my life for which I assumed full responsibility. As May and I started our life together, we acquired more and more equipment, most of which was rather expensive. I had to learn to start being more careful with my money so that I could afford everything I needed to give May what she deserved. This equipment was my own responsibility. Because I spent some of my own hard-earned money on it, I was much more attached to it and respectful of it than I might have been otherwise. I quickly learned how to properly take care of it to make it last as long as possible and keep it in good condition, both for my wallet and for May's comfort. The saddle soap and sponges in this piece embody this turning point in my life, when I learned to accept responsibility for such valuable items, helping me achieve a higher level of maturity as I learned lessons regarding treating my possessions with respect. I hope that this piece will represent to others on a shallow level, the importance of taking good care of the important things in our life, and on a deeper level, the importance of accepting full responsibility for, and taking charge of, our own lives.

This piece is done with charcoal and Chinese ink and watercolors in a realistic, Western style. The realism of the Western style matches the practicality of the lessons I learned.



Art, to me, is an avenue through which one can bring beauty and meaning to those around them. I create works of art as a means to express myself. Through them, I want to show others what's important to me, as well as make something beautiful. Besides that, I also make art for the process; painting and drawing are very calming and finishing pieces provides such a strong sense of accomplishment — the knowledge that you contributed beauty to the world.

I am always looking for new ways to express myself in art and at some point, I decided to make a series of works that combined Chinese and Western styles, as well as Chinese ink and charcoal. This decision was inspired by my Arts and Humanities concentration, which consisted of a conventional Western drawing course and an introductory course to Chinese painting. I really enjoy most types of art, but I found these two especially attractive, although they were very different; in fact, the inherent differences between them were fascinating to me. I was drawn in by the contrast between the realistic Western style — in which the exact likeness of the subject is captured — with the minimalist Chinese style— in which just enough brushstrokes are used to capture the essence, instead of the exact likeness, of the subject— and decided that I wanted to bring the two differing ideas together in one piece, merging them.

In addition to enjoying both differing styles, I appreciated working with and viewing both of the two mediums. Both the charcoal and the Chinese ink consist of shades of grey and black, rather than color, which appeals to me as black is my favorite color; it is an exceptionally strong and bold color. The watercolors added a bit of color to help capture the likeness of the subjects and to help the artwork stand out. Beyond this, charcoal is appealing in that it is such a free and bold medium that is great for realism; this medium quickly became my favorite as I began to use it more and more. Working with it helps me to challenge my fault of perfectionism. Charcoal is messy and imprecise, forcing me to be more open and relaxed about the process of drawing. Similarly, Chinese ink is unforgiving; you get one shot to achieve the stroke you want, as there is no erasing. This also helped me overcome my perfectionism as I had to just learn to accept the way my first attempt came out. The idea of mixing these mediums was also quite intriguing to me, seeing the two different textures and shades so closely contrasted within the work.

And, thus, I knew the proposed styles and mediums of the works, but I did not know the subjects. I had difficulty deciding what I wanted to depict. I knew I wanted the works to be part of a cohesive series, not just separate pieces unrelated to one another. Thus, I tried to develop a theme for the project. I was leaning toward typical Chinese painting subjects, such as bamboo and rock landscapes, but my best reasoning for choosing these subjects was that they were visually pleasing which was a good reason, but not good enough for me. I wanted my work to be meaningful, which, to me, meant that the subjects had to be important to me for some reason. Eventually, I chose to create a series of pieces depicting subjects of a horseback riding theme. Horses are significantly important to me. Not only is riding my sport of choice, but being around horses has a profound effect on me; working with them puts me at peace, in a way that is similar to the peace making art brings to me, a parallel that seemed appropriate. Being on a horse makes me feel incredibly free and alive. Beyond this, I owned a horse, named May, for a few years in high school, and she was one of the most important things in my life. I fell ill in my junior year and

May was one of the only reasons I was able to keep going; knowing that she needed me helped me through this difficult time. For these reasons, a horseback riding theme holds a lot of meaning for me.

I believe it is the sign of a good piece of art for viewer to be able to take some sort of meaning from it. Thus, I wanted my works to have some sort of worth for others beyond myself, as well. I tried to tell a story with each one, which is aided by my artist's statements, to help others feel the way I feel around horses and learn the lessons I have learned from them.

In order to tell these stories, however, I needed to have the right subjects, interacting in just the right way. Putting together and choosing actual compositions within the theme was difficult. I decided on a self-portrait of May and me and a scene involving equipment maintenance materials. The self-portrait represents a very happy and content time in my life and intends to help viewers understand the effect horses can have on one's life. The group of equipment maintenance materials, including saddle soap and sponges, represents the lessons of maturity and responsibility I learned as I became accountable for my own expensive equipment. This piece seeks to remind others of these lessons.

While I worked on deciding what to actually depict in my work, I also addressed the challenge of finding a paper that could accommodate both mediums; the paper had to have enough bite to hold charcoal, but be absorbent enough for the ink to spread in its natural ways. In the end, I chose a high-end watercolor paper which absorbs the ink the way it supposed to be and is rough enough to capture the charcoal.

Next, I experimented with incorporating the multiple styles and mediums into one work. I created multiple practice pieces, including one where I practiced using Chinese ink in depicting a flower in a realistic Western style, one where I practiced using the western medium of charcoal to create a drawing of horses in a Chinese style, and one where I experimented with using both mediums in one work that happened to depicting Chinese subjects – rocks, bamboo, and a panda – in a Chinese style.

The Chinese ink in a Western style was fairly easy to achieve. The method for making a work in a realistic style involves drawing – or in this case, painting—exactly what you see, reproducing exactly the different shades and the relationships between the darks and lights. It is easy to reproduce shades when using Chinese ink; the amount of water can be manipulated to dilute the strength of the black to any shade of grey.

The charcoal piece in a Chinese style was harder to achieve. The brushstrokes needed to be represented by cohesive areas of black; however, because the areas were outlined and filled in, rather than being a simple, single stroke, the flow and movement of each line was interrupted. The piece ended up looking somewhat forced, rather than natural and flowing. Additionally, brushstrokes absorb, bleed, and fade outwards in a way that charcoal cannot.

The practice piece in which I combined both mediums was straightforward; I worked on it in two stages to add the two different mediums. This piece helped me to realize that the order of the steps in which the piece was created mattered significantly; in general, this meant that I needed to put in the ink parts

first to both avoid smudging the charcoal and avoid letting the moisture of the ink ruin the texture of the charcoal parts.

In my first final piece, depicting May and myself, I chose to work with both mediums and both styles, with her in ink and a Chinese style and myself in ink and charcoal in a Western style. In the portion consisting of May, I had the unique challenge of capturing her form in a Chinese style. To do so, you must simplify all of the detail of the physical objects into just the essential outlines. Previously, all of my work done in a Chinese style had been of typical Chinese subjects, such as bamboo and rocks, which have a well-established pattern. Now, I was attempting to start from scratch and make all of that simplification myself. I worked with the tips from the final few chapters in *Chinese Brush Painting*. In addition to this challenge, I had the task of creating an interesting and visually pleasing composition. I learned from *Composition in Drawing* that having the larger objects or focal points off to one side at about the one-third mark is desirable. Thus, I cropped the image to contain a focal point of May's star out one-third from the left edge. Additionally, I was faced with transforming the colors of the photo into values to be rendered in charcoal or ink by comparing the colors to determine which is darker. I learned techniques in how to achieve this from *Essentials of Drawing*. I also used lessons I had studied in *Drawing with Charcoal* to mimic the shape of my form through blending these different values to create the illusion of three-dimensionality.

In my second piece, depicting saddle soap and sponges, I chose to work with both mediums in a realistic, Western style. First, I constructed a composition, with the focal points of the tall bottle and label text arranged at the one-third marks, a cascade of sponges and the height of the bottle creating a sweeping motion through the work, and high tonal contrasts between the bright highlights of the bottle's plastic and the dark label background making the piece more interesting and realistic. The extension of the pile of sponges balances the tall bottle and the overlap of the sponges onto the bottle intentionally provides spatial relationships among the objects. I learned all of these lessons about composition arrangement from *Composition in Drawing*. I was taught techniques to render the different types of materials and textures, such as liquid and plastic, by *Charcoal Drawing Techniques*.

Citations

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