

Beyond the Boundary

Yi Chen solo exhibition

Blue Roof Museum of Chengdu

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March 26, 2018

Animals are the visual icons easily identified and frequently found in Chen Yi's paintings. Whether portrayed as a singular subject in *Wolf Playing Coins*, *A Captured Bird*, *Small Birds Series*, *Force-Feed a Duck*, *A Shower*, or appeared alternately in *No !* series, they are the primary subjects of "natural ecology". *No !* series specially concerns the twenty types of animals facing extinction. The iconography of animals shifted from a subsidiary position to being the protagonist among her paintings (from the summer of 2014 to the first half of 2017), and this transformation is particularly apparent in *No !* series, where the perception of the image evolves from visible forms to readable subjects. In other words, the interaction between the viewer and the image does not only take place on the level of viewing, but steers the viewer into a mode of reading, or to the action of reading, which proactively generates meaning in itself.

However the increase in the number of animals and the "orderly permutations and combinations" of which that filled the canvas is not to emphasize on the details, narratives, or the background from which these literary features are drawn. Painting is only painting itself. It begins with an iconography, then returns to a narrative logic and methodology of representation itself, it faces the viewer without voicing any self-explanation. While what it is worth deciphering

is often hidden behind the canvas, one that we cannot see through at first glance. Like a writer should fade behind one's work, the "taxonomy of meaning" in a work of art likewise, shouldn't interrupt our perception. In this process, the image is only a concrete silhouette, the original projection of the first viewing of the work, while the image represents an integral effect of the scope of its visual information as it relies on an overall explanation and integrated expression under the mode of reading.

Since the relationship between the work of art and the animals portrayed is not simply a repository or representation of factual information, then the legitimacy of the work must be validated between the image as an icon and the image as a mirror in order to discover a new threshold – one that's put together from various disparate elements. Whereby, we would visually decipher the artist's conception of the world at large, in "considering pictorial representation of a multi-dimensional or fields consist of heterogeneous components, a collage of abstraction, or an old quilt sewn together from pieces of rags." **【1】** Based on this notion, *Crawling* and *Delivery* are two works worthy of our discussion and analysis. These two mixed media works have certain abstract qualities, elements of collage and the aesthetic tastes of materialism. These works are proficient in their language of painting, for example their distinct and rich colors, full space of painting and hard edge silhouette approach is used to execute the main subject. From all corners of the painting to the center of the canvas are given equal emphasis, to the extent of being "painstakingly well-rounded". While the internal structure of these two works are disconnected, or even seems fragmented. Isn't the artist's adaptation of juxtaposing complex visual elements a way of enquiring our ever-changing of life experiences? Those abstract concentric rings in vibrant tones, the three crawlers at the center of the image moving towards the left, and the consumer icons collaged around the edges that demonstrate materialist aesthetics: race-cars, yachts, mansions, VISA Face ID, cellphones, watches, champagnes, cakes, ice-cream, fashionable clothing, jewelries, diamonds, lip-sticks, perfumes, stilettos... The objects in the former category are masculine, or at least neutral symbols of wealth of the material world; whereas the latter are typically feminine. Given these ubiquitous and appealing objects, we can't help but to ask whether it was materialism that delivered our aesthetics or our desires for things catalyzed the formation of consumer society?

If we were to use three keywords such as expressionism, abstraction, *Xieyi* (a form of traditional Chinese painting) free hand style – the existing artistic styles – to categorize or define the work of the artist, then it would be a rather difficult task. In addition, the narrative structure of the exhibition does not necessarily attempts to reconstruct the logic behind the various styles of artworks, so they would be connected and become indisputable. Instead, we use a thread - the pursuit of creativity and a drive to transcend it - to connect the works in this exhibition. Since the summer of 2014, the styles in Chen Yi's art practice have undergone various changes, while the logic among different series may seem passive, in other words, a way of connecting the artist's spirit of exploration, her concern for nature, the environment and humanism - these most humble and essential sentimental necessities of all human beings have been present throughout the course of her art practice from the recent years. They appeared alternately, occurred freely and are expressed in a natural way like a baby itself. *Wolf Playing Coins* is a playful and mesmerizing work, in which, the wolf symbolizes nature and wilderness, whereas the coin is a quantifiable object that has been standardized by people, or used to regulate humanity. In the painting, the gaze of the wolf meets that of the viewer at a same level, so their staring into each other's eyes would carry beyond the canvas. While the coins the wolf plays seen from our "bird-eye" perspective, seems within our reach, yet their respective unruliness seems nevertheless uncontrollable. Plane-level and bird-eye perspective, unruliness and regulated qualities, the artist have adopted these approaches by juxtaposing two formerly unrelated icons and allowed their symbolic meanings to permeate into each other.

This reminds me of the British artist David Hockney, German artist Martin Kippenberger, French artist Francis Picabia. These masters are the indisputable representative examples in the history of art for their varied styles and prolific creativity. Their works embody the spirit of variety of stylistic transformations unconstrained by formalism. The transformation is the only truth in art, and the cultural value of the existence of the artist in the whole social communities .

This exhibition presents a paths of thoughts and transformations of Chen Yi's artistic practice from 2014 to the present. It would not be useful to define this type of artist with any rigid affinities of either aesthetic tastes or styles. Whether it is the medium or technique, styles or genres, the language of painting or unique materials used, for the artist, the painting is a narrow path through which only one person can traverse, the space of its possibilities exists only in neighboring fields or the edge of its boundaries.