

Perjury and Genesis

By Yang Jian

Articulate but dirty,
Articulate but calculating,
Articulate but stingy,
Articulate but full,
Articulate but pretentious,
Articulate but ambiguous,
Articulate but violent,
Articulate but occupied,
Articulate but covered,
Articulate but deceased.

The language of gypsies has a fascinating feature – which has been summarized most precisely by Giorgio Agamben as “bandit’s argot”, or generally as “slang”, and as a way of communication that fills dialogue with code words and metaphors, it has been being injected with new dialects, grammars and names as well as new metaphors stemming from local people, anecdotes and so on along the ongoing wandering of gypsies, and becomes an extremely versatile and fast-iterated language that can hardly be intervened in or learnt by outsiders, and that gypsies will systematically lie when aliens approach them makes their language impossible to be researched and planned by linguists as other national languages. Between every two cats there is also a mysterious way of communication, a unique language made by consecutive and tentative mews, and it’s so exclusive that it even can’t be understood by a third, that is, even the same mew made by the same cat may convey totally different meanings to different cat listeners. Although this cannot be verified yet, it does suggest a possibility of communication.

The above two examples are associated by me with the language of the collage-like artworks. And like the attributes of expression indicated by these two examples, the elements in these collage-like works can only be partially interpreted and are very difficult to be concluded as a whole, but a continuum of thought can be perceived from them symbolically and metaphorically, with suspended ideas that can’t be put into words or text, but can only be understood by insight. As if revealing an opportunity that can be grasped, but somehow falling into a region of uncertainty.

By making “Still Life with Chair Caning”, Pablo Picasso blurred the difference between reality and illusion in art. And the concept of “collage”, expanded by Dadaists after the WWI, kept fermenting this language of art in their art waves and brought in the political vocabulary. Richard Hamilton’s “Just What Was It That Makes Today’s Homes So Different, So Appealing?” precisely adopted the convenience of this language, and tested the connections and boundaries between pop culture and art. Chris Ofili, Helen Marten and other creatively energetic artist go on exploring their own kingdoms of art by riding on this charismatic language.

Song Peng’s works, also collage-like, never cater to some inherent and empirical issues, but take personal experience as a foundation to break and reconstruct information, and the artist likes this process of digging a kind of readability out of the broken information, and of trying to get close to the vital he knows but can’t name – because we cannot repeat the past, cannot preset the future, and what we can do is to explore in the dark, looking for the light of individual values.

Perjury

Perjury is a behavior of deliberately using false evidence, statement, identification, record, translation to intentionally hide or cover up the truth, but also a subversive creation.

All things can be divided into right and wrong, true and false, probable or definite. Yet these categories may be false and hypocritical because in some particular time and place, people will fabricate and alter the fact in line with what they want, so as to eliminate all that is “incorrect”. Yet, truth is not something that can be manipulated by man’s words. Song Peng grew up in Qingdao, an “old industrial base” scattered with the factories and industrial landscapes left over by the old times that once believed in “the truth” but ended up with a collapse of planned economy, and this very place has made inerasable imprints of growth in the artist’s personal history. With the past glories and splendors reduced to mere shadows, walking in the shadow, trying to prove in the shadows to prove, state, identify, record, and to translate the past, to create perjury, and to question what was wrong at that time, which probably just resembles the large areas of the shades in Song Peng’s paintings, perhaps never accurate though, can sculpt the shape and gradually reveal it under light.

A large number of image appropriations in Song Peng's works are derived from the historical figures and news events in videos and photos. Like a rebel, the artist often uses nearly black-and-white or monochromatic images to intervene in as a treatment of some historical images with outstanding traits, and such an original image-processing approach renders a sense of distance and security of expression, and meanwhile it blocks or vetoes the original meaning of images. And when applying it to the scenarios, the artist would add some relatively sharp, cracked, stripped hard-edges, covers, smears, scratches, etc., to suggest that all these are "false", and to seek a sensory disorder, and such is also an endeavor to completely break with realistic painting. But even the decomposed and released static slices still maintain in one way or another the eternal stance of quotation itself, somehow we can't take them as the fixed images demanded by form or the appropriation of meanings; instead, we should perhaps interpret them the way Gilles Deleuze put image movement in *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image* as the freeze-frames in a certain wink or in the lost videos, and after being painted on the linen by the artist, these freeze-frames can recover the lost, real meanings, but also the meanings of now.

Song Peng has an architectural background, which frequently offers his images a sense of space, and when the characters, things and objects are put into this space in decent proportion and illuminated by intensified artificial light, the painting feels like a theater. For the artist, he cannot get rid of the charm of political symbolic, historical and heavy elements, and theater, the art form with a strong sense of ritual, also contributes to the weighty theme the artist is persistent in. When entering the painting, such a schema gives a touch of history being re-examined, just like you'd also get totally lost when facing something you knew before after a certain amount of time and then force yourself to observe it again. Alain Badiou said in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* that: All positions are to be re-defended today. No one is innocent, and they may be innocent at this moment, but the next they need self-justification. On the surface theater brings landscapes to you, but actually, it is to blast the position you held fast and were so proud of, and to expose the vested interests you have hid so well so far. This review is undoubtedly subjective, and the painting is like a written record noting down and stating something. History proves that the yield of such an examination is nothing but a perjury, but the artist does not want to falsify history. The political suggestions in his paintings are as inextricable as the impact made by the artist's growth environment. The artist's intention is, by using the certain homology of such pictorial symbols and personal experience, to stimulate the sensitive power within.

Genesis

To create is to invent a form of existence, and to give it meaning. Where there is no meaning, there is no creation.

After graduating from college, Song Peng went back to his hometown Qingdao, started making art alone, and had barely any contact with the so-called art circle in over 10 years which witnessed his persistence in art more as in a wild ecology. As a result, Song Peng's extremely personal reading and information selection ignite his passion towards art-making, and it is not difficult to imagine the emotion stirred by being so isolated from the field he loves inevitably brings the artist irresistible repression and nihilism, since he has to digest all by himself the measurement and losses and gains in his art-making, consequently the libido of ecstasy and rage popping the edges of his canvas, so overwhelming that we can't ignore the flooding sentiments and painful confusion of the artist when we see it. A thought on this clarifies for me why Song Peng cannot compromise on the scale of painting.

In the era of information explosion, the dissemination of images and videos always drives people into openness, frankness, exposure and uncontrollability, and also consumes people's interest in it. Collecting images by computer, the first step of Song Peng's working method is relatively rationally to separate figures, events, objects in an image and to attempt to name them, so as to reach a conscious state where his own knowledge structure and thinking logic can justify themselves, thereby selecting their appearances. Whereas when he moves to step two, i.e. the stage after painting, the rational will embodied in the beginning declines. Equipped with an expressionist painting approach, his painting style now starts to become extremely tight, stacked and overlapping, often with all the passion, sadness and joy and light condensed into a fragmented or blurred image, with a few undistinguished faces, or limbs and trucks cut by images. However, this series of solemnity and tranquility seemingly capable of penetrating time and space tells something totally different: when all breath-holding and mind-concentrating and depression and restraint outbreak at their time, there come never-ending rambles and behavior grotesques. The option of such a bizarre and eternalized approach that is absolutely contrary to the first step naturally confuses people. Perhaps we have found that, defining the world by logical or linear thinking is only an arduous and thankless job of philosophers, Song Peng really does not intend to talk about the perplexing part of his works or the philosophical potentials, nor does he provide any

concept with a specific name. What he is willing to do is to repeatedly depict in compositions and paintings one after another based on his personal situation, so as to move closer to his inner emotional chaos, fluctuations, struggles and depression. However, we can say that Song Peng while painting is with one foot deep in the obscure mud shielded by the shell of rationality, and the other foot undoubtedly feeling out the bottom line of ration. By doing so the artist not only recognizes himself and transforms the open external world, but also creates the personalized time-and-space and painting grammar.

As an artist, Song Peng is lucky in that he grows in a self-contained art-making ecology and yields extraordinarily precious independence and the willfulness and casualness he deserves, and that the seemingly stubborn character is actually a sign of the artist's inner firmness and confidence, and that he also creates an invisible armor in the process of self-digestion of self-production. Song Peng takes perjury to completely bid farewell to a world that appears logical, all self-consistent and gapless. Then in creation, he looks for a working method that is ineffective for life ontology and can reach his own spiritual plight, so as to reconcile with his own entangled feelings.