

The Play Note

Wang Mian's series of works that are generated from *Journey To The West* should not be viewed as a narration. Instead, the famous fantasy novel is used as a justification for the sarcastic and absurd drama that Wang has directed with the combination of reality and imagination.

Game and Religion

After the 80s, China has been formed by the generation of only child.

September 1980, the third meeting of the Fifth Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference decided to limit the Chinese population in the end of the 20th Century to 1.2 billion. And, the public letter on the issue of increasing population from the central government to the entire communist party declared the start of implementation of China's One Child Policy.

Wang Mian was born in this year.

"I was raised by my parents. When they were busy, I would stay quietly at our place that was no more than 24 square meters. For someone imaginative, it was spacious enough..." Childhood memory of Wang Mian's generation often lingers around the loneliness of time when parents and grandparents watched over devotedly. The popularization of varieties of cartoon toys, TV programs, and video games makes the images from the public media the visual and mental mark in their mind. Additionally, through participation, one may take a break away from the loneliness. Therefore, games that evolve around a virtual world become the favorite recreation of this generation and a characteristic of artists of this generation. In other words, "images" or "cartoon" are just a visual sampling and description. The innate playful outlook is their special quality even though this quality may have been a product of the compelled social intervention.

Playfulness is part of the human nature. In the dull days of adulthood, it often happens to be the "time machine" that connects reality with childhood fantasy. If one can view life with a distance, then he may realize that after all, life is just a game. Therefore, those who live life with playfulness get hold of the most important persistence in life. It is hard to imagine how dreary, blend, and serious art would be with out the playful elements. This kind of playfulness surpasses the endeavor for vanity and sets the new generation of artists apart.

Looking at the subject matter only, one may think that Wang Mian's works are just a bunch of cartoon characters and toys. Made with skillful techniques and precision, these works clone the classic setting of *Journey To The West*, combine the outlandish scientific fantasy, and make an undetectable connection with our childhood hero. In the piece "Surfing", the Monkey King, blind with one eye, sets off from the stormy waves with no turning back as the undulating waves make one startle. It is the moment when there is absolutely no doubt about the goal and the future; a belief or strength gives these "toys" life and spirit. They seem to have existed

somewhere, and as our flashing memory or daydream, they have always been there with us.

In Wang Mian's world, being overly concentrated makes him lose the ability to distinguish reality and imagination. "Sometimes I feel as if he was right outside my window hiding behind the cloud despite how little sky I could see from my small window." Perhaps, art is the only mean for Wang to sort out his daydreams and to regain the grasp of reality. After he graduated in 2005, Wang Mian has been following his dreams persistently and arduously. Nevertheless, optimism and magnanimity do not always serve as the solution for the uncertainty and the confusion along the way. The process of work making is always very slow...A suffocating impasse is exacerbated by the endless production and the repeated contemplation... he watches his colleagues pass him by one after another with the halo of success...Other than sleeping and eating, ha has spent all his time at work...Yet, what is ahead of him is still indefinite. As a reflection, in the "*Five Elements Mountain (WHITE)*", fluffy popcorns strain the grand power of the seventy-two methods of transformation. Here, the expectation from the "Eminence" is still up in the air, and the idea of "rescue" and "advancement" make him out of control. Therefore, he decides to rescue himself from the hope of waiting, pack his luggage, and get on to the road toward the grand finale.

I believe this is a respect to one's principle, a devout and persistent belief in art as the way of life. – "the outcome is always uncontrollable, but the process of making the work is still pleasant." – It has almost turned into a religion, as long as we do not regard it unattainable.

Substance Recycle

The temptation and the compulsion to make art are not always entirely for the creation but for the recollection of a memory or the completion of a promise.

Man comes with history; we extend and expand through cultural and inter-personal exchanges. Everyone is an individual in the history. As we inherit the culture, we carry the weight of our life experience at the same time. What we feel right at this moment cannot be separated from another specific experience in life. The thoughts and the experience of an artist have an inseparable connection. And, the fascination of art is how it can always unexpectedly manifest the collision, integration, confusion and contradiction of the artist's personal experience with the History and the Culture.

A Classic story is never merely the words on paper. It contains the narrator's inflammatory details and listeners' unilateral willingness. Everyone has his or her way of remembering and re-interpreting a story. When it is told repeatedly, memories and reality are always intermingled and inseparable. It combines with and brings out the details and the attractions of the current reality. Through all kinds of personal narration, our traditional culture becomes more abundant.

To Wang Mian, "the piece of cloud where the Monkey King hides...mixed in the fault of time", always exists hauntingly.

“Pwnage!!!” is one piece of work with this kind of recollection. As a widely-known classic, “Three Battles Against Succubus of White Bones” is interpreted without the complicated human relationships because of the simple good versus evil structure. As a matter of fact, there is nothing wrong with Succubus of White Bones; as a Succubus, eating human beings is her nature, let alone an immortal flesh! As a Buddhist monk being seduced by feminine charm, Tripitaka should be questioned for his Buddhist practice. What is worse, he has no faith in his first disciple! In this piece of work, the battle on the mushroom-liked cloud is very different from the story. Tripitaka has been shrunk into a trivial onlooker; the Monkey King is still as powerful as an unconquerable warrior, but in front of the sexy Succubus of White Bones, the direction he carries his Golden Banded Staff seems confusing...all the childhood memories and the forgotten pieces of reality now come back to life, reconstructed and transformed—this is no longer the simple a story of good versus evil.

There are a kind of artists who are have no ambition is succeeding. To them, to be engaged in art is a way to relieve their abundant imagination. It is a spiritual need –and we eventually get the best use of this so called “useless” action.

“I like recycled goods not only because their prices are good. If you have enough expertise, then you may find something that worth more than a brand new one. What is more important is the adventure it has recorded. As I think about it, I realize that many artists like to ponder around the past and the present through the history of human civilization. With pieces of information and inspiration they pick up from different era, they are reminiscent, reflective, and hopeful for tomorrow. I think the true value of art should come with the insight from discovery and the considering mind set”

This is the art that I would rather believe in.

Cold Weapons

In Wang’s works, he always likes to bring the characters that possess high-tech products back to the age of cold weapons.

“I have always liked cold weapons. They consist of a primitive power.”—When we disregard their functions and look at their formal qualities, we find them even more primitive, direct, cold, and sharp. Their shapes may be elegant or absurd. A piece of good weapon is as enchanting as a piece of art.

This reminds me of certain quality and practice of sculpture making.

Sculpture is the earliest form of art which started off with stone and bronze. Traditional sculptures have passed their peaks. At first, the material and the execution make the foundation of this form of art. Today, in the fast food age, sculptures have the advantages in the

materialization of the value of art and the succession of spiritual extension. Being attacked by installations and 2-D drawings from both sides, sculptures represent the “cold weapons” in contemporary art: they are a bit dull, clumsy, aged, indecisive, and hesitant.

Because of its volume, a sculpture unquestionably presents in the form of an object. It is a primitive and powerful method that fights with the virtual and numeric world. Similar to the charm of cold weapon, the charm in language of traditional art is irreplaceable.

Wang Mian’s works give “cold weapon” a special interpretation. Legend and Myth that involve pilgrimage, Heavenly Palace, and devil are supposed to exist in people’s imagination. Yet, people have always wanted to capture and freeze these images for the same reason why people always hope to turn their own images in to an everlasting rock. Paintings and drawing certainly can illustrate these fantastic stories vividly. Yet, the 2-dimensional works suggest a restraint to the flat surface. On the other hand, the three dimensional works display the story from every perspective and allow us to scrutinize our own imagination. It is an irresistible sensation! The details produced by the artist’s skillful techniques push one’s comprehension to another level. The works give the audience the delusion to consider fantasy as reality. For instance, in “Surfing”, the materialization of the waves takes it from two dimensions in to an objective existence in an effect as magical as if a spirit revives in a new body. All of a sudden, the Ukiyoe image has a new look; tradition has awakened!

Works by many young Chinese Contemporary artists, affected by the artists’ background, incorporate cartoon and animation like qualities. Finding a personal style in the “Cartoon Art” has become the most recent challenge for every young artists. In addition, no matter how intense the cartooning deviation is taking place in China, in Japan, Yoshitomo Nara and Takashi Murakami’s “Superflat” has already blown up a storm in the world. Thus, everyone has to face the question of how one’s own aesthetic language is established. In Wang’s “Celestial Counter Attack”, that critical bite of Hsiao-Tien Dog, just like the Monkey King’s unavoidable defeat, is inescapable! As we can see, with Wang’s out of ordinary affection and skill, his works have broached surprising perspectives and approach.

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