

My Second Career: an interview with Dr. Anthony P. C. Yim

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Editor's notes

As we age, retirement may come sooner than we think. A clinical doctor who has been spending the past few decades focusing mostly on patient care may find it uncomfortable, apprehensive or ill-prepared as he or she approaches retirement.

With this in mind, it is refreshing to note that Dr. Anthony P. C. Yim, one of the earliest pioneers in VATS, is venturing happily into his second career as an artist after he retired from his surgical practice in 2017. This interview is based on our visit to Dr. Yim's home in May last year (Figure 1), as well as a recent telephone conversation as he is about to launch his first art album entitled *My Second Career* (Figure 2).

Interview & response

AME: Dr. Yim, how did you get to have a second career in art?

Dr. Yim: Actually my first career ambition was to be an artist when I was a teenager. However, my Dad successfully persuaded me to study medicine as it offered a more secure livelihood. I completed my first oil painting in 1978 during my gap year while waiting to be admitted to Cambridge to read medicine. Initially, I wanted to paint alongside my study. However, three years at Cambridge followed by three years of clinical training at Oxford soon proved that idea to be impractical. I went through surgical residencies in the United States and later joined the surgical faculty at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. I have had a highly successful and fulfilling career as a thoracic surgeon. However, my hectic lifestyle left me little time to even think about art, let alone painting itself. It was really after my retirement that I had the chance to pick up painting again, and I managed to catch up quickly.



Figure 1 From left to right: Prof. Anthony P. C. Yim, Stephen D. Wang, Grace S. Li and Esther Yu (Prof. Yim's wife) at Prof. Yim's home.

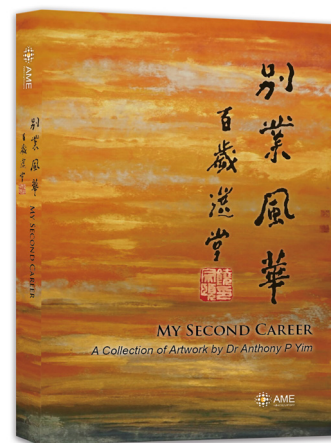


Figure 2 Dr. Yim's first art album titled "*My Second Career: A collection of artwork by Dr. Anthony P Yim*" will be officially published in March 2018.

AME: How do you see yourself as an artist?

Dr. Yim: I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to learn a wide spectrum of techniques including porcelain, watercolour, acrylic, and Chinese ink painting. I need that basic knowledge and skill to judge what medium to use to best express myself under different circumstances on different subjects. My experience in art has been broad, from folding fan painting to commissioned work measuring 3.2 times 2.6 metres.

I considered myself fortunate that I didn't just follow one teacher for an extended period of time. It is not uncommon to see that kind of apprenticeship even nowadays, especially with Chinese ink painting. The downside of that is you would then be a disciple of a certain school and be obliged to follow the footsteps of your Master teacher. To me, this would stifle any creative, innovative expression of oneself that the very art stands for. A true artist has to be honest to his or her inner feelings.

AME: How would you compare a surgeon to an artist, since you have been both?

Dr. Yim: Although these are two seemingly vastly different professions, they do share something in common. Firstly, both strive to pursue perfection. Simply put, a surgeon is practicing art everyday in the operating room. Secondly, although individual surgery usually runs on a protocol, modern surgery, as a whole, puts a lot more emphasis on innovation. The pace of change in medicine is fast accelerating. Our forefathers in surgery focused only on refinement of a technique. However, the introduction of minimally invasive surgery which irreversibly changed the landscape of surgical care, also reminded us that future surgery is going to be increasingly technology-dependent. Innovation is therefore an important and integral part of surgical progress. Suffice to say here, innovation and art are inseparable.

There is also one important aspect of art that can be easily overlooked. We are constantly facing a lot of stress from work, and sometimes, from relationships, and we need to vent our emotion. Painting is a non-verbal means of expressing your deep feeling. Therefore, I would say that while surgery is often a therapy for the patients, art is a potent therapy for the artist.

AME: How do you see yourself moving down the road of an artist?

Dr. Yim: I considered myself extremely fortunate to have a

second career in art, following a very successful career as a surgeon. It would be very difficult to create when you have to depend on your artwork to make a living. Although I am not rich, I am secure enough financially that my artwork does not need to be market driven. That is a big advantage, or even huge luxury that many talented artists would love to have.

From the art perspective, I am very interested in exploring new media on different substrates. For example, I like to use mixed media like Chinese ink and colour mixed in with oil or acrylic paint on silver and gold card paper. I truly believe the latter is underutilized in art. The shiny metallic background colour that simmers through the overlying paint creates a unique, spectacular visual effect that I capture in some of my later paintings.

The technical difficulty of using shiny card paper is how to get the paint to stick onto the shiny surface. To approach that challenge, I tested different combination of media and substrates systematically and scientifically, using the methods I learned and practiced over the years as a surgeon-scientist. That was the moment when I personally experienced science meeting art.

As I mature as an artist, the subject of my paintings moves more and more towards abstract, and away from real life, as the former provides infinite space for creativity, limited only by one's imagination.

I am rediscovering myself everyday through art which is what it is supposed to do. An artist must be truthful to himself or herself. I paint primarily for my own sake—for my health and self-cultivation. If other people happen to like my work, that would be an honor and an extra bonus but that is certainly not something I intentionally seek, or am working for.

*AME: Thank you very much for your sharing your insights and wish to see the launch of the art album!***Written at the end of the interview**

AME is proud to present the first art album *My Second Career* by Dr. Anthony P. C. Yim (*Figure 3*). It contains 227 paintings by Dr. Yim over just 2 years, from February 2016 to March 2018 and consists of 13 porcelain, 30 watercolour, 22 acrylic, and 162 Chinese ink and colour paintings. Collectively, this work provides a unique documentation on how he made the transition from a pioneering surgeon into a dedicated artist based on his talent, hard work and perseverance. The book eloquently speaks for itself and will



Figure 3 During the second visit of AME editor (Grace S. Li) in November 2017, Dr. Yim completed the entire Lotus painting (Chinese colour on black xuan paper) in less than twenty minutes.



Figure 4 Chinese ink and colour on gold card paper (size: 78 cm × 54 cm).

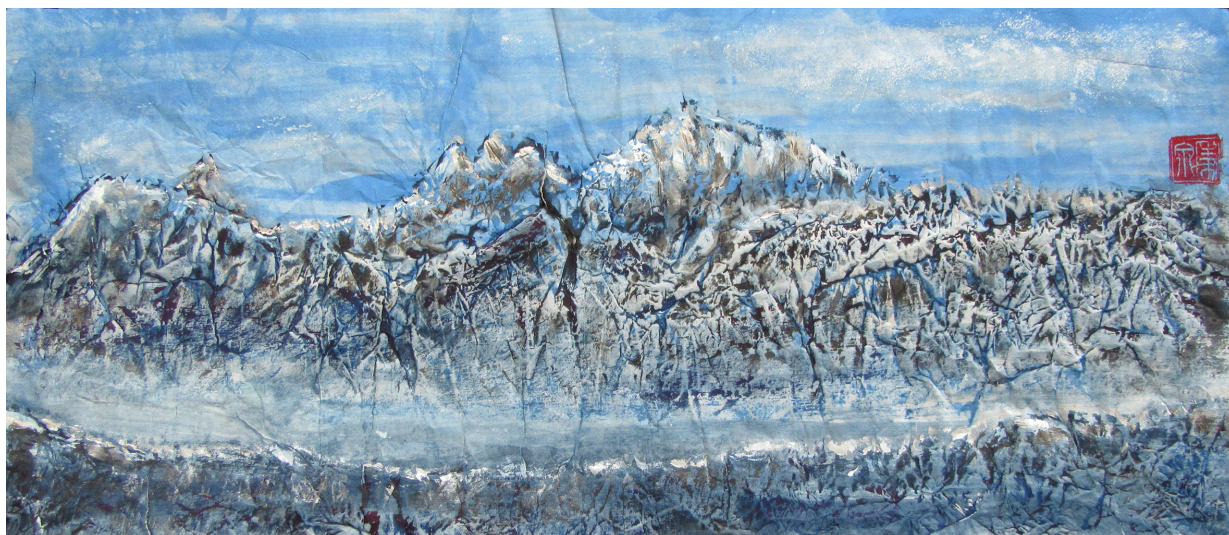


Figure 5 Blue Mountain (size: 76 cm × 33 cm).

provide insight for people approaching retirement looking for a hobby, as well as those who are already interested in art and considering taking it up more professionally.

My Second Career can be ordered online: <http://gallery.amegroups.com/art-book>.

The following are extracts from Dr. Yim's album:

Porcelain painting: <http://gallery.amegroups.com/collections/porcelain>

Watercolor painting: <http://gallery.amegroups.com/collections/watercolor>

Acrylic painting: <http://gallery.amegroups.com/collections/acrylic>

Chinese painting (include chapters 'Lotus and Lilies/Transcending time and space/Chi/Exploring old Masters', exemplified by *Figures 4-8*): <http://gallery.amegroups.com/collections/chinese>



Figure 6 My second career (size: 46 cm × 34 cm).



Figure 7 Chinese ink and colour on gold card paper (size: 54 cm × 39 cm).



Figure 8 Water Lily Pond—night and day (size: 116 cm × 35 cm).

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Footnote

Conflicts of Interest: The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

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