

Concussion unlocks woman's inner artist

CHAO, Angela

By Jason Spencer

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Since concussions are now spoken about more openly, it seems as if we are only just scratching the surface of our understanding of the condition.

Take Mississauga's Angela Chao, whose life dramatically changed when she suffered a concussion about a year ago.

Chao, who has worked as a camera assistant for the past decade on several well-known movies and TV shows, says she was on set when she suffered a head injury.

After going to the hospital, Chao went back to work without realizing the extent of what happened.

"People were telling me to go home and I was saying, 'I'm Angela Chao, I'm supposed to be here today,'" she recalled. "I just kept losing my memory - that's the first week."

Following a newfound sensitivity to light, Chao continued to work because, on the outside, she appeared to be okay.

Meanwhile, she noticed a transformation in her personality.

"With a concussion, you go through depression for no reason."

Six months went by before she realized one day at work that something had to be done, so she decided to speak with an on-set paramedic, who used the words "mental illness."

At first she was offended, but returned an hour later in tears, admitting that she needed help.

Rejecting the initial advice of seeing a psychologist, Chao decided to take matters into her own hands and ask around at work. She said being on a film set offered serendipitous access to a co-worker who was familiar with concussions: the stuntman.

"He suggested that I go to cranial sacral



Mississauga artist Angela Chao's work is on display until Sunday at the Art Square Cafe on 334 Dundas St. W. in Toronto.

therapy, which is a massage therapist who specializes in moving blood flow from your head to your toes," she said, noting that her bump on the head had left her with the feeling of a

"headrush" that wouldn't go away.

Admitting that the practice seemed like "voodoo" at first, Chao was surprised to find her six-month headache finally leave her.

"The weight on my shoulders was gone. When I went home, I was like, 'Something in my life has changed.'"

Following a sudden compulsion, Chao grabbed one of her mother's old plates and began drawing on it with a marker.

"After 45 minutes, it turned out to be this magnificent bird."

Noting that concussion has caused her to have problems focusing, she added: "It was so emotional."

It was this mega-relief that I discovered this type of art in me that came out through this headache, this concussion."

Without any instruction, Chao has created nearly 170 pieces in the past five months.

Until Sept. 21, six of Chao's vibrant and intricately painted ceramics are on display at the Art Square Cafe, on 334 Dundas St. W. across from the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto.

She doesn't follow any particular artist or trend, creating solely from her intuition as a way to re-channel negativity.

"I don't pre-think, it just comes out as how I feel," said Chao, adding that she doesn't even remember the free associative process in which her works were created.

"I've never done two styles - I'm told it's like a hundred different artists, instead of me."

Given the life-altering ride Chao has been on through the past 12 months, she's hoping to "shed light" on her concussion and depression.

And even though she's equally amazed by her recent surge of creativity, the discovery is still bittersweet: "It's interesting and bad at the exact same time. I would give it all back just to feel normal for a day."

Visit mindlessdoodle.ca to view her work.