

Strokes of genius

Young artist's work represents
a breathtaking foray into subject matter
far beyond her years

By JILL DIVER • Photos by ROGER DARRIGRAND



Victoria Yin, 12, sits in her studio, a house on Argilla Street, surrounded by her works of art.

When adults look at Victoria Yin's paintings, a next logical question is this: "What drives a 12-year-old girl to explore profoundly mature concepts so very deeply?"

Ask the child to articulate the wellspring for her work, and she answers: "I don't know; I just paint what I like."

Questions aside, Yin's art has created quite a stir — on the local scene with the Andover Artist's Guild and more widely through the International ArtExpo in Las Vegas, among other places.

Yin traveled to the expo in 2008 with her mother, Eva Xu, and showed her work in the company of about 300 other artists.

"We saw these really neat geometric, angular people," said Charlotte Brenes, 39, a 17-year industry veteran, describing her first impression of Yin's art at the expo, where she viewed it with International Art Publishers owner Ben Valenty.

"We were drawn to the work," Brenes said. "And then we met Victoria."

At the time, the artist was 11 years old.

"To see that caliber of work coming out of (a child) was incredible," Brenes said. "We thought, 'Wow that's interesting.'"

The discussions began.

Yin continued to work independently in her

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Courtesy photo
"Year 10,000 AD I — The Twin Blossoms,"
by Yin at age 11.

Andover studio. And Brenes and Valenty watched her art develop as every few weeks from September 2008 to May 2009, Yin's mother sent photos of completed paintings to their offices in California.

"We saw tremendous growth ... It was astounding," Brenes said. "Every time we saw something new,

it was another level again."

Her first pieces were black and white, Brenes said. Now there are bold color images hiding inside of more images.

"You kind of wonder where it's coming from," she said, another adult marveling at the inspired visions flowing from the paintbrush of a waifish little girl. ➤

Victoria Yin's art has been compared to that of Salvador Dali, the Spanish surrealist who in the 1920s gained fame for paintings including the highly recognizable "Persistence of Memory."

Now 12, Yin works in acrylics only, delving into subject matter such as lust, temptation, and innocence - weighty topics for a kid.

Yin creates her paintings in a studio in a house on Argilla Street. It's separate from the family home on Lowell Street, where she lives with her mom, dad, Yizhong Yin, and her younger sister, Zoe, 8, who also is an artist.

Today Yin has an exclusive contract with International Art Publishers. And while her work still can lean toward surrealism, she paints in other styles.

Some of her new pieces, for instance, show of hints of Romain de Tiroff (1892-1990), the diversely talented French artist who worked under the pseudonym Erte.

"Erte did a lot of fashion stuff; some of Victoria's new pieces are reminiscent of his style of work," Brenes said.

And yet, Brenes added, "I don't know if there is comparison. She's very in tune with futuristic ideas and you'd never expect that from someone so young."

Her publishing house carries approximately 35 of her paintings and its



Courtesy photo
Yin's "Beautiful Innocence," painted at age 12.

WHEN SHE ISN'T PAINTING, VICTORIA LOVES TO ...

- ▶ Read: Fantasy tales like "Lord of the Rings" and the "Harry Potter" series.
- ▶ Listen to: Michael Jackson. She admires him for "being different."
- ▶ Watch: TV, channel surfing.

representatives say that thus far, 11 of Yin's paintings have been sold, garnering between \$11,500 and \$16,500 each.

In addition, she has had two shows: the first in May 2009, and the second in October 2009, both through International Art Publishers.

On a first meeting, the girl is soft-spoken and reserved.

Of Asian descent, she has long hair that reaches her waist. Glasses frame her petite face and her clothing is trendy: a short gold vest paired with a print shirt and leggings. ▶

As she speaks, she stands in front of her latest painting. It is half-finished on the easel and while pondering it she plays with her hair, brushing it over her shoulder and back again.

“Besides my art, I’m normal,” she says.

An eighth-grader who skipped the second grade, Yin deals with the regular ups and downs of being in middle school. There are projects and homework, thoughts about preparing for high school. And yet, painting is central to every day of her life.

“I go to school Monday to Friday, come home, do my homework and then go to the studio for a few hours. On the weekends, I’m in the studio all day,” she says.

“Victoria is an excellent student and puts a lot of effort into her work,” says John Heidenrich, her social studies teacher at Andover West Middle School.

He thinks she just might be the most artistic student he has had 32 years of teaching.

“But she doesn’t wear it on her sleeve and she doesn’t brag,” he says. “She seems to be very mature and responsible for her age. She has this, ‘Ya, this is what I like to do’ attitude. She’s bright and friendly and good to other people. And she has a good sense of humor; she fits in very well with others.”



Courtesy photo
“Jealousy — The Rising Serpentine,” by Yin at age 11.

Yin’s humor and ability to remain humble are noticed by her other teachers, too.

“I have had the pleasure of Victoria’s presence in science classes for the past two years,” Kay Levesque writes in an e-mail. “(Victoria) excels at everything that she attempts.”

While Yin’s painting takes

center stage, she has other artistic talents, too.

“During auditions for our annual musical, I was thrilled with Victoria’s audition. If I had known what a wonderful stage presence and singing voice she possesses, I would have encouraged her involvement earlier than this year,” Levesque adds. ➤

Both Levesque and Heidenrich have high expectations for the future of her art career, and say they look forward to following her career and seeing where her talent takes her.

Everyone needs friendship and companionship. And for Yin, this comes largely in the form of her little sister Zoe.

The two work together in their studio, though they have strikingly different styles.

Zoe has usurped her sisters' claim to fame as the youngest artist ever to attend International Art events: Victoria was 10 when she first exhibited; Zoe already has. (See related story, Page 47).

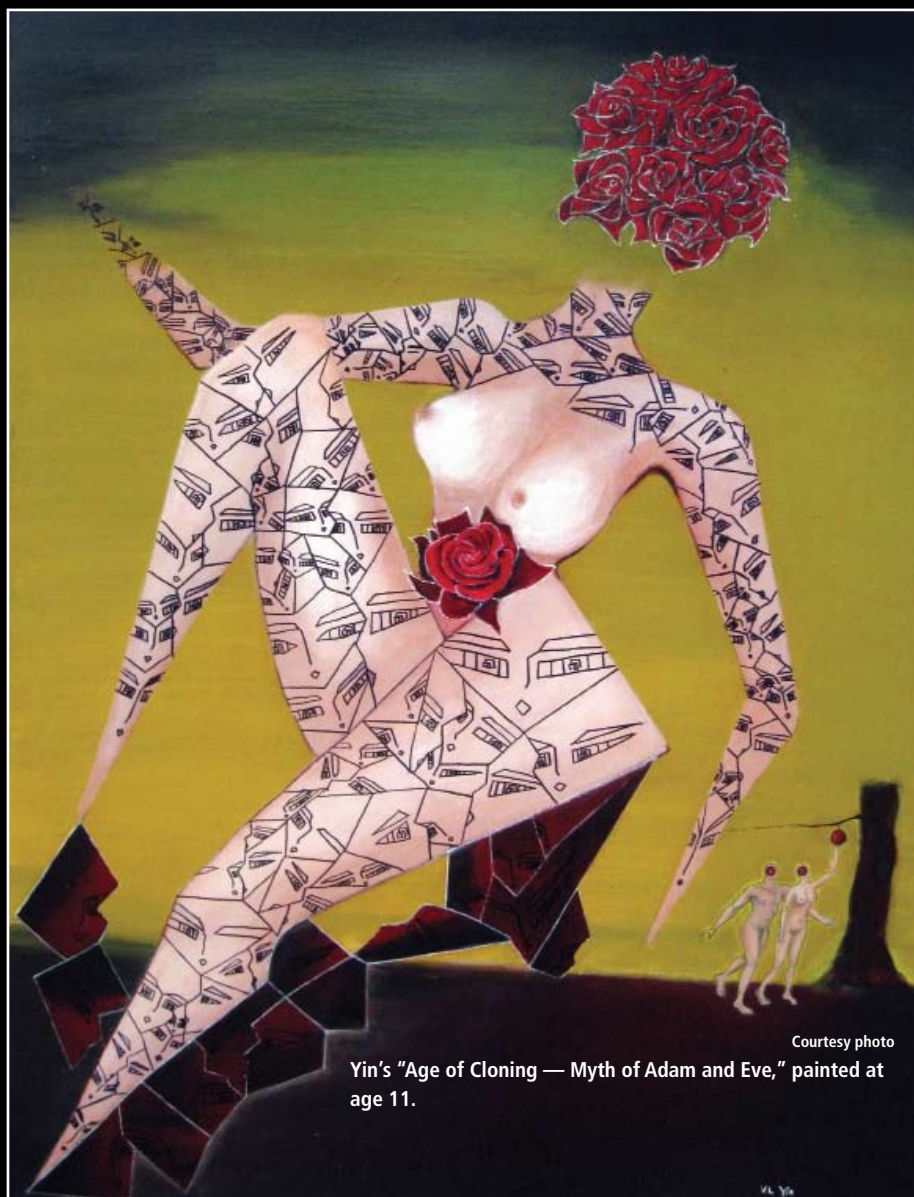
Yin started drawing when she was 1 year old, her parents say.

"From what my Mom tells me, I've always been drawing, even before I could remember," she says laughing while pointing to her mother, a tiny woman with short black hair.

An aura of respect can be felt between mother and daughter.

"My parents support me and let me be when I'm actively painting," Yin says. "We're a team and we've gotten here together. I wouldn't be here without them."

Once she was old enough to be interested in and read books, she began to get artistic inspiration from literature. She loves science fiction, mythology, and Bible stories like the one of Adam and Eve. This love finds its way



Courtesy photo
Yin's "Age of Cloning — Myth of Adam and Eve," painted at age 11.

into her art.

International Art Publishers is known for signing another, well-known child prodigy to the art world: 9-year-old Alexandra Nechita.

Now 24 and known for her mastery of Cubism, Nechita has reached six-figure sales figures for her art.

Yin and Nechita have very different styles, but they do have things in common, Brenes said.

"The only way to compare

Alexandra and Victoria is the age factor," Brenes said. "It's that old soul in a young child. They have this ability to paint what it takes people 70 years to learn."

Victoria's mother says her daughter's life path has been a surprise to her family.

"We never thought that she would become professional," she said in their Argilla Street studio, a genuine look of surprise on her face. "We just encouraged her to draw for fun." ➤

Yin at work in her studio.



Victoria and Zoe Yin's 'studio' house is brown and modest, situated back from Argilla Street.

Outside is a long driveway laden with potholes. A gargoyle guards the door.

In no way does the house scream, "Young artist prodigy works here." But inside, the surroundings tell the story.

Paintings by both Yin sisters line the hallways and stairwells and living room. Paint is spattered all over the hardwood floors. Canvases in varying degrees of completion stand on easels and lean against walls.

Paintings are stacked all over the floor, too.

Some of the art appears to be masterpieces in the making. Others - Mother's Day Cards drawn in marker, little notes that read "do not enter," reveal the two little girls who work here.

Victoria's painting process starts on paper and pen, then moves to the canvas, she says. She paints the background, then sketches out in pencil what she wants to paint on top of the background.

"I don't always have the backgrounds in my mind," she says. "I just stand here and see where it goes."

Her easel is in the center of the room, bright illumination from a spotlight shining on a

piece in progress.

She "normally likes the quiet" when she paints, she says. But on this day, Victoria is chatty. She moves brushes around and mixes colors, explaining that what she is about to undertake is "the tedious part of painting."

She gestures to a canvas with a dark background sporting yellows and reds.

Her color choices for the smaller parts of the painting are based on how the background comes out, she says.

"The background is the most fun, because it has the big brushes and tells the story," she explains. "It sets the mood for the piece." ➤

While she learns every day in school, her basic vision for her paintings hasn't changed.

"But my (painting) skills have improved every year," she says.

That's not because of instruction, however. She took art classes for two weeks and thought the work was tedious.

"There's always some specific guideline and I don't like it," she says. "I thought it was limited for me. I want to go outside the boundaries."

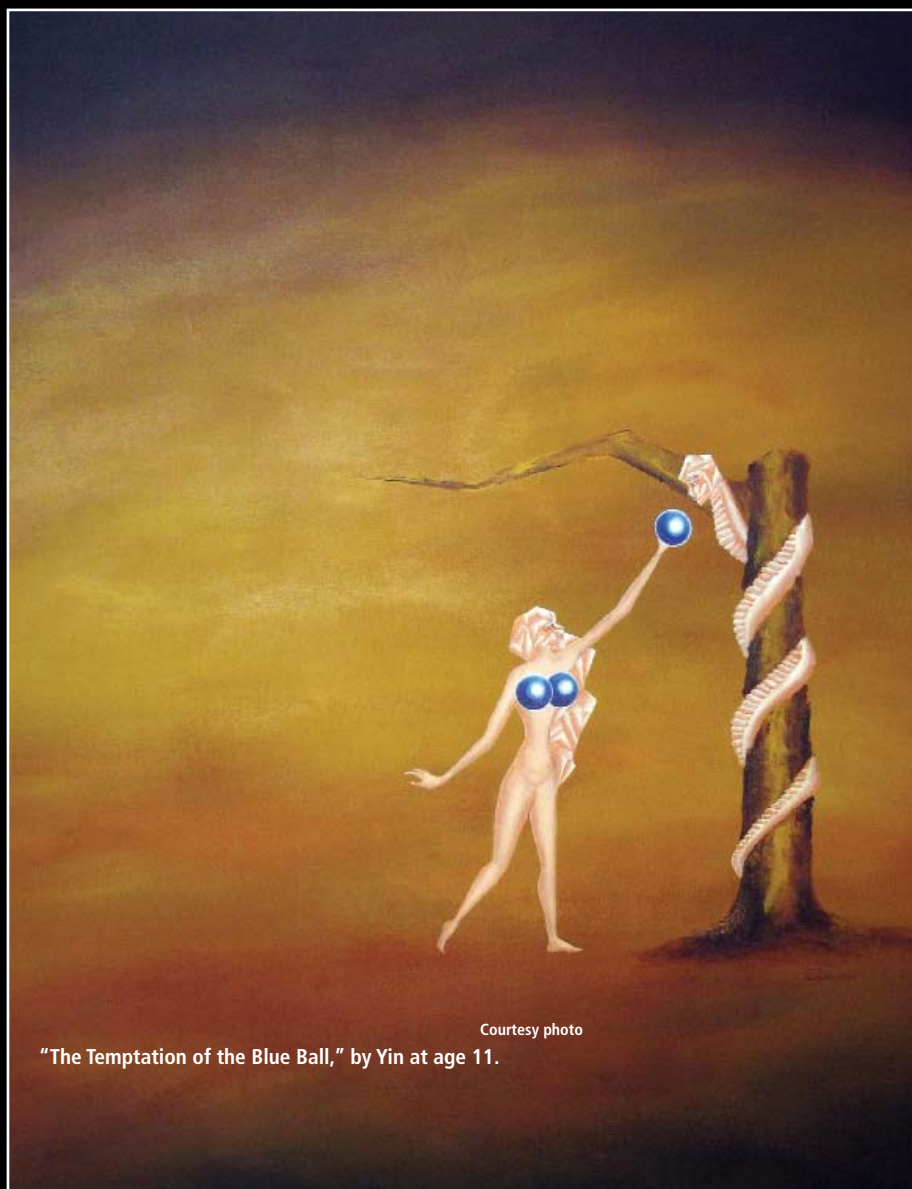
Recognition and praise have not made Victoria Yin boastful. In fact, the girl seems quite grounded.

"I'm not big on attention," she said. "I love that people know my name, but sometimes I don't like the attention."

While her mother recognized Victoria's talent early on, it wasn't until after Yin joined the Andover Artist's Guild and exhibited her work in "Art in the Park" that they began to research ways to expand her audience.

Because she is so young and there were special legal concerns, it ultimately took a year to finalize the contract with International Art Publishers.

"We insist on court-approved contracts for minors to protect them," Brenes said. "So somebody outside of us and the parents can decide if it's fair or not."



Courtesy photo

"The Temptation of the Blue Ball," by Yin at age 11.

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VICTORIA YIN

According to Brenes, Yin's paintings are of interest to fine art connoisseurs.

"In fact one collector already has five of her works," she said.

The publishing house is listing her works for several thousands of dollars.

"There is a lot of time and effort going into these paintings," Brenes said. "This isn't

anything that anybody can pick up and do. There are not that many prodigies in the visual arts and they are hard to come by. Like anything else it's a rarity."

Yet the 12-year-old just calls it "fun."

"Everybody has a special talent," she said. "Most important is that I do my art to express my feelings." ▶



Roger Darrigrand/Staff photo

Yin works on a painting in her studio, a house bought for her and her sister to work in, separate from the family home elsewhere in Andover.

People often ask what Yin was thinking when she was painting a certain piece.

“Everybody has their own point of view when they look at a painting,” she said. “I try not to give too much away when people ask what I was thinking. I prefer to leave it a mystery.”

Her future remains a mystery, too. Because even with the success of her painting, there are other things she would like to pursue.

“I’m into fashion,” she said. “I love clothes and photography. Maybe someday I’ll be producing or directing, but I don’t know.” A



“The Making of Earthly Woman,” by Yin.

Zoe poised for future in art, too

Zoe Yin is 8 years old and has been referred to in some art catalogs as the younger sister of child prodigy Victoria Yin.

Yet, Zoe's artistic talent stands out on its own, even as it emerges from the shadows of her sister's.

"I have seen some of Zoe's work and her growth is incredible," said Charlotte Brenes, 39, of International Art Publishers, the organization that has contracted Victoria Yin's paintings. "It is so different from Victoria's work. They are a very talented family."

Zoe sold her first art piece at age 6 at "Art in the Park" in Andover. More recently, she presented at the International ArtExpo in New York.

"I like to imagine funny people when I paint," Zoe said.

Her work has been compared to that of French painter Henri Matisse and Spanish painter Pablo Picasso.

"I see more Matisse in Zoe's work," Brenes said. "You would think, that living in the same house as Victoria, that Zoe's work would have a similarity in style. But there isn't at all. If she continues to grow like Victoria and Alexandra Nechita, she has career potential." **A**



Roger Darrigrand/Staff photo

Zoe Yin, 8, of Andover poses with some of her paintings in her studio on Argilla Street, that she shares with her older sister Victoria. Here are two examples of Zoe's paintings, which often get compared to Pablo Picasso.

