

WHERE & WHAT IS HOME?
NO. 1

by CINDY LEE
with ELAINE CHOI



Please introduce yourself

I am Elaine Choi from South Korea, studying BA Fine Art at Central Saint Martins (CSM). I went to an international school in Korea for my whole life and went to a university in LA after graduating high school. During the gap year that I took after 2 years, I decided to transfer schools which led me to continue my studies in art, here, in London.

How was living and moving to different countries impacted your sense of self or cultural identity?

I think it's always difficult... It's difficult moving to different countries because it consistently challenges you, both, culturally and personally. When I first moved to LA, I struggled a lot with finding my sense of self. I was unsure what I wanted and didn't know what to do. Navigating that and growing up in a bubble in Korea, it was difficult. The gap year that I took in university allowed me to reflect a lot on myself. Bringing the experiences and lessons I've learnt from LA and Korea, moving to London was much easier for me to adapt and to be more grounded. By the time I got here, I knew what I wanted, what I wanted to achieve, and what I wanted to get out of this experience.

What did you focus on during your gap year?

I tried to spend a lot of time alone. For me, being in university and being a freshman was very chaotic. Meeting so many new people, I kind of forgot to take care of myself. It was nothing crazy. It was just spending quiet time alone. The quiet times I spent alone, unconsciously, helped me to reflect and look back on myself a lot. I think I felt much more confident after that.



How has studying abroad changed the way you see your own culture?

To be truthful, when I first moved to LA, every time I came back to Korea for winter or summer break, I kind of resented the Korean culture and I felt really suffocated. Mainly because of how different it was and how conservative it was.

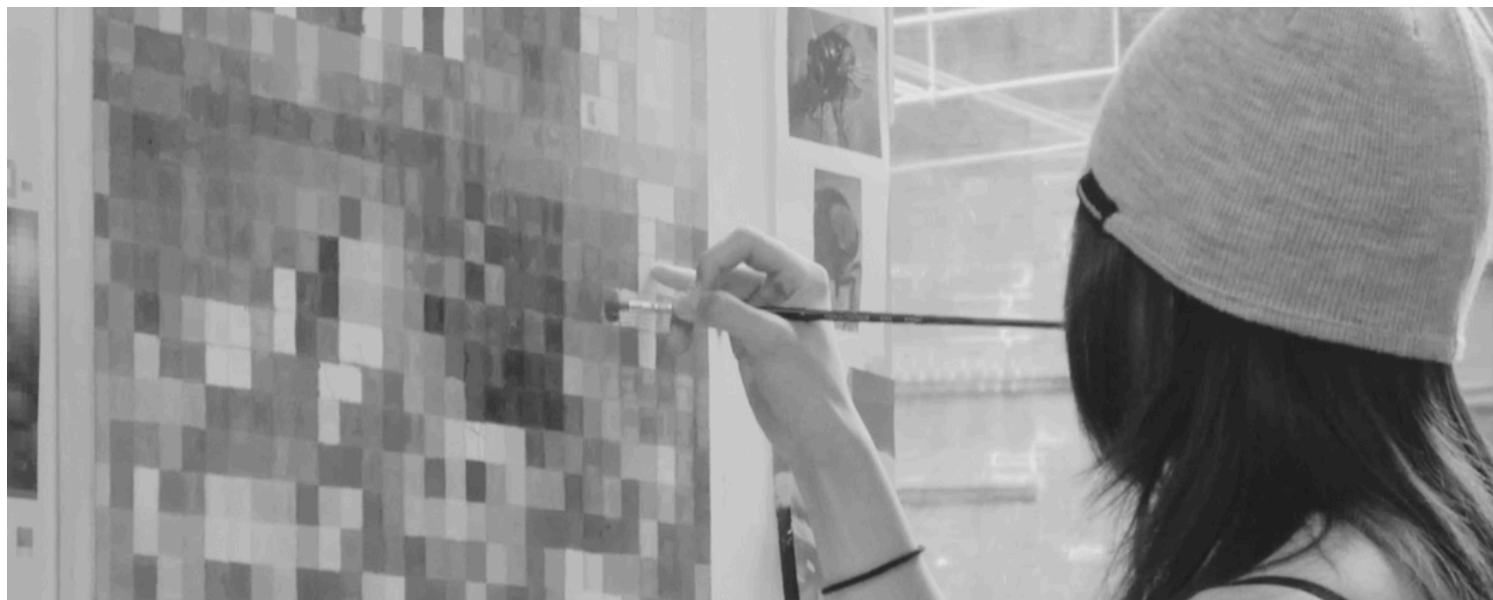
Once I started getting used to it, and by talking about it with my parents, I've come to a point of accepting it. I've learned that there's good and bad in everything and you can't really have everything you want. I've learned to live with it.

Where do you call home & how has that changed over time?

Home is just where my family is. Hence, home is Korea to me. I don't think that's every changed. If someone asks me "Where are you from?" I would probably say Korea. Sometimes I do get really hesitant thinking about whether if I am from LA. But I always get to the point where I realize that I am not from LA. Family is what really defines home to me.

But also, I guess... where I grew up and the place I spent most of my childhood is an important factor to think about. That is, again, Korea for me. So the place I was raised up and the place I call home aligns. If it didn't align, it would've been more difficult defining what home is. Mine was very straightforward.





Would you want to stay abroad longer or go back to Korea once you finish studying?

I would want to live abroad. Just because I had this education abroad for a reason. Even though I really love Korea, I feel like it just doesn't align with what I want to do and where I want to be after graduating.

Do you feel that your background and experiences living between cultures have influenced the kind of work you create?

Yes, but... for me, it's not something very direct where it clearly shows up in my art. I'm not consciously thinking about how my back-ground and cultural experiences affect my artwork. Rather it naturally shows through my artworks as it's something that makes up my identity. It naturally flows into my artworks.

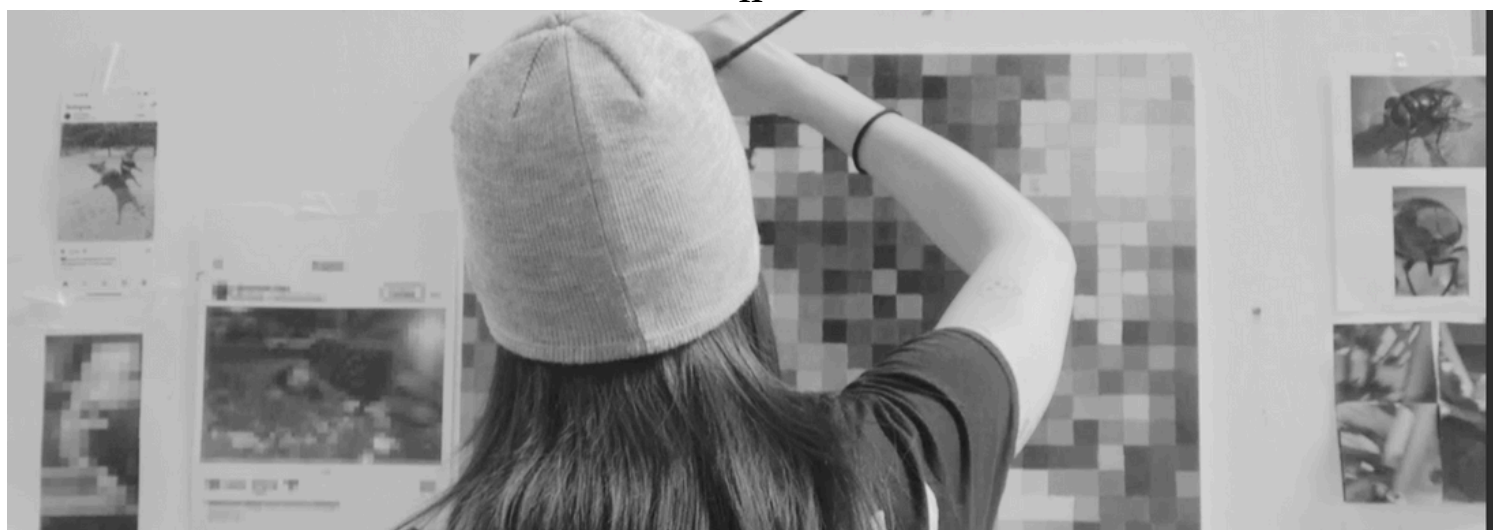
Most of my art is very spontaneous. If I want to do something, then I just do it... or that is, at least, the mindset that I really want to have. From that starting point, whether it's a painting or a sculpture, I identify what I like and what I don't and develop the idea from there.

In what ways have this cross-cultural experiences helped you grow personally?

Learning and just seeing how different people live in different places and taking things from different cultures, whether it's from traveling somewhere or it's from where I live (London/LA). It's really important to experience various cultures because, like I've mentioned, there's always good and bad in everything. Observing and seeing what works and what doesn't helped me realize what to take from certain cultures which assimilated into my identity.

In the past, my works talked a lot about 'in between spaces.' The difference between two opposing ideas. For instance, genuine versus not being genuine. Kind of that 'in between' where you don't really know. I feel like that also ties into cultural identity of not having somewhere to fit in. But finding that 'in between' that works for you.

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I AM ...

Name

Elaine Choi

Born in

30/08/2003

Lives in

London, UK

Tell us about your story

Born in portland, raised in
Korea, lives in London

Words to live by

everything happens for a reason.

YOUR
PHOTO