

Ashley Kruythoff Artist Statement

Photography and artwork saved my sanity from the tumultuous, abhorrent year that was 2020. As a Black, Caribbean-American young woman, I often found national turmoil and the pandemic's inexorable effects too much to bear. My camera became even more important, a steadfast reprieve from insufferable politics, racism, and brutality. Studying Buddhism, Taoism, and Stoicism influenced my perspective and ability to appreciate the simple beauty that was just outside of my Los Angeles apartment.

Nevertheless, it was hard to release underlying anxiety which can be sensed in some of my pieces in the series, *Flow State*, 2020. My photography-based artwork juxtaposes beautiful and serene subjects with an altered glitch editing style. Final compositions represent the surreal dichotomy I experienced throughout the year — finding beauty in the “little things,” while simultaneously experiencing mind-bending errors of the new, digital era. Not all images from this series are stimulating glitches as, thankfully, there were moments of serenity and awe.

My artwork is greatly influenced by an objective of an ancient branch of philosophy called Stoicism which teaches us not only to meet life's challenges, but to retain our tranquility as we do so. Like Buddhism, it teaches us how to cope with anxiety, grief, fear, and other negative emotions that keep us from experiencing a truly joyful existence. By taking a breath, by being present, and trusting wherever fate leads me, I was able to “let go” of fear and anxiety. When you're able to do this, you realize and better appreciate nature and the beauty that surrounds you.

In “exploration of space,” the majesty of a large cumulonimbus cloud seen days after lockdown momentarily arrested my attention. Particularly, this piece shows that in order to reach tranquility we as individuals and society must often dare to go through the unknown and have the bravery to conquer whatever turbulence faces us. Taoism teaches us coming to terms with what faces us and going with the flow, like water, can carve mountains of troubles, worries, and fears. The ability to stay calm and focused allows us to come out the other side stronger. Living in harmony with whatever comes our way builds character, endurance and true strength.

Maintaining tranquility was — and still is — challenging, of course. Yet ultimately, I found beauty amidst chaos.