# MELISSA HUANG

FRAGMENTS & FABRICATIONS

"In my glitch-inspired painting and video self-portraiture, I study the desire, failure, and dissonance of portraying an idealized self for a real and digital audience. Adopting a perfect girl persona has never been easier; however, the physical and emotional roles that society expects women to fulfill have never been further out of reach.

Like many, I am trying to embody a person-shaped daydream of the self. I know what I should be, what I want to be. A perfect version of myself is always just around the corner. I can catch a glimpse of her, or sometimes feel her slipping from my fingertips. She's uninhibited, wild, beautiful, everybody's best friend. She's an exquisite flicker on a screen.

The non-daydream version of my self is foggier. She cries, worries, and obsesses. She projects success but never fully enjoys it. She's learning to love herself, but it's harder than she thought.

I find myself questioning the objective reality of my body: is a purely representational, painted version of myself more authentic than an abstracted and amorphous body cloud? Am I capturing the daydream in unrestrained washes of color, shape, and movement, or something closer to reality?
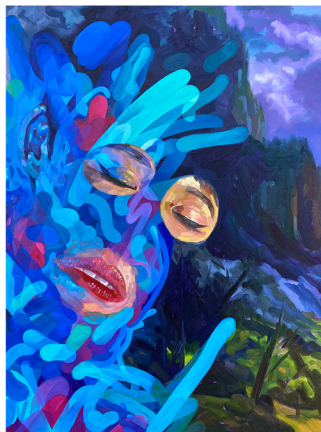
A different version of you exists in the minds of your family, friends, colleagues, strangers, and digital
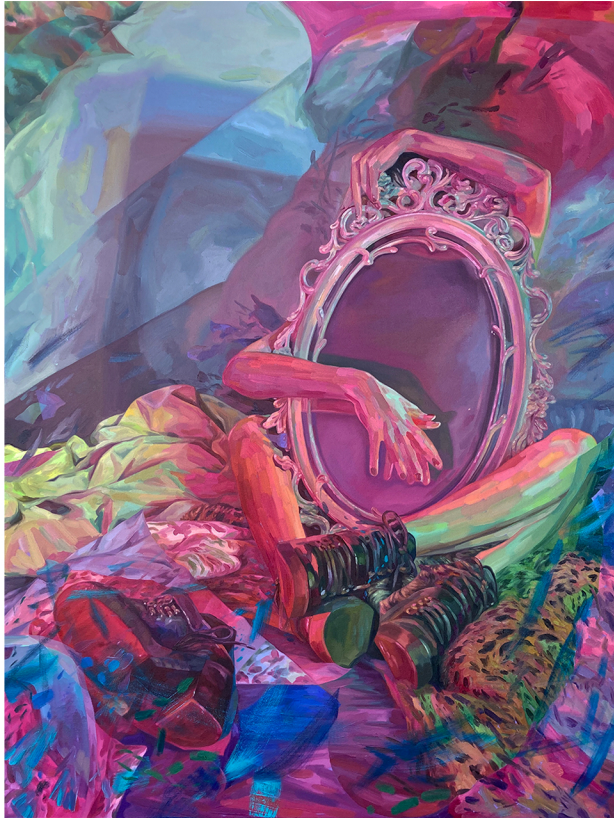
Smoke and Mirror, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 x 36 inches
Image Courtesy of Whitespace Gallery

audience, none of which are your complete identity. Rather, each of these fragments come together to paint a fuller picture of 'you'. We form our identities through the Sartrean act of looking at others, being looked at, and understanding that we are the subject of 'the look'.

Contemporary culture is obsessed with perfection, and digital image manipulation has blurred the lines between reality and the idealized self, creating an unsettling gap between who we really are and how we wish to be perceived.

In recent work, I consider how those of us coming of age with the internet and social media have constructed alternative identities online — fantasies, really — that bear little resemblance to the person in real life. I transform my image beyond believable authenticity: it is fragmented, replicated and distorted to the point of becoming disconnected from my real body. Ultimately, I use this series of works to dismantle the complicated archetypes to which women must conform in our ever-changing cyber landscape.

My work utilizes traditional oil painting techniques with a focus on direct painting and limited glazing. I use a wide range of hyper-saturated color throughout to give character to each fragmented portrait and to reference the glitched feeling of being deconstructed online and in real life. Washes of color create small windows to another world. I repeat and layer my self-portrait on the canvas to represent multiple versions of the self and the emotional push and pull I feel between them."

- Melissa Huang

front: *Digital Dreamer*, 2022, oil on canvas, 48 × 36 inches

interior: *Beguiled*, 2022, oil on canvas, 24 × 18 inches

back: *Beguiling* (detail), 2022, oil on canvas, 24 × 18 inches

All Images Courtesy of the Artist and Whitespace Gallery

BRADBURY ART MUSEUM
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