

Gloria Ho

From People to Animals and Back Again

Gloria Ho is a watercolourist who grew up in Edmonton, Alberta where she currently resides. Her parents are Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong. She grew up speaking both English and Cantonese at home. She started painting when she was in elementary school. In high school, she took International Baccalaureate (1) art classes, and she wanted to make art with strong conceptual meaning. How this was going to turn out she didn't know. What happened was that she began on this journey painting about people and fashion, which then took a turn to animals, which led her to merge the two to create her own concept.

When Gloria moved to Toronto to study fashion at the Toronto Metropolitan University (which at the time was called Ryerson University), she fell in love with watercolour painting. For her capstone project (2), she made a series of portraits depicting her extended family members, including one of her deceased grandmothers. This portrait was very significant because she looked after Gloria as a youngster. In making it, Gloria felt as though she had reconnected with her.

After graduating, Gloria and her friend wanted adventure, so they decided to teach English abroad to elementary students in South Korea. Gloria's name sounded like gorilla to her students. Even though she wasn't expecting to focus on painting on this trip, her students motivated her to paint primates. Gloria later travelled to Nepal to teach English in two different women's literacy programs. She stayed with a host family and had a lot of free time to explore and paint. It was her experiences overseas that allowed her to develop into the painter she is today, an artist who values people as well as



animals. After returning to Edmonton, Gloria taught English to newcomers to Canada. She hung her paintings on the classroom walls to spark conversations between students making the learning environment more fun. Today, she is known for her animal portraiture, and she has ongoing collaboration with the SPCA, a charity near and dear to her heart. She is now working on her seventh poster for them.

Much of Gloria's work is illustrative, comical, inviting and, in a way, magical in the joyful emotions she portrays of her subjects. Gloria paints animal versions of people portraits by using a lot of reference photos and noting small details of the person such as their posture, how their clothes sit on their body, and which way their hair curls. Sometimes clients will ask Gloria to decide which animal they should be, in which case, Gloria considers the personality of her subject, what animal they remind her of, and how the composition will unfold with other creatures she includes. Gloria people-watches to observe different types of facial characteristics to capture different

human expressions. Each work is individualistic and full of personality.

“I want to make art that is fun and that will put a smile on people’s faces.”

To commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Komagata Maru Incident, Gloria created portraits for an exhibition that was held at Latitude 53. The Komagata Maru was a ship that attempted to bring immigrants from India into Canada in 1914, but they were faced with physical confrontation at the Canadian border and fatal confrontation when returning

to India (3). When Gloria studied the photographs of the event, she noticed that the immigrants were seen from faraway, showing the people on the boat as outsiders separate from society. To make viewers empathize with this disaster, Gloria zoomed in for a closer perspective of the immigrants. Many people had never even heard of the Komagata Maru Incident before seeing the exhibit, and it brought needed focus for the important historical event.

Gloria’s early artistic experiences are strongly contrasted today as a professional painter. Clients have much higher expectations than her elementary students in South Korea. It is her goal to continue to document important moments and experiences in her life, and in the future, she would like to experiment more with gouache

paint because of its graphic quality. An art career can be unpredictable and lack structure. However, art has also helped Gloria develop patience over things and events she cannot control. Gloria’s advice for anyone starting out in this business is to stay positive, have another source of income and continue to make art that speaks to who you are.

Based on an interview by Isaac Belland in 2022

References

1. The IB program is a demanding program that indicates to universities that the student is capable of handling undergraduate studies. <https://www.crimsoneducation.org/ca/blog/campus-life-more/international-baccalaureate-programme/>
2. A final project for students to demonstrate what they have learned throughout their degree.
3. Source: <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/komagata-maru>

