

Comparative Study

Candidate Code:



[1] Kara Walker, *U.S.A Idioms* (2017)



[2] Christine Ay Tjoe, *Let Me Come Out #202* (2008)



[3] Christine Ay Tjoe, *I'm A Human #03* (2018)



[4] Kara Walker, *no world* (2010)

Introduction

This comparative study will focus on four works by contemporary artists Kara Walker and Christine Ay Tjoe. These works-- *U.S.A. Idioms* (2017), *no world* (2010), *I'm A Human #3* (2018), and *Let Me Come Out #202* (2008), by Walker and Ay Tjoe, respectively, while quite different in origin, style, and medium, still share many fundamental characteristics, especially in regards to conceptual significance, which connect them across cultures. Both artists delve into themes of identity, fear and oppression, personal reflection, and what it means to be human, as well as exploring the idea of 'Blackness'--both in a tangible sense (as a racial/social term) and in a more ambiguous sense (as an emotional/artistic term).

In this study, I will break down the cultural context, formal qualities, function/purpose and conceptual significance of each piece individually, compare them with each other, and, finally, compare them with my own work and art-making process.

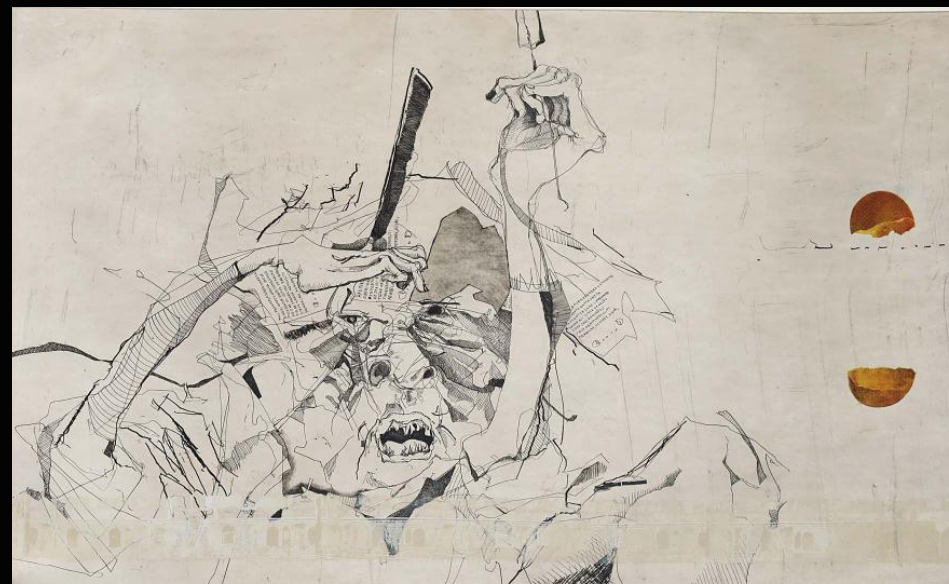
The goal of this study is to highlight how these pieces are unique in their origin and execution but nonetheless share in serving as undeniably powerful reflections of the human condition.



[4]



[3]



[1]



[2]

[1]



*



[4]



U.S.A. Idioms (2017) and *no world* (2010) are contemporary artworks by Kara Walker, who is well-known for reimagining and recontextualizing racial stereotypes into grand, life-sized installations that force viewers to confront the realities of slavery and racial oppression in America. The former is one of many pieces she did in response to the white terrorist attack in Charlottesville, Virginia, on August 12, 2017; the latter is part of a series of six etchings entitled *An Unpeopled Land in Uncharted Waters*, all of which depict moving scenes inspired by the trans-Atlantic slave trade (approx. 1526 – 1867). Both of these events are fraught with the trauma of racial oppression, feelings that Walker channels through her art.

Born in 1969 in Stockton, California, Walker spent her early childhood in a peacefully integrated suburb on the California coast. Her father, a successful painter and professor, most likely had the biggest influence on her desire to become an artist--she recalls that she would often sit on his lap in their garage and watch him draw. At age 13, her family moved to Stone Mountain--the city that houses the biggest confederate monument in the U.S. It was a culture shock for Walker, who experienced a barrage of racially charged abuse at school.

Walker recalls that she often felt uncomfortable or even afraid to address race in her work during her young-adulthood, but whilst pursuing her master's degree, she began drawing on themes of race, specifically racial violence and oppression, which she found to be cathartic after years of being unable to discuss or outwardly explore her racial identity.

Much of her work seems to be stylistically influenced by the Baroque period (1600–1750), as she often opts not to root her figures in space, choosing instead to play with perspective and movement in a way that is reminiscent of this period in art history. However, Walker herself cites Adrian Piper, conceptual artist and philosopher, and Lorna Simpson, photographer and multi-media artist, as being her two biggest inspirations and artistic influences.

Cultural Context

Kara Walker

*Photograph by Maria Spann, *The Guardian*. "Kara Walker in her Brooklyn Studio"

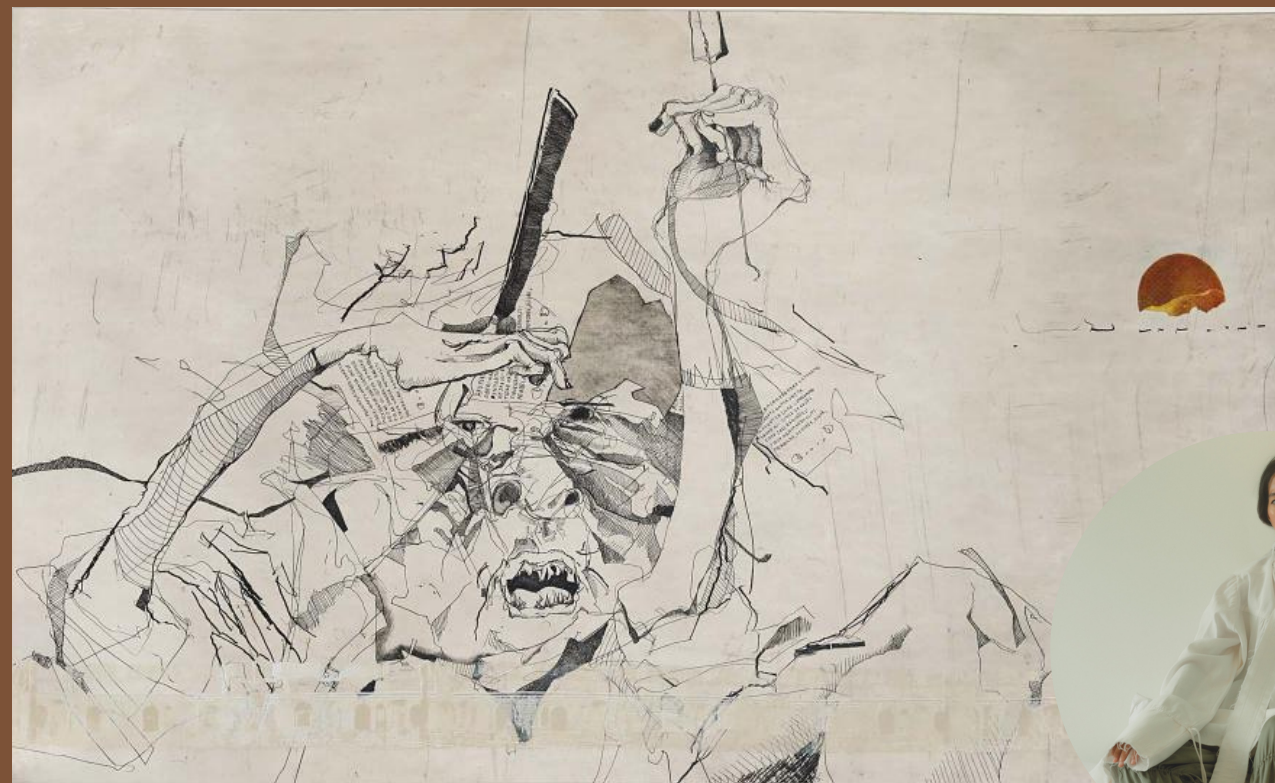
Cultural Context

Christine Ay Tjoe

There is significantly less information available about Christine Ay Tjoe's early life--as opposed to Walker--due to most of her interviews and columns being conducted and written in Indonesian. However, from what I was able to learn, she was born in 1973 in Bandung, West Java, Indonesia, where she continues to live and work. Ay Tjoe began her career as a fashion designer after graduating from the Faculty of Fine Arts and Design of the Bandung Institute of Technology in 1997, where she studied textile and intaglio dry point printing before transitioning to the visual arts as a full-time working artist. Her work has been highly praised across Asia, and she has recently been gaining traction in the U.S. as well.

In an interview from 2023, she discussed growing up in Indonesia, where everything is very crowded, and there is limited access to large natural spaces or landscapes apt for inspiring artwork. Because of this, her work is less a reflection of the world around her but rather of her inner world, the one from which she draws much of her inspiration. Ay Tjoe has discussed her love of texture at length, stating that it stems in part from her lack of interaction with the natural world as a child, and thus, the immense variety of textures inherent to plants and animals has sparked a deep curiosity about the natural world and served as much of the inspiration behind her enthralling abstract compositions. In an interview with the Hall Art Foundation, she said that much of her art "is about the specific, rare, and beautiful ability of living things." Her pieces can be seen as 'small models' of gardens and plants that she creates in order to attempt to help herself and her audience understand nature and the essential role it plays in defining the human condition.

Ay Tjoe's work is often described as abstract-expressionism, which is defined by the ability to "connect with our most powerful emotions and deepest psychological fears" (White Cube). She explores the breadth of the human condition through her own subjective experience, filtering the expansive nature of the world and all its difficult, painful, hopeful, and impossibly confusing parts through her passionate, radically-reflective works.



[2]



*



[3]

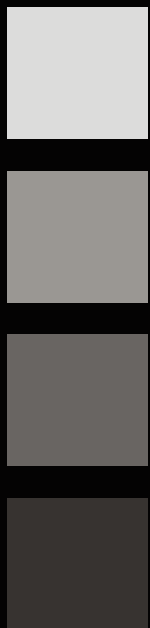
Formal Qualities

U.S.A. Idioms, Kara Walker

Space

Walker's work relies heavily on negative space to increase contrast and heighten emotional impact. Her drawings retain clean lines and shapes which emphasize the white space of the background--this emphasis brings a sense of isolation to the forefront by restricting the viewers' ability to ground themselves in the piece, just as the figures float around the paper without any signs of a physical relationship to each other.

Color/Value

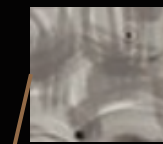


The majority of Walker's work is done in black and white, or in an otherwise monochromatic (generally neutral) and contrasting palette, making value particularly important. In this piece Walker utilized her chosen medium to create a range of values, watering down the ink for softer washes of color and creating deep black patches by fully saturating the paper. Most of this piece stays in the mid-to-dark grey area of the value scale (left), and using the lightest and, even more importantly, darkest washes to emphasize significant aspects of the work that she wants her viewers to focus on.

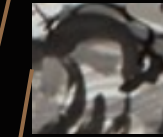
Line

Because this piece, like the majority of Walker's work, has its roots in traditional line drawing, her masterful use of line is what ties the entire piece together. Her varied applications of line creates texture and value, and her emphasis on clean, dark lines provides contrast and the emotional impact that created such a stir in its audience.

Texture, Pattern, & Application



- Soft, blended strokes



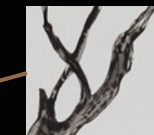
- Looping strokes



- Stippling/blotting



- Thick, dark strokes/shapes



- Jagged strokes/shapes

Walker includes a variety of textures and patterns to give her work dimension and interest. She composes each figure and object so that they have distinct combinations of textures and patterns which add to their characterization and emotional impact.

An example of this can be found in textures like the ones Walker applies to the hair and skin of her figures which are exaggerated, particularly in those representing stereotypically Black characters, in a move for historical reconciliation with our harmful representations of blackness.

Elsewhere, Walker's use of texture adds to the already prominent contrast of the piece and serve to guide the viewer's attention to certain aspects of the work--particularly when it comes to the sections she has completely filled with ink, such as the hole in the bottom left--these textures are quite jarring and ensure that certain parts of the composition stay in our minds long after viewing.

Balance & Movement

That way that Walker spreads her figures out across the page provides for a uniquely balanced composition. The visual emphasis is distributed relatively equally amongst the smaller and larger characters through the lack of a single, grounded perspective. The inclusion of the tree/branches also guide the viewers eye fluidly around the piece but never off the page, creating an enthralling cycle of movement.



Media

Sumi ink and collage on 12 x 15 ft paper.

[1]

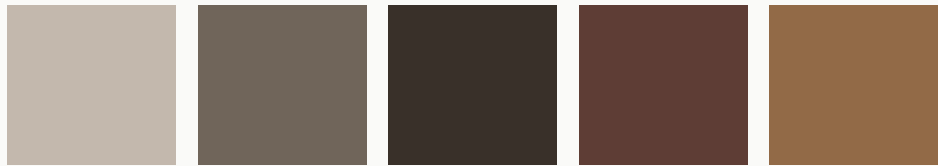
Balance & Movement

Ay Tjoe's abstract work generally favors unbalanced, unique compositions with portions that stretch and move across the canvas. As in this piece, the larger focal point is usually slightly off from the center, and she utilizes limb-like lines to move the viewers' eyes around the composition. The lack of symmetry and balance adds to the often chaotic nature of the work, but the addition of the aforementioned lines serves to distribute focus throughout the entire piece and to make it look as though the 'subject' is itself in motion, adding interest and dimension to the work.

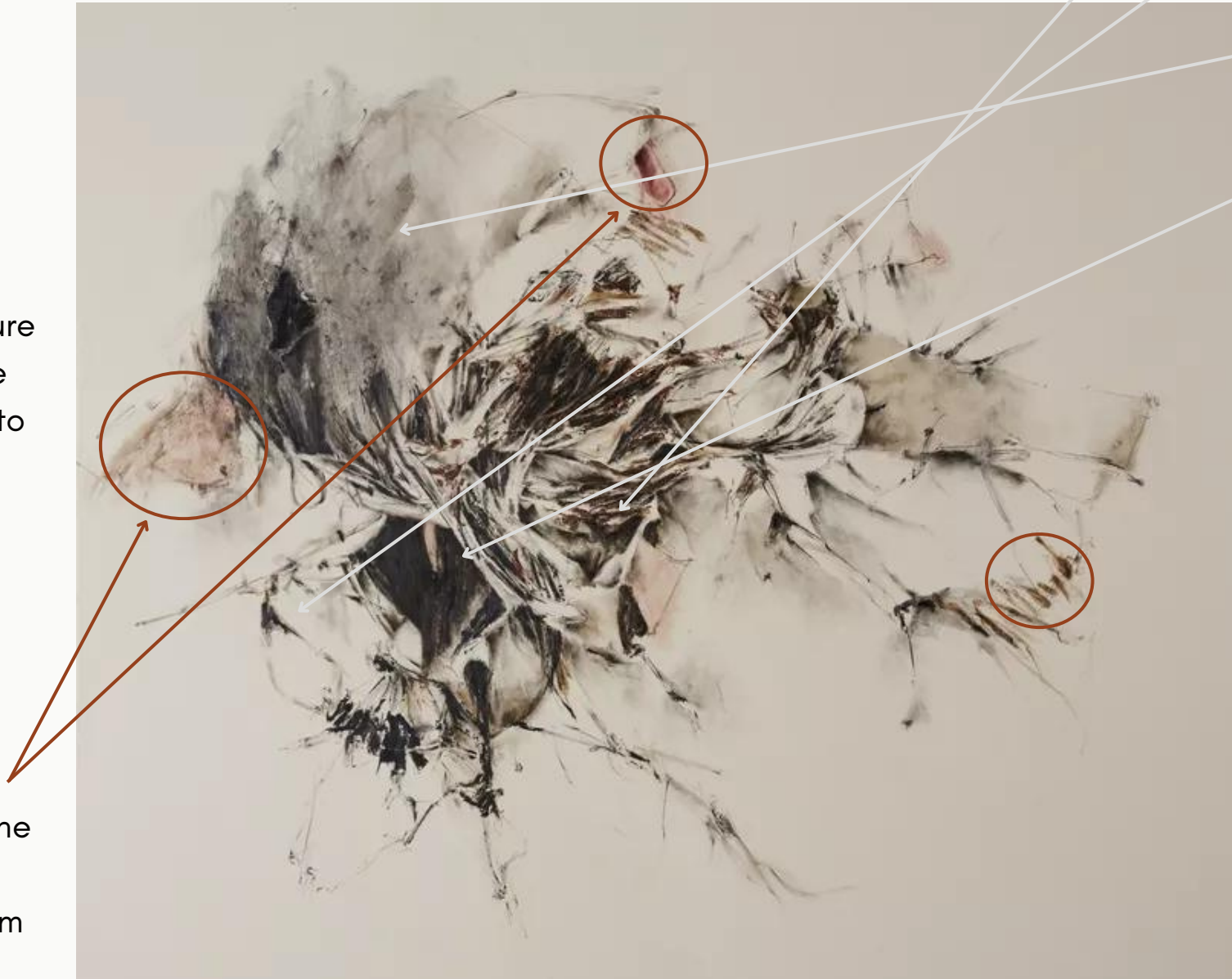
Line

Ay Tjoe has mentioned that through the use of mediums such as the oilbar and through her passion for traditional drawing, she has learned the importance of the line in providing a piece with compositional and emotional impact. Thus, much of her work stresses dark, thick line work, but she also balances these out with smudging and softer, more subtle lines. The jagged nature of her lines, too, particularly in this piece, emphasize the chaotic, conflicting feelings that the work was created to evoke.

Color/Value

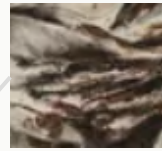


This piece is mainly monochromatic--focusing the majority of the composition on blacks and grays--with the inclusion of reddish-browns to accent the work. There is also a deep brown, which is difficult to differentiate from the black/dark grey but which adds a great deal of dimension to a piece that would otherwise appear flat. The reds that she includes in this particular work tie into the themes of being human and the sinew-like textures bringing to mind images of blood and muscle, which is an excellent example of formal qualities heavily impacting thematic interpretations of art.

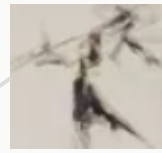


[3]

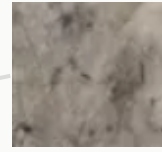
Texture, Pattern & Application



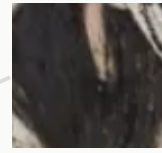
- Compact, layered lines



- Jagged, thin lines



- Smudging



- Thick, dark shapes

Ay Tjoe's work is known for its textural compositions which add to the works' unique and dynamic quality. In this piece, many of the textures she uses have an almost sinew-like nature, which connect back to the title of this piece (*I'm A Human #03*) and her own descriptions of the finger/limb-like lines that are heavily present throughout her work, including in this piece. The textures Ay Tjoe chooses also create immense contrast, such as how the soft, smudged areas juxtapose the thick, saturated areas of the composition. Further, her repetition of certain textures and patterns throughout the piece bring a sense of connectedness to an otherwise chaotic, tumultuous composition.

Media

Oilbar on a 70 x 78 inch canvas.

Formal Qualities

I'm A Human #03, Christine Ay Tjoe

Conceptual Significance

Kara Walker

Function/Purpose

As I previously mentioned, Walker originally created *U.S.A Idioms* as a response to the attack in Charlottesville in 2017, suggesting that at least one purpose of this piece was to help Walker cope with the event and to bring attention to the horror of White-supremacy and terrorism. Similarly, *no world* is part of a larger series in which Walker reflected upon the trans-Atlantic slave trade and processed her emotional response to this awful history through these works. Walker has often discussed her desire for her work to be viewed alongside the history that inspired it and for herself to be viewed as a sort of 'amateur historian' as well as a contemporary artist. She has also voiced her intention to evoke an emotional response from her viewers; understanding that art has an immense capacity for creating empathy and subsequently hoping that upon viewing her work, people will allow themselves to learn and to be reshaped by these difficult parts of history, just as she was as she was creating it.

Concepts, Themes, & Symbolism

Walker's work is deeply symbolic, and the conceptual significance of her pieces can often be determined/supported by the symbols she conceals in her compositions; as in *U.S.A. Idioms* which is home to numerous symbols and historical references. For instance, many of the facial features of the figures in this piece are reminiscent of the makeup done by black-face performers in the minstrel shows of the 1800s, in which African-American culture was exaggerated and mocked for the enjoyment of White audiences. There is also a depiction of the confederate flag, the notorious symbol of the Southern cause during the Civil War, which resisted the abolition of slavery; today, the flag is frequently used by White supremacist/White power groups. These, among many other subtle details, support Walker's overarching concept of using instantly recognizable visual trends from America's dark past and re-contextualizing them in the present, bringing attention to the acts of racial violence that continue to this day.



[1]



no world also addresses America's history of racial oppression, but in lieu of specific visual references or symbols, the small details of this piece contribute to the act of storytelling, which defines many of Walker's pieces. This piece tells the story of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, and, more specifically, the painful future that awaits the captured Africans when they reach the shore--depicted through caricatures on the far left. Further, the subtle inclusion of the woman underneath the boat could either be in honor of the thousands of Africans who tried to escape by swimming back into the ocean, or the hundreds of thousands who died on the boats and were thrown overboard. In either case, through her subtle, thoughtful storytelling, Walker gives voice to those who have been tragically forgotten.

[4]

Function/Purpose

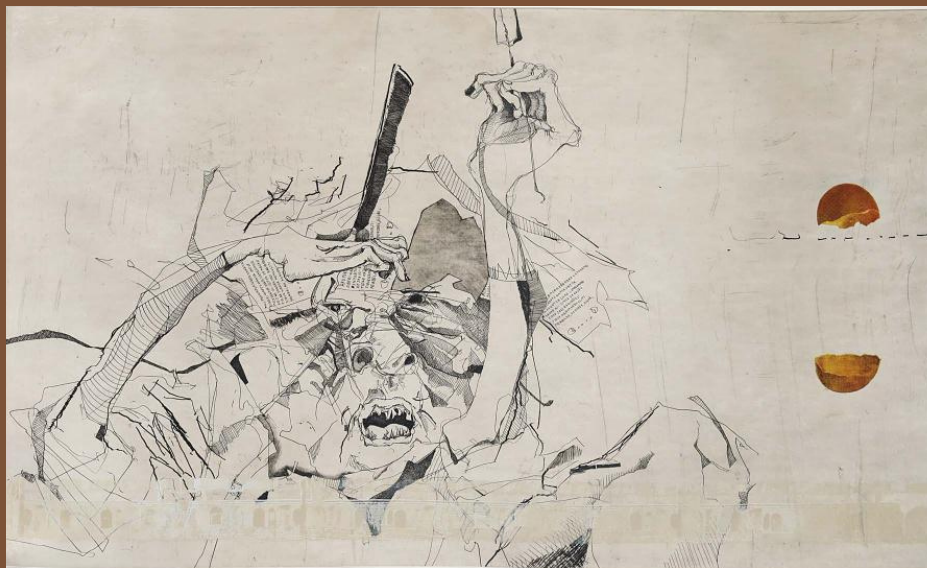
I'm A Human #03 comes from a collection entitled *Black, kcalB, Black, kcalB* (2018–2019), which Ay Tjoe has said is an exploration of the question: "How do we build a relationship with the dark potential that we have which is permanent and cannot escape?" (White Cube). Like Walker, Tjoe relies on her artistic process to help her work through emotional and mental turmoil, meaning that one of the purposes of this work is in relation to that necessity. There is very little information about Ay Tjoe's other piece, *Let Me Come Out #202*, however, I was able to find multiple sites with listings that suggest the piece was put up for auction in the past. This could mean that the primary function of the work was to be sold, but even if this is the case, that doesn't diminish its conceptual significance for viewers.

Concepts & Themes

In general, Ay Tjoe's collections explore powerful emotional themes, usually combining philosophical and spiritual ideas with her interpretations of deep psychological fears, both her own and those common to the human condition. Ay Tjoe relies on her viewers' empathy and emotional intelligence to understand and connect with her work. Her more recent compositions, such as *I'm A Human #03*, begin as an exploration of her own subjective experiences and inner dialogues, are combined with her curiosity about natural textures and abstract interpretations of her immediate environment, and ultimately create poignant compositions that evoke a range of powerful emotions.



[3]



[2]

While there don't seem to be any direct discussions on the concepts that inspired Ay Tjoe's earlier works, many of the same themes present themselves through pieces such as *Let Me Come Out #202*. One theme that is undeniably prevalent in this piece is, once again, that of the human condition. Not only is the subject of this composition much more recognizable as a human than her newer works, but her use of tangled, gestural line work seems to depict the figure as being in emotional and/or mental distress, which can be connected back to her previous discussions on internal darkness and psychological fears. The figure also seems to be interacting with their head in some way, which, even though this piece was not presented in the same collection as the former, can still be interpreted as having a similar underlying theme: The important relationship with the self.

Conceptual Significance

Christine Ay Tjoe

Cultural Context

Compare & Contrast

Location

Kara Walker was born and raised in the United States and her work is heavily influenced by this upbringing. She frequently addresses issues of racism and the fraught race relations that have plagued the country since its inception. Her role as an African American female artist in the U.S. means that her personal experiences with these issues has become a central theme of her work. She also explores U.S. politics/political figures and imagery frequently.

Influences

Walker has mentioned that she draws inspiration from history and politics, but she has also praised fellow American artists Adrian Piper and Lorna Simpson, who also address issues such as racism, sexuality, misogyny, politics, and trauma. Further, in Simpson's work we can compare her explorations of the Black female form to many of Walker's pieces, and in Piper's work we can see much of the influences for Walker's detailed line work and conceptual compositions.

Kara Walker



Christine Ay Tjoe



Both

Location

Christine Ay Tjoe was born and raised in Indonesia, and she has discussed how growing up in a crowded city meant that she had little access to natural spaces, fueling a lifelong interest in nature and the textures and interactions therein. She avoids recognizable images/symbols preferring instead to connect to the viewers innate emotional understanding, focusing most of her work on this inner exploration rather than addressing topical issues like politics.

Influences

Christine Ay Tjoe has specifically mentioned artists such as German graphic artist Horst Janssen and other Indonesian artists who, like Ay Tjoe, use their work to explore social and interpersonal themes to be inspirations of hers. The intersection of these influences can very clearly be found in Ay Tjoe's work, as her abstract expressionist style draws much of its unique textures and compositions from modern graphic works, which serve as stylistic inspiration, however, she frequently goes back to her Indonesian roots for thematic and conceptual inspiration.

Time Period

Both Walker and Ay Tjoe are contemporary artists. All of the pieces I chose for this exploration were created in the 21st century, making all four of them examples of modern art, even though they utilize very different styles and address issues of contemporary life/humanity in different ways.

Childhood Passion

Walker and Ay Tjoe had very different cultural upbringings, however, one thing they do share is a deep connection with drawing, specifically. Both women have mentioned that their passion for drawing has been present since they were very young children, a factor that has had a huge influence on their later works, including their focus on line-work and monochromatic compositions.

Media & Style

Both Walker and Ay Tjoe do most of their work as 2-Dimensional pieces and both women grew up focusing on traditional drawing. However, Ay Tjoe also specializes in textile and intaglio printing, as well as a portion of her pieces in the collection *Black, kcalB, Black, kcalB* (2018–2019) which are etched onto Aluminum plates, with the rest done in her unique dry oil bar on canvas method. On the other hand, Walker gained prominence from her work with large-scale paper-cuts but has since expanded her repertoire to include more ink and paintings. In terms of style, Walker focuses mainly on caricatures/semi-realistic figure drawings, while Ay Tjoe's work leans more towards the abstract-expressionist style, two very different yet very effective stylistic choices.

Balance & Movement

All of the pieces that I chose for this study rely heavily on the illusion of movement to provide the compositions with dimension and visual interest. They move viewers’ eyes around their compositions with the reaching branches of a mangled tree (*U.S.A. Idioms*), a turbulent ocean with crashing waves (*no world*), tangled limb-like line work that spreads like spilled ink (*I’m A Human #03*), and gestural line work that swarms the subject and climbs across the canvas (*Let Me Come Out #202*). In Walker's piece, *U.S.A. Idioms*, the figures are ungrounded and seem to float around the page, untethered to the page or each other, with their body language and positions increasing this feeling of movement. The solitary figure in Ay Tjoe’s piece *Let Me Come Out #202* also appears to gesture wildly while remaining in their own little world. Further, all of the compositions feel slightly unbalanced due to their primary focal points being slightly off from the center, utilizing the rule of thirds and the guidance of leading lines.

Space

Through these pieces, both artists demonstrate masterful control over positive and negative space to provide contrast and emphasize important aspects of their work. Both Walker and Ay Tjoe's pieces include a lot of clean, negative space--either black or white--which surrounds their detailed subjects; this method is highly effective because it allows for the entirety of the viewers' focus to be drawn to the central aspects of the work, with each and every part of the composition adding to the overall impact of the work. Something unique about *U.S.A. Idioms* and *I’m A Human #03*, in particular, is their lack of perspective; in Walker's work, the figures vary in size, not appearing to follow any organizational rules, giving it a surreal nature, while Ay Tjoe's abstract work is, of course, not grounded in a single perspective, leaving that aspect of the work up to interpretation by the viewer.

Line

As previously mentioned, both Walker and Ay Tjoe put significant emphasis on line and shape language; however, something more specific connects the two artists, particularly when comparing *U.S.A. Idioms* and *I’m A Human #03*. Arabella Hutter von Arx, a writer from Riot Material, noticed that the twisted tree central to Walker's piece *U.S.A Idioms* was reminiscent of the biological phenomenon known as a rhizome, which she explains as "a continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious roots at intervals" (Riot Material). She also credits philosopher Alan Taylor with explaining the rhizome in a more artistic manner: "...the rhizome engenders ‘lines of flight.’ It allows for the re-opening of flows that the tree shuts down...The rhizome offers some hope of bringing about a kind of ‘liberation’ from structures of power and dominance." I am very intrigued by this concept, and I think its characteristics can be seen in Ay Tjoe's work as well through the reaching, limb-like lines. Both artists not only embody the themes associated with the rhizome, but their work seems to feature its imagery frequently in terms of their line work.

Color/Value

Walker and Ay Tjoe both tend to favor monochromatic, neutral palettes in their work, preferring to rely on value rather than color to reflect the intention and evoke emotion. The large majority of Walker's work is done in black and white or in some form of greyscale, increasing contrast and tying the work back to her primary themes of racism/race relations. Meanwhile, even though Ay Tjoe does work in black and white often, the majority of her work is done in neutral tones, like beige, brown, and black, with small accent colors to round out the compositions; in other words, Ay Tjoe tends to explore color a bit more than Walker does, but both of their styles have their foundations in neutral palettes.

Formal Qualities
Compare & Contrast

Theme

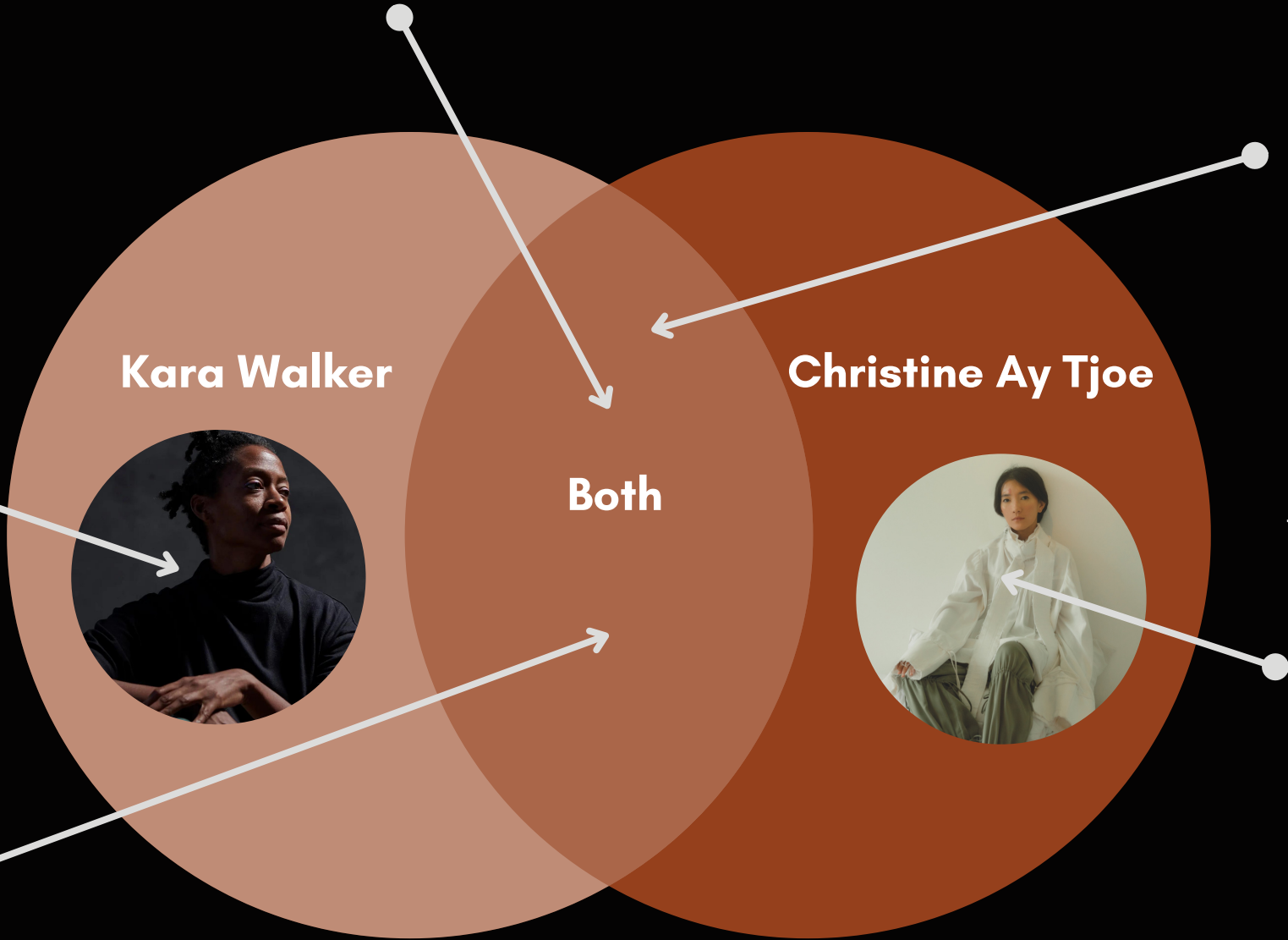
There are two themes that both artists explore in great detail throughout their work, these being the human condition and the idea of 'blackness'. In Walker's work, she employs her own experiences as a Afro-American female artist to offer personal commentaries on the human condition, as well as connecting her work to historical events and reflecting on the universal aspects of humanity that have spanned centuries. Ay Tjoe focuses on the exploration of the self, specifically in terms of emotion and our innate desire to turn inward and form deeper relationships with ourselves. In terms of 'blackness,' these artists have very different ways of interpreting the word, but both lead their viewers on a similar path of reflection. Walker defines blackness as being an aspect of the African American identity that she explores in relation to her own life and the lives of those who came before her; she subsequently reflects on the centuries-long oppression of blackness in the U.S. and how that has affected our interpretation of it today. Meanwhile, Ay Tjoe defines blackness as being a part of the 'dark potential' that we all have inside us--something that we cannot escape, however, if we are able to accept it as part of our humanity, it can help connect us to the fullness of ourselves, bringing us peace in the process. Despite these differing definitions, this theme can be seen prominently throughout both artists' work. Additionally, both artists cover topics such as the balancing of outward expression versus our true identity, as well as intersectionality and the complicated beauty of humanity.

Concept

The majority of Walker's artistic concepts stem from the intersection between America's racial history and her own experiences as a Black woman in the country. She utilizes a vast knowledge of historical events and a deeply reflective perspective on the modern world to produce thought-provoking works. These collections force viewers to confront the stereotypes and implicit biases they hold as well as reexamine their personal understandings of history--her work also encourages hope and liberation in the face of prejudice.

Function

Both of these artists show their work in galleries, both in their home countries and internationally. They also usually show their work in large collections or as interactive pieces produced at a massive scale.



Purpose

Both artists utilize their artistic processes as a method of coping with emotions and to connect with themselves and others on a deeply personal level. They also express a hope that their work can serve a similar purpose for their viewers: sparking self-reflection and a general desire for further exploration of the self, as well as empathy for others, just as the work did for the artists themselves.

Concept

The concepts behind Christine Ay Tjoe's work stem mainly from philosophical and spiritual ideas, particularly in reference to how these things relate to the emotional experience of being human. She explains her central concept as follows: "My interest point is human beings... In my works, I talk more about what will happen in terms of human trends, local or global; what I see as possibilities in my mind, personal ideas..." (White Cube).

Conceptual Significance

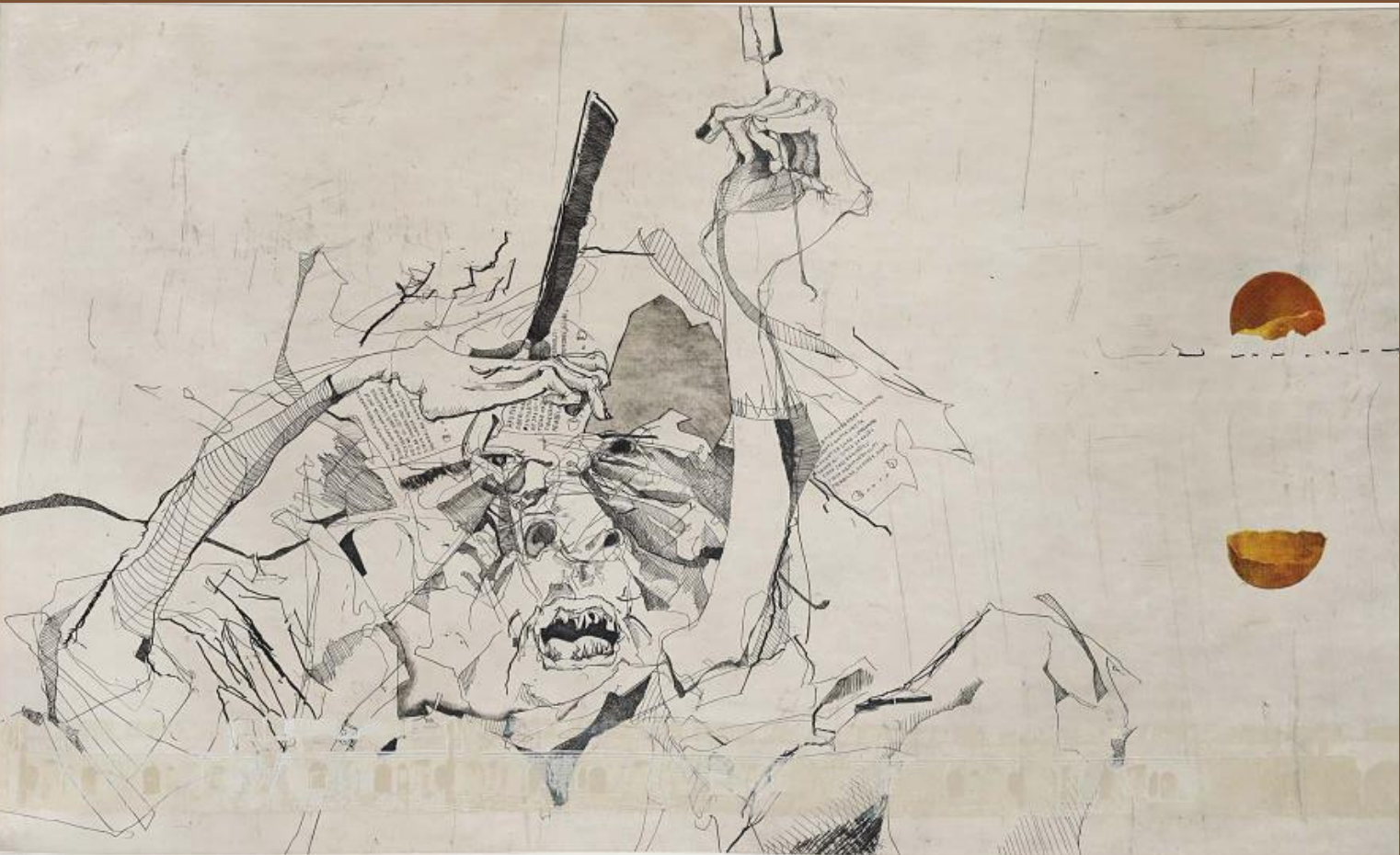
Compare & Contrast

Connections to My Own Work

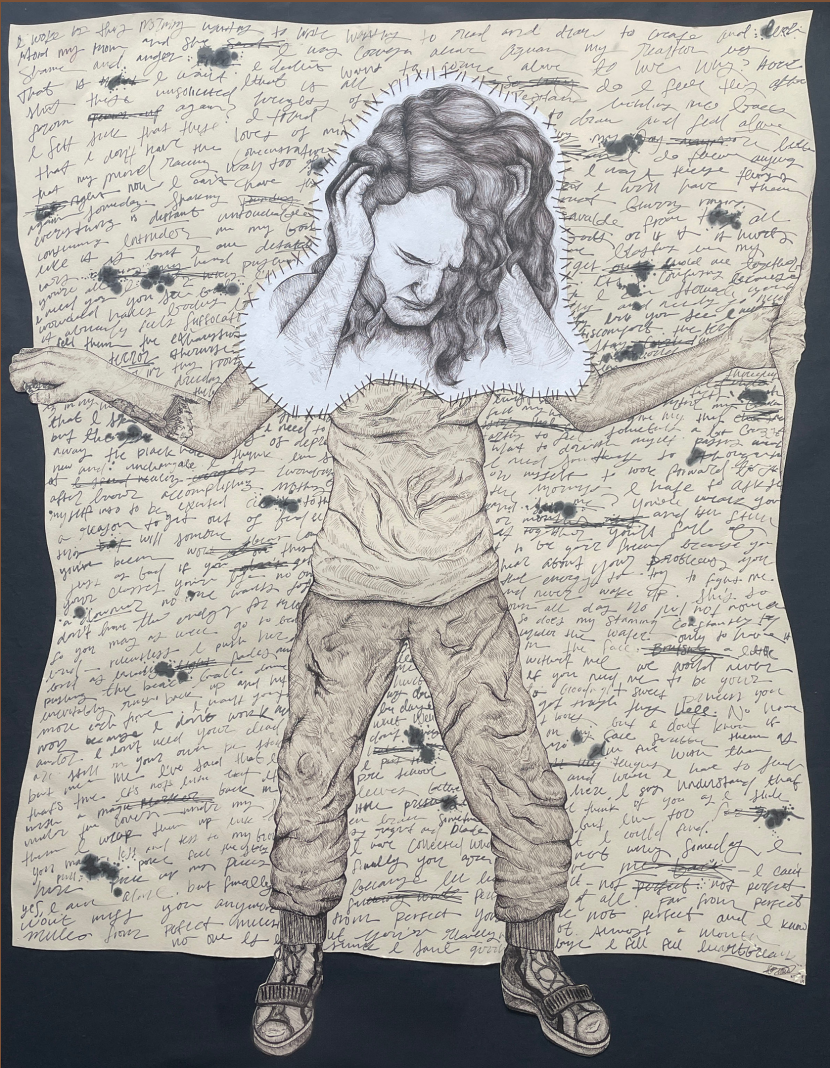
Let Me Come Out #202, Chistine Ay Tjoe

Media, Composition, & Style

Christine Ay Tjoe’s piece, *Let Me Come Out #202* (below), and my piece, *Boundaries* (right), have a lot of formal qualities in common. To start, both of the compositions feature black and brown line work atop neutral beige/off-white backgrounds, and, although her piece uses linen and screen-printing while mine used paper and ink, both incorporate stitching and layering to some capacity. Further, both of our pieces focus on a central human figure; not only that, but both of our subjects are reaching up and touching their face/head, which is a very interesting and specific detail that I think relates to our shared conceptual qualities (discussed in more depth below). Beyond that, we both work with very fine details--in the form of intricate line work--as well as utilize language in our pieces by including text, which has the same messy sort of style that further supports the chaotic movement present in both compositions.



“Boundaries” (2023)

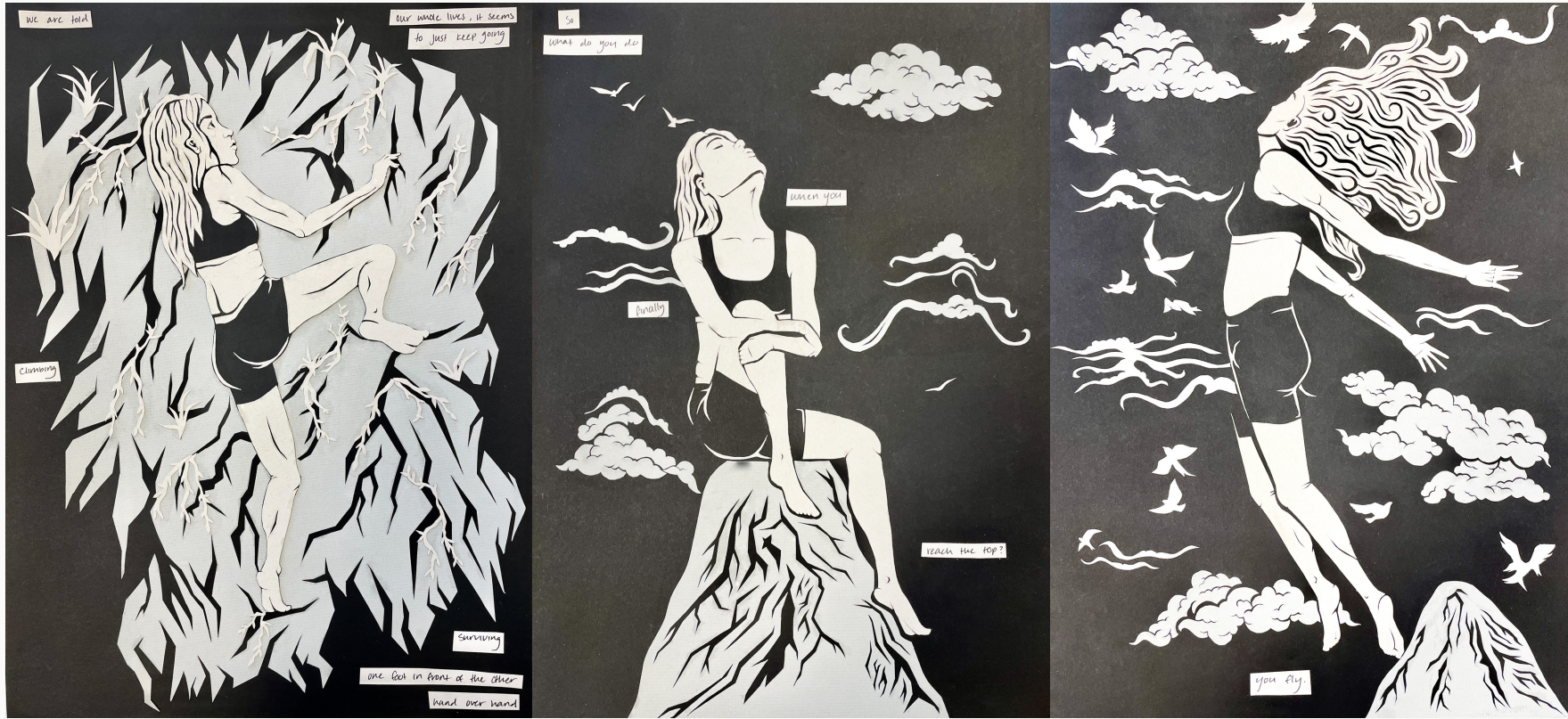


Conceptual Qualities

I believe Ay Tjoe and myself work with very similar concepts and themes throughout our pieces. As I’ve mentioned previously, Ay Tjoe centers the majority of her work on explorations of the human condition and making peace with mental and emotional turmoil; I center much of my work on these subjects as well, with the primary concentration for my IB portfolio being ‘relationship with the self.’ The piece I have chosen to feature here explores my difficult familial relationships and how a breach of boundaries jeopardized the way I saw myself and my worth, and, in observing Ay Tjoe’s piece, it feels as though the subject of her piece might be feeling something similar. In other words, the concept of emotional turmoil comes through strongly in both of these pieces, especially as both of our subjects are wearing tense, painful expressions, which further communicates this concept.

Connections to My Own Work

no world, Kara Walker



My triptych entitled “Fly” (2022)

Color, Composition, & Subject Matter

Although Walker’s work and my own share very little in terms of conceptual qualities (I am White and as such I cannot understand the generational trauma that centuries of racial oppression incurs), our use of color and shared focus on the human figure is immediately noticeable. The majority of Walker’s portfolio is done in a monochromatic palette (usually black and white), this is also the case for me as I conduct most of my work in grey scale. This choice results in stark contrast and large sections of negative space, both of which seem to feature significantly in most of our compositions. Further, both mine and Walker’s pieces feature human figures moving around and interacting with the world around them. The environments are also similar as we both chose to feature natural elements with a combination of soft and sharp edges--with my figure climbing a rock wall and then taking flight, surrounded by clouds and birds, and Walker’s figures placed in and around a dynamic ocean, with clouds above them as well.

Media, Size & Style

In my piece, *Fly* (left), I explored my journey of recovery from mental illness through paper-cutting, which is a favorite medium of Walker. *no world* (below) is a multi-media piece, however, it does feature paper-cut elements in the form of the figures on the far left and the over-sized hands holding the boat in the center. However, paper-cutting is not a typical medium for me like it is for Walker, who will conduct entire installations using life-sized paper-cut silhouettes. On this point, the size we usually work in is quite different--as Walker frequently takes up entire rooms with her work--however, in this case, our pieces are relatively similar in size: mine is about 15 x 33 inches while Walker’s is 24 x 35 3/4 inches. Stylistically, these pieces are quite similar as well, with much of the compositions being taken up by plain black space and featuring simplified figures--though mine do have a bit more detail while hers are limited to black silhouettes.



Conceptual Qualities

Ay Tjoe and I have a very similar approach to the artistic process, especially when it comes to the conceptual inspirations behind our work. Both of us take much of our inspiration from the human experience and this can especially be seen in the comparison of these two pieces. My piece, *And It All Came Spilling Out* (left), was intended to be an abstract self-portrait, and while the exact intent of this specific piece, *I'm A Human #03* (right), is unclear, Ay Tjoe has spoken at length about the exhibition this piece is a part of, *Black, Kcalb, Black, Kcalb* (2018), to be a representation of the 'blackness' inside of all of us; she writes: "The reality is that darkness is part of human nature... it is not just the enemy but an eternal life partner."

Similarly, in my description of my self-portrait I write: "The two panels can be seen as representative of our duality, one side is calm and content--regulated, and the other is chaotic and confused--disregulated." In this way, both of our pieces center on making peace every part of ourselves, even those traditionally seen as negative, and giving them space to be recognized and appreciated through our art.

Balance and Movement

In terms of composition and formal qualities, these pieces share a very similar sense of movement and balance. Both compositions have a very organic quality to them, making it seem as though they are moving of their own volition--reaching, stretching, even melting across the frame. This, in turn, creates an interesting balance to the work, where the densest parts of

each piece are placed off to the side; this compositional technique makes for very visually engaging pieces (as opposed to those where the densest portions are placed in the direct center) as the tendril-like movement discussed previously moves the eye outward around the rest of the space, or, in the case of my piece, down the length of the work and back again.



[3]

Connections to My Own Work

I'm A Human #03, Christine Ay Tjoe



Line and Space

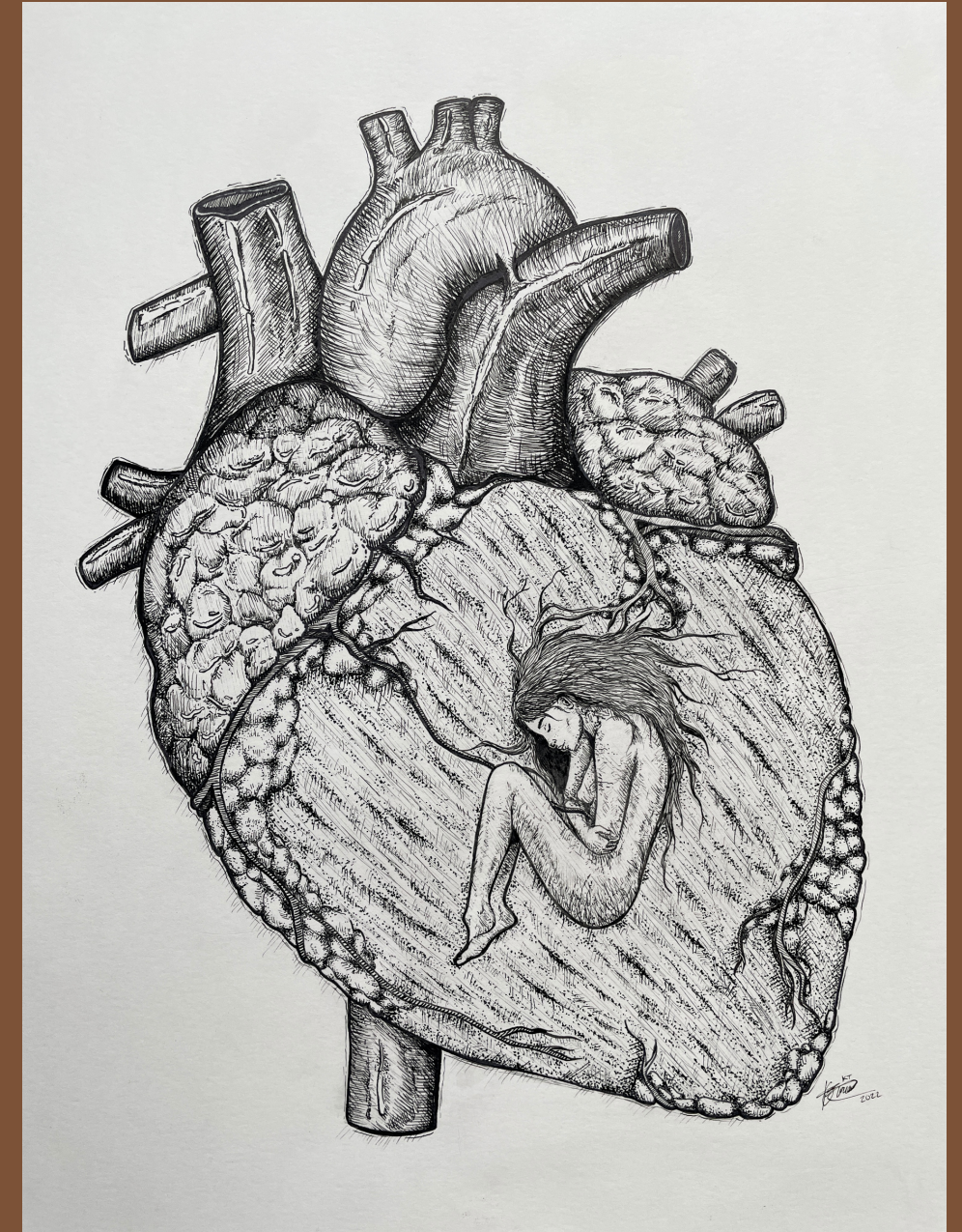
One of the biggest similarities between my piece, *I Wear My Heart On My Sleeve* (right) and Walker's piece *U.S.A. Idioms* (left) is the use of negative space; both of our pieces juxtapose detailed ink drawings with a stark white background. This technique ensures that the viewers attention stays on the most important part of the work, the central subject matter. Additionally, the lack of context in the form of a rendered background gives both pieces a surreal quality as the figures and objects seem to float untethered in space. Our use of line is very similar as well, with both of our pieces being done in simple grey-scale and utilizing a combination of thick and thin line weights to help guide the viewers eyes around the piece(s) and add to the stark juxtaposition addressed above.

The concept/visual technique that I discussed earlier (Formal Qualities: Compare & Contrast), that of the rhizome, features strongly in both of these pieces as well. This can be seen in the branches of the trees in Walker's piece and in the veins of the heart in mine.

[1]

Subject Matter

Although our conceptual inspirations behind these two pieces are very different, we both place the human figure (or figures) at the forefront of the work, as well as ensuring that our figures are posed in very dynamic poses which make it seem as though our drawings are part of a larger story. We also place these figures next to/around organic elements--in my case it is a human heart while Walker uses trees--these inclusions further reinforce the fact that both of us focus primarily on the human condition and humanity in general as a central inspiration behind our artistic works.



"I Wear My Sleeve On My Heart" (2022)

Connections to My Own Work

U.S.A. Idioms, Kara Walker

[1] – Walker, Kara. *U.S.A. Idioms*. 2017, sumi ink and collage on paper.
Harvard Art Museums, 2019.

[2] – Ay Tjoe, Christine. *Let Me Out #202*. 2008, hard-ground etching, drypoint and screenprint on paper.
White Cube, Hong Kong, 2008.

[3] – Ay Tjoe, Christine. *I'm A Human #03*. 2018, oilbar on canvas.
Ota Fine Arts, Shanghai, 2018.

[4] – Walker, Kara. *no world*. 2010, Lift-ground and spitbite aquatint and drypoint on paper.
Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA, 2010.

Image Credits

- Ariani, I. S. (2020, March 17). Perjalanan Ay tjoe christine Menemukan Diri. www.dewimagazine.com.
<https://www.dewimagazine.com/profile/perjalanan-ay-tjoe-christine-menemukan-diri>
- Artists – Christine Ay Tjoe. White Cube. (n.d.). https://whitecube.com/artists/artist/christine_ay_tjoe
- Arx, A. H. von. (2022, February 10). The redemption of art through disfigurement and slaughter. Riot Material. <https://www.riotmaterial.com/redemption-of-art-through-disfigurement-slaughter/>
- Brinkhurst-Cuff, C. (2019, September 23). Turbine Hall artist Kara Walker: “apparently, the only thing I am is black.” The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2019/sep/23/kara-walker-turbine-hall-tate-modern-racially-charged>
- Harvard. (n.d.). The big picture: Kara Walker’s U.S.A. idioms: Index Magazine: Harvard Art Museums. Index Magazine | Harvard Art Museums. <https://harvardartmuseums.org/article/the-big-picture-kara-walker-s-em-u-s-a-idioms-em>
- Ota Fine Arts. (n.d.). Christine Ay Tjoe: I’m a human #03 (2018). Artsy. <https://www.artsy.net/artwork/christine-ay-tjoe-im-a-human-number-03>
- YouTube. (2014). Kara Walker: Starting Out | Art21 “Extended Play.” YouTube. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhByMffG9IA>.
- YouTube. (2021). Interview – KARA WALKER. A BLACK HOLE IS EVERYTHING A STAR LONGS TO BE | SCHIRN. YouTube. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKfLxuu6g1c&v=nl=en>.
- YouTube. (2022). In the Gallery: Christine Ay Tjoe on ‘Black, kcalB, Black, kcalB’ | White Cube. YouTube. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jD8xl85qrVc>.
- YouTube. (2023). In the Studio: Christine Ay Tjoe | White Cube. YouTube. Retrieved May 8, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gtNSLZRqbxl>.

Works Cited