

# Comparative Study

Based on my interest in *Autumn Rhythm* from Jackson Pollock, *Blind Portrait* from Sui Jianguo, and *Winter Vine I* from Shao Yan, in this document, I will compare and contrast their similarities and differences. Although 3 artists grew up from different cultural backgrounds and the way and material used to present objectives are different from each artist, the idea of intending to lose some controls during the creating process, such as pinching clay with covered eyes or creating distance between hands and the canvas. Also the similarities between the art object include motion and action map which is a style that emphasizes the process of making art, often through a variety of techniques that include dripping, dabbing, smearing, and even flinging paint on to the surface of the canvas. <sup>1</sup>



(Above) Jackson Pollock,  
*Autumn Rhythm*,  
Enamel on Canvas,  
266.7 x 525.8 cm, 1950

(Right) Sui Jianguo,  
*Blind Portrait*,  
Cast Bronze Installation,  
110cm x 130cm x 300cm,  
2010-2012

(Far Right) Shao Yan,  
*Winter Vine I*,  
Ink and Rice Paper  
(Lampblack, Glue 4.8g, Water  
1.3Kg, Temperature 10°C),  
247cm x 39cm,  
2011



# Cultural Context

## ***Autumn Rhythm* created by Jackson Pollock**

As many European artists, such as Max Ernst and Marc Chagall, fled to America due to WWII, they greatly influenced American Art style at that time. The style of Surrealism and Cubism developed from Europe quickly occupied the Art world in America. As a result, American artists wanted to create something belong to themselves. They were seeking for a totally new Art form and Art style - abstract expressionism. Jackson Pollock's works were a reflection of this “trend”. Abstract Expressionism refers to a group of American artists who were prominent during the 1940s and 1950s. Like the Expressionists, they felt that the true subject of art was man’s inner emotions, his turmoil, and to this end they exploited the fundamental aspects of the painting process - gesture, colour, form, texture - for their expressive and symbolic potential<sup>2</sup>. Abstract expression contains two main areas - action painting and color field painting. Pollock is one of the action painters. As early as 1942, Jackson Pollock was working at the cutting edge of abstract expressionist painting. One of his significant achievements was to rejuvenate the European sense of art and make it viable again for native sensibility.<sup>3</sup> Although there were artists like Arshile Gorky, Hans Hoffman did drip painting as well, Pollock's works were more well known and well developed.<sup>4</sup> This a new art form based on the his interest in the ideas raised by Surrealist - unconscious and embrace of automatism yielding control of making process to let the unconscious mind hold sway - and the understanding of picture space guided by Cubism.

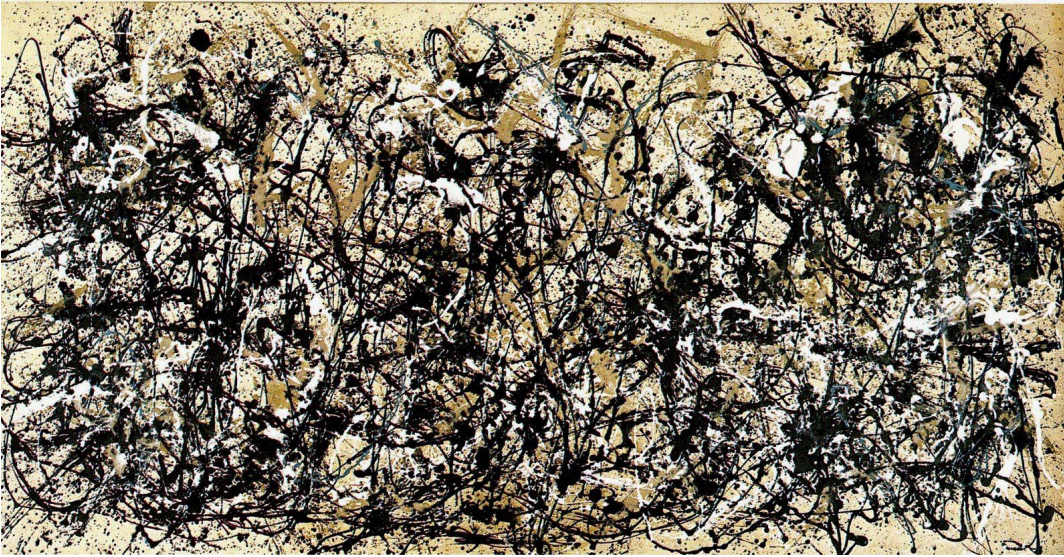
## ***Blind Portrait* created by Sui Jianguo**

With the development of clay sculpture, a complete aesthetic system in China has been formed, which is derived from the word "imitation".<sup>5</sup> For example, Chinese high school art examination only tests student's ability to imitate, if a student is good at imitation, he or she can get a really high score. The tendency can finally result people's inner thoughts and emotions be less expressed. Sui notices this and he wants to challenge this kind of aesthetic system by emphasizing the role of the artist’s unconscious mind in creation. With its special mental mechanism, unconsciousness is closely connected with inspiration and dream in literary and artistic creation.

## ***Winter Vine I* created by Shao Yan**

Most Chinese in China are patriot and the definition of patriot has been long time considered as one who respects Chinese culture and only follows the traditional way. However, as modern art influences China, people - especially Chinese artists - begin to reflect their own culture. Since most cultures in China have long time history, there are many aspects can be improved. The culture that Shao chooses to reflect is Chinese traditional calligraphy. One of the main feature in writing calligraphy is letting the work being alive, ancient people show motion in calligraphy by introducing the connection between character to make the work alive. But, until now, Chinese people didn't greatly investigate other forms of “being alive” other than the ancient way since the definition of being patriot. In this artwork, Shao offers other possibilities of making calligraphy alive which also challenges the idea of patriot in China.

# Autumn Rhythm



Jackson Pollock,  
*Autumn Rhythm*,  
Enamel on  
Canvas,  
266.7cm x 525.8  
cm, 1950



Detail  
View

## Formal Qualities

The artist uses non-objective proximity and repetition of neutral color and curved lines, and crystallographic balance to create the unity and pattern. Although the design also contains variety in thickness and curvature of lines, and in colors and has several green and yellow strokes mix with in black and white greyscale, when viewers see it as a whole, these varieties create unity again. Far from being slapdash, they are tightly disciplined, and show an assured sense of harmony and rhythm.<sup>6</sup>

Unusual techniques and unusual creating process are shown in instead of putting the canvas on easel to paint, Pollock lays his canvases on the floor. The distance between the paint tool and the canvas changes the role of artist. Instead of using brush or pen to paint, Pollock drips paint onto canvas straight from the can or with a stick or trowel. This creating process helps to create action map. What left on the canvas is the permanent record of the temporary action.<sup>7</sup> Pollock first created a complex linear skeleton using black paint. For this initial layer the paint was diluted, so that it soaked into the length of unprimed canvas, thereby inextricably joining image and support.

Lines are diagonal and curved, which show the movement on a 2D static artwork. Although the movement of the lines are smooth, the texture of the lines are rough. Biomorphic elements are shown in lines found in body movement, drops found in splashing water. Since it is crystallographic balance, there is no major focus and no any clear and distinct points of emphasis, plus, the layers of overlapping lines make it hard to tell the beginning and ending in the artwork. Also, the material - enamel - the artist chooses to use is opaque which is able to cover the underneath layers.

This is an artwork with large size - 266.7cm x 525.8 cm - when people stand closely in-front of it can feel the extension in space, and able to see the thickness of the enamel which makes the artwork 3D. However, this feature can't be observed when people stand from away from the artwork. Although Pollock's imagery is nonrepresentational, Autumn Rhythm is evocative of nature, not only in its title but also in its coloring (including the autumn-colored canvas support), horizontal orientation, and sense of ground and space.<sup>8</sup>

# Autumn Rhythm



Jackson Pollock,  
*Autumn Rhythm*,  
Enamel on Canvas,  
266.7cm x 525.8 cm,  
1950

## Critical Hypothesis

Let the creating process be the artwork.

The artwork introduces a significant concept of art object - people used to think an artwork only means the final product, but we can tell in this artwork, each creating step is the artwork. There is no sketch before the creation, every stroke can either be a sketch or part of the final artwork, or we can say the artwork is the combination of sketch and the final product<sup>9</sup>.

There is no figurative objects or major focus but there are non-representational lines. The motion of the line records the artist's creating motion and process. The overlapping lines which make it hard to tell the beginning and end of the artwork show the continuation of the artist's creating process.

The thickness and the size of the line reveal how much forces the artist uses while creating, and the time duration the artist has at one point.

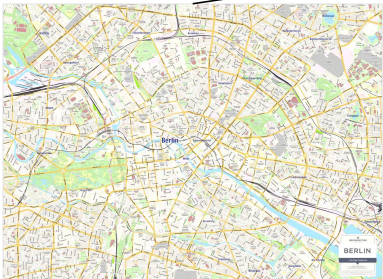
As many other abstract expressionists, Pollock also exploits the fundamental aspects of the painting process.

Unlike watercolor, enamel is opaque and able to cover the underneath layers. This is true even for white color. This relationship of hiding allows artist to build layers, and meanwhile the value of the under layers won't decrease, which are good for recording. What left is the permanent record of the temporary action.

What happens in the artist studio is always a mystery, training and expertise synthesized over time into a picture or a thing. But Pollock shows what happened to get us here more distinctly than anyone had before. Viewers can clearly see that there was a person traversed this canvas. Which is also known as 'energy and motion made visible' said by Pollock<sup>10</sup>.

## Support & Conceptual Significance & Material Significance

The artist splashes and drops the enamel on the canvas, and while walking. This kind of creating process brings the movement and rhyme to the lines and avoids painting figuratively. Which makes the artwork looks like a map or a web - two forms of recording.



Berlin City Map, Ink on paper, 100cm x 75cm



J Schmidt, Spider web, 1977

# Winter Vine I

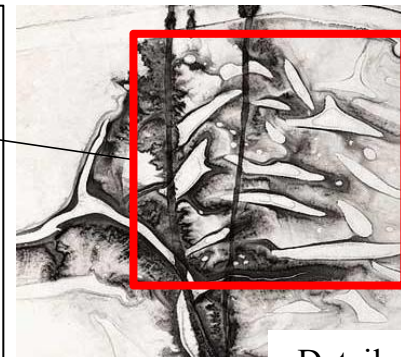
## Formal Qualities

Unusual techniques and unusual creating process are shown in instead of using brush to write, Shao injects ink on the rice paper with a syringe that fills with ink at first, then sinks the artwork into water tank. And he does all the creation in-front of Chinese people.

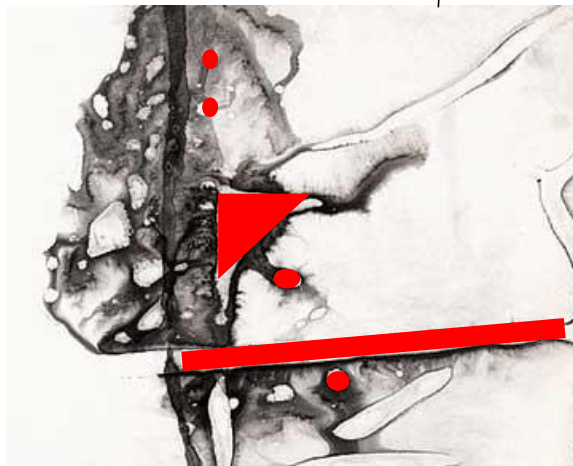
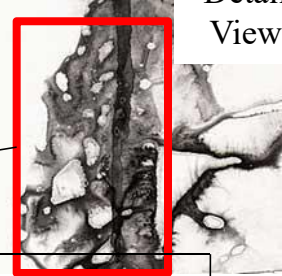
The artwork contains unity with variety. The unity is shown in the repetition of lines, and the continuation formed by the main stroke. The variety is shown in the variety in values, variety in shapes, such as, "circle", "triangle", and "rectangle", lack of proximity of lines.

After encountering water, the black ink forms the texture of folds and interacts with the white part in the background which shows the arrangement of the positive and negative spaces in an active way. Lines are diagonal and gradual change in value, Which show the movement on a 2D static artwork.

This is an artwork with large size - 247cm x 39cm- when people stand closely in-front of it can feel the vertical extension in space, and able to see the there are actual white "circles" in the black ink due to the bubbles caused by the water.



Detail View

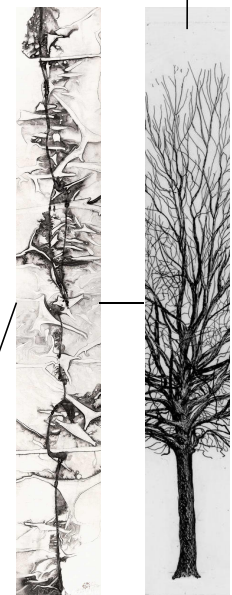


Detail View

The artwork is within an overall asymmetrical balance and the major focus is the main stroke which looks like a branch. Near by the main stroke there are small "branches". The rhythm is shown through the repetition of variety in values of neutral color along an spread out eye-path.



Cesare Leonardi, Franca Stagi, 11.3.1  
*Carpinus Betulus*, 1978-1982



Shao Yan,  
*Winter Vine I*,  
Ink and Rice  
Paper,  
247cm x39cm,  
2011

# Winter Vine I

## Critical Hypothesis

Make the calligraphy alive.

## Support

According to Stanley-Baker, "calligraphy is sheer life experienced through energy in motion that is registered as traces on silk or paper, with time and rhythm in shifting space its main ingredients."<sup>11</sup>A good calligraphy work emphasizes the whole artwork should be being alive which can best be reflected on the motion in the work.

Bleeding is usually not accepted in Chinese traditional calligraphy work. However, a good calligraphy shows alive and supposed to move. Bleeding is a kind of moving.

The biomorphic elements and rhythm make the lines as high abstracted branches. Branches relate to growth which is a form of being alive.

There are white circles in the black ink due to the bubbles caused by the water. This shows the concept of "ink breathing". Just like a man breaths underneath the water, the surface of the water will appear bubbles.



Shao Yan,  
*Winter Vine I*,  
Ink and Rice  
Paper,  
247cm x 39cm,  
2011



Detail  
View



*Water bubbles*,  
2012

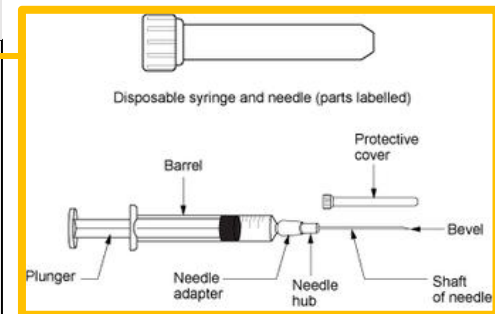
## Conceptual Significance

**Calligraphy** --- Shao says *Winter Vine I* is calligraphy, which challenged people's opinion toward Calligraphy and traditional art. As a form of Art, traditional Art - works that have elements of traditional art - should also be inclusive, allowing all possibilities.

**Bleeding Ink** --- Bleeding ink is normally unacceptable in Chinese traditional calligraphy. However, Shao wants to prove this conventional opinion is wrong. It not only brings the integrity to the work, but also makes the work to a good and alive calligraphy work. By challenging this traditional ideology, Shao also challenges the word Patriotism in China.

## Material Significance:

By using **syringe** -representing revolution and western (syringe is invented in Italy in the 15th century and the invention of syringe is an epoch-making revolution in the field of medical appliance<sup>12</sup>) which violates the traditional writing tool, such as brush. The artist shows his intention of bring a revolution which is offering more possibilities of making the calligraphy alive. Calligraphers need to re-ink every three or four words, so their movements are incoherent. But the needle holds three times as much ink as the traditional brush, which greatly helps the motion formed by continuous action.



*The structure of the syringe, 2013*

By choosing ink - traditional material in Chinese traditional calligraphy writing - as the material, Shao creates a contrast between the traditional calligraphy and his own work. Ink in the traditional calligraphy work is static and doesn't combine with the white background well. But in Shao's work, ink shows motion via adding water to form depth in value. When water combines with ink, there forms "gray space" which are the light value part. Gray space is like a bridge that combines the white background and the black word of a calligraphy work and makes the work movable and integrated. Secondly, since ink with water is transparent, the upper layers can't completely cover the underneath layer. Plus, it bleeds. Therefore, it brings extra attention to the motion or act of making the calligraphy. Also can add an extra layer of expression to the calligraphy.



# Blind Portrait

## Formal Qualities

Unusual techniques and unusual creating process are shown in instead of pinching the clay with observation, Sui covers his eyes while pinching with unconscious mind.<sup>13</sup>

The artist constructs a high abstract sculpture with rough texture and uses proximity and repetition of cupped holes to create pattern and unity. Meanwhile, the variety is shown in the shapes of the holes, in size of the holes, in textures, for example, some places are smooth, some places are rough and show the fingerprint. The depth shows how much force the artist uses to pinch the clay.

The material of the final artwork - bronze - is hard, but the texture of the artwork looks soft. The thickness shows that it has been rubbed and be folded into layers.

This is an artwork with large scale - 110cm x 130cm x 300cm - when people stand closely in front of it can feel the vertical extension in space, and able to see there are fingerprints left during the creation by the artist. However, this feature can't be observed when people stand far away from the artwork. The artist scans his original artwork and asked workers to enlarge them to 110cm x 130cm x 300cm and made of bronze<sup>14</sup>. By magnifying the details of the clay sculpture to the extent that the naked eye can see, which makes the touch of the sculpture visualized.

This artwork is a imperfect formal balance, the big size of the top part makes it as the major focus. The layers of overlapping holes make it hard to tell beginning and ending of the artwork.



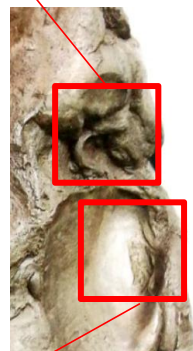
Sui Jianguo,  
*Blind Portrait*,  
Cast Bronze Installation,  
110cm x 130cm x 300cm,  
2010-2012

The artwork is a biomorphic form which combines a biomorphic "oblate spheroid" and a biomorphic "cylinder".



The parts that concave in show greater force be used and have smoother texture than the other parts.

Convex



Concave in



Donald Scarinci, Sui Jianguo "Blind Portraits"  
Series Arrives in Central Park, 2015



# Blind Portrait

## Critical Hypothesis

Portray a portrait - Externalizing the unconsciousness

## Support

The artwork is named “portrait”, the combination of the biomorphic “oblate spheroid” and a biomorphic “cylinder” makes the the sculpture looks like a human's head. But there is no eyes, nose, hairs and such facial feature portrayed. The artist only shows the formality of the portrait. The unconscious mind is absurd and can best explained as the rough texture. In this artwork, the texture of the outside is rough, but texture that goes in deep to the core of the sculpture is smoother.

Because all the paintings and sculptures are continued on the basis of considering the things that have been done. It is the requirement of the shaping itself, which is like a composition of Chinese painting and the intention initiates the expression. The first stroke initiates the second one that initiates the third one. The clay sculpture did the same, and it constantly corrects the similarity between the motion and the object in hand. The effect of the eye-shade here is letting the intuition, accident and unconsciousness work. The artist says “I stop when I don’t understand what I am doing, because I will take off the eye-cover and assess the sculpture subjectively.” This emphasizes the role of unconsciousness in this artwork<sup>15</sup>.

Unconsciousness is the nature of one's mind. The artist doesn’t paint on the clay, but keep the original color of the clay, which shows its primitiveness and nature.

Everyone’s finger print is different. When one has his or her own fingerprint on the clay which latter be made into bronze, it is irreplaceable and a more private results. This is a permanent record of the temporary action. Which makes the unconsciousness has specificity. Also the large size makes the artwork looks like a monument which makes it has publicity. These designs help the artist to show the idea of externalizing the unconsciousness.



Sui Jianguo,  
*Blind Portrait*,  
Cast Bronze Installation,  
110cm x 130cm x 300cm,  
2010-2012

## Conceptual Significance

**Blindness** --- People are afraid of being blind because that brings the fear and insecurity to them. However, Sui believes blindness helps people being unconscious.

**Art Object** --- The artist presents his mental experience as a high abstract physical object.

Uncontrollable creating process: In *Autumn Rhythm*, the artist uses the brush to splash the enamel on canvas, and there is a distance between the brush and the canvas. Which makes the splashes of the enamel and the trend of the stokes uncontrollable. In *Winter Vine I*, the artist uses syringe that fills with ink to inject the ink on paper, same as Pollock's work, the distance between the syringe and the paper makes the splashes of the enamel and the trend of the stokes uncontrollable. In *Blind Portrait*, the artist pinches clay with covered eyes. In artwork *Autumn Rhythm* and *Blind Portrait*, the uncontrollable creating helps to show the concept of unconsciousness.

Overlapping: In *Autumn Rhythm*, lines overlap. Since the artist uses enamel which opaque and easily covers the underneath colour while keeps its shape and value. In *Winter Vine I*, lines overlap, but since the artist adds water to black ink to create depth in value and make it transparent, the upper lines can't completely cover the underneath lines and the underneath lines' shape and value be changed, they bleed. In *Blind Portrait*, holes and fingerprints overlap, clay is very flexible and the past actions are easy to be "erased", therefore, similar as *Autumn Rhythm*, the top holes and fingerprints can completely cover the underneath.

**COMPARISONS**

Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm*, Enamel on Canvas, 266.7cm x 525.8 cm, 1950

Sui Jianguo, *Blind Portrait*, Cast Bronze Installation, 110cmx130cmx300 cm, 2010-2012

Shao Yan, *Winter Vine I*, Ink and Rice Paper (Lampblack, Glue 4.8g, Water 1.3Kg, Temperature 10°C), 247x39cm, 2011

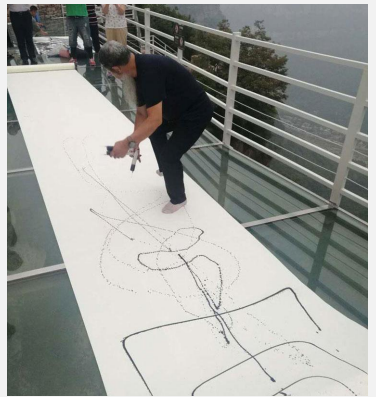
Extension in space & Large size: All 3 artworks can fill a viewer's field of view in at least 1 dimension. When standing near the artwork, *Autumn Rhythm* fills the audience's field of view in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions. *Winter Vine I* and *Blind Portrait* can similarly fill the audience's field of view in the horizontal direction. Three of them all have large size, when people stand closely to view the work, they can see details - finger print, thickness of the line, white circle in the black ink.



Sui's creating process  
Sui Jianguo and his *Blind Portrait*, 2008



Pollock's creating process  
Namuth, Hans, *Jackson Pollock and his drip painting*, 1950,



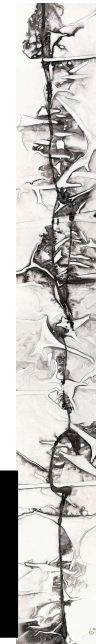
Shao's creating process  
Shao Yan and his *injecting painting*, 2018

An indication of depth: People can tell how much force the artist uses when he is creating the work. In *Autumn Rhythm*, the force is shown in the thickness - both 2D and 3D - and size of the lines. In *Winter Vine I*, the force is shown in the 2D thickness and size of the lines. In *Blind Portrait*, the depth of holes and the fingerprints show the level of force that been used.

No sketch before the design: In *Autumn Rhythm* and *Winter Vine I*, every stroke can either be a sketch or part of the final artwork. In *Blind Portrait*, the artist leaves his fingerprint and the trace of kneading on the final work.



Jackson Pollock, *Autumn Rhythm*, Enamel on Canvas, 266.7cm x 525.8 cm, 1950



Shao Yan, *Winter Vine I*, Ink and Rice Paper (Lampblack, Glue 4.8g, Water 1.3Kg, Temperature 10°C), 247x39cm, 2011



Sui Jianguo, *Blind Portrait*, Cast Bronze Installation, 110cmx130cmx300 cm, 2010-2012

## COMPARISONS

Unity with variety: In *Autumn Rhythm*, the artist non-objective proximity and repetition of neutral color and curved lines, and crystallographic balance to create the unity. variety shown in thickness and curvature of lines, and in colors and has several green and yellow strokes mix with in black and white greyscale In *Winter Vine I*, unity is shown in the repetition of lines, and the continuation formed by the main stroke. The variety is shown in the variety in values, variety in shapes. In *Blind Portrait*, the artist uses proximity and repetition of cupped holes to create pattern and unity. The variety is shown in the shapes of the holes, in size of the holes, in textures. But when viewers see the artwork as a whole, the variety creates unity.

Balance: *Autumn Rhythm* is a crystallographic balance, and there is no major focus is shown in the artwork. *Winter Vine I* is an informal balance, and the major focus is the symmetrical line that looks like the main branch. *Blind Portrait* is a imperfect formal balance, the major focus is the oblate spheroid which looks like a head in a portrait.