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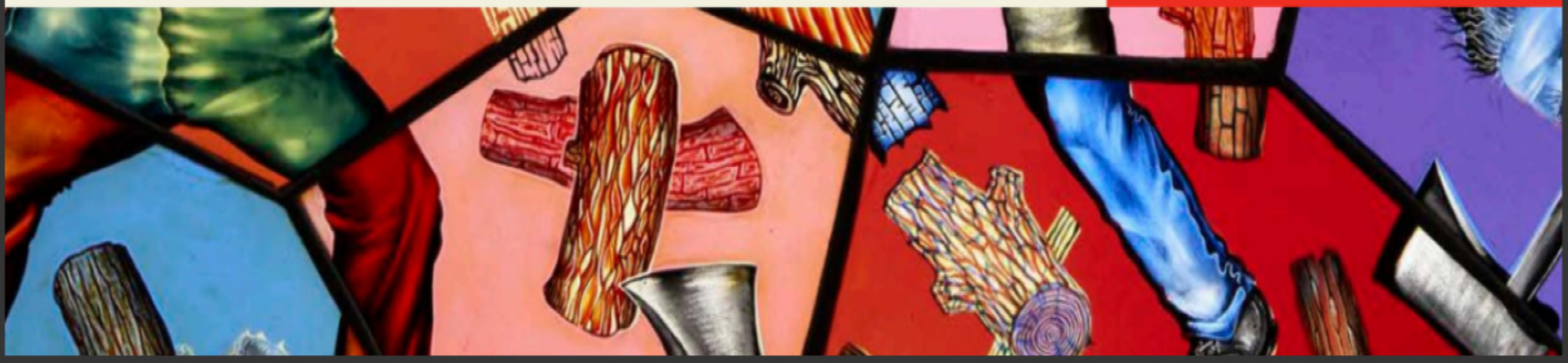






Figure 4, *Non-Existent Existence 2*, 2019. Jinya Zhao. Southern Illinois University. Photo by Jinya Zhao.

how he represents phenomena in a technique that borders on abstraction.

I would like here to advance my discussions of how observational methods influence the representation of atmospheric phenomena by comparing how immediate observation and memory recollection is predicated on specific times and places. As the pioneer of Impressionism, Claude Monet's painting *Impression, Sunrise* (Figure 4) is a reference to how the artist becomes the filter of experience. Monet developed an approach to capturing changing, fleeting moments by painting from direct observation the effects of nature on his immediate environment that became known as *en plein air*<sup>3</sup>. Monet often captured the same landscape in different momentary atmospheric conditions, combining colour and light with atmosphere to achieve, as with Turner, a remarkable degree of abstraction. This inspires my use of colour gradation and sandblasting, unlike Monet's direct approach, using cast glass requires me to recollect the memory of a time/place and to undergo a number of technical processes to conjure these qualities.

I will now move to discuss how ethereal and intangible qualities of atmospheric phenomena can be physically captured via differences in scale. In Gormley's installation *Blind Light*, he creates a thick and dense environment, conveying a disorienting background and large scale atmospheric experience, which effectively heightens bodily consciousness. These foggy white conditions are created using artificial fog, facilitating visual diffusion, similar to the sandblasting effects I employ. Gormley here utilises a large-scale and immersive work. In contrast, I work in a much smaller scale but also try to articulate the same feeling and

effect as Gormley's work through my sculpture. We both aim to dislocate the audience's perception, and in the way that *Blind Light* undermines architecture's role in providing protection to people, audiences are invited to 'enter' my work's interior space, analogous of being on top a mountain or at the bottom of the sea: an immersed figure in an endless horizon.

Finally, I explore the combination of scale, memory and space through the monumental spirit of atmosphere conjured through the small paintings produced by the Chinese painter, Ma Yuan. Yuan focusses completely on the articulation of the different gestures of water, depicting it through the absence and presence of descriptive mark-making and drawings, all of which are predicated on his own subjective understanding of a visual experience. Yuan's process is similar to my recollection of memories informing my creations. I repeatedly sketch, aiming to discover the colour and shape of memory, which inform the subsequent steps in my glass blowing.

In evaluating my works, I ascertain that the control and transmission of atmosphere is not contingent upon scale, and rather is predicated upon the colour, form, and relationship of structure, as well as its presentation and connection with surroundings. Atmospheric phenomena is elucidated through the carrier of colour, manipulated by the form and shape, enhanced with structure and texture of the work, and are constantly changing according to conditions informing the presentation of the work through time and space. The sublime is a quality of greatness which provides me a wider range of possibilities.



## LECTURE

# Evoking the Atmospheric

By Jinya Zhao

My research by practice seeks to ascertain how qualities of atmospheric and sublime phenomena can be expressed through hot glass. In particular, the question of how ethereal and intangible qualities of atmospheric phenomena can be revealed, physically captured and translated into hot glass, so as to effectively convey novel and personal meaning. These questions are examined by conducting practice-based investigations. In this article I expand my research on atmospheric phenomena.

The primary research method comprises studio-based personal experimentation with painting, varied applications of colour and density, as well as combinations and distributions of colour across the form. Tests are undertaken to explore how conducive levels of opacity and transparency might be achieved. Atmospheric phenomena are further explored outside the studio, where I reorganise my memory and my written poetry as a means to translate the intangible and sublime qualities of atmosphere, conveyed through glass, and thereby generate a new expressive language through the medium of glass. In so doing, this research shall provoke new understandings.

The interplay between imagination, observation, memory, and atmosphere are contextually entwined with colour theory, aesthetic research, and the descriptive language of the sublime. This investigation is grounded in Modernist abstraction and colour theory (Josef Albers) and the writings of Kassia St Clair. The atmospheric paintings of J.M.W. Turner and Mark Rothko's boundaries of colour also inform this research, supplemented with the concept of vast and infinite space in traditional Chinese paintings (Ma Yuan). The installations of James Turrell, Olafur Eliasson and Antony Gormley and the literature of William Wordsworth, supported with photography of Maarten Vromans and the theories of philosopher Edmund Burke also provide theoretical framing and contextual reference.

A rigorous focus on formal elements (such as colour, shape, form, balance and depth) is established in my glassblowing praxis. I explore the expressive potential in blown glass whereby the phenomena engulfs the viewer with the perspectives and experiences of the artist.

### Atmospheric Phenomena

Atmospheric phenomena often manifest as optical phenomena, caused by interactions between the light of the Sun or Moon with elements in the air<sup>1</sup>. Many artists, including myself, take inspiration from this and seek to capture it. Some artists aim to reproduce this visually, through pigments and immersive spacial installations, whereas I chose to explore it through the attributes



Figure 2, *Foggy*, 2017. Jinya Zhao. Photo by Yunpeng Zhang.



Figure 1, *Storm at the Mouth of the Grand Canal*, 1840. J.M.W. Turner. Watercolour and white highlights on off-white wave paper. 21.8 x 31.9 cm.

of three-dimensional glass objects, and through effects obtained via techniques that change colour and opacity. The combined thread in the works of these following artists informs my exploration of atmosphere and my experience and memories of place, transformed into physical materials. Through attempting to capture the beauty of being located in an environment, I see my work as an endless landscape in miniature.

I begin by discussing how atmospheric conditions can be affected by diffusion between light and materials. The artist J.M.W. Turner and I both focus on the observation of an industrial atmosphere as a reflection of personal experience.<sup>2</sup> His atmospheric painting *Storm at the Mouth of the Grand Canal* (Figure 1) is indicative of his sensitivity to atmospheric effects. He was drawn to flashes of light, an interest manifested in his attempts to draw out the effects of smoke emissions from steamships and trains. Likewise, I am creating atmospheric effects based on my personal experience of industrialised China (Figure 2), whereby I express my experiences and reflections of living in a changing, industrialising country. I take Turner's painting as a reference and expand upon

1. Ahrens, C. Donald, *Meteorology today: an introduction to weather, climate, and the environment*, (Minneapolis/St. Paul: West Pub, 1994)