

## **Rational Consciousness: Tang Mingwei's Paintings**

The creation of contemporary art is viewed to be neither inseparable from the guidance of rationality and irrationality like a sort of centripetal force of spirit, nor the consciousness and intuition like an instinct for life. It is said that contemporary art is merely a simple and rough way of emotional catharsis and it just shows rationality. In view of this, they only look at the superficial side of it, on the contrary, contemporary art is by no means a binary opposition of sense and sensibility, beneath it there is a series of elements including the knowledge structure, comprehensive qualification, social observation and theoretical system of the artists involved. This allows the group of artists with spiritual powerfulness to accurately hit a sensitive nerve of the society in time, truthfully conveying their true feelings and attentively focusing on the lifeblood of the times.

The Sichuan-born young artist Tang Mingwei has recently gained wide recognition in art for years, and his “rational consciousness” artistic feature and unique language of his creative painting have helped generate an innovative way of thinking to the narrative of contemporary art which is at present increasingly characterized by a sociological significance. The artist Tang Mingwei is by no means concerned with the currently trending schema in art and he doesn't slavishly follow the orientation of art market, in fact, he always stays true to himself, insisting on his “rational consciousness” throughout and attempting to come up with a transcendental, almost ever-lasting and essential way of expression with geometric order. This enables Tang Mingwei to view the world from a rationalistic perspective of art, and the geometric abstraction of form together with the emotional sensibility make Tang Mingwei's world of art refreshingly innovative. As the critic Gao Minglu said, reflection is a visual expression of the mainstream demand of rational painting. This kind of reflection falls into two aspects, namely, one is to observe the society and people, another is to reflect and research those metaphysical issues including moral values of cultural tradition and its constraints as well as cosmic view. In the process of reflecting, it starts from the “material” to the “way”, from experience to deduction, from sensibility to sense. Tang Mingwei's “rational consciousness” is rooted in the ultimate code of life, starting from the irrationality at the very beginning to a highly conscious rationality, and possibly may express irrationality by means of rationality at last.

Tang Mingwei was born in a rather artistic family, his father is a folk artisan who gains a certain recognition in town. Under the influence of his father's hammering scene since he was very young, Tang Mingwei grew up with an unconscious sensibility of art. When Tang Mingwei was in second grade at primary school, a volunteer tutorial of art came to the village, the teacher used to tell stories about Leonardo Da Vinci, this largely gave rise to Tang Mingwei's keen interest in art. From then on, Tang Mingwei started to copy the illustrations from his textbook of language and literature. As the tutor spotted his potential as an artist, he began to guide him intentionally. When Tang Mingwei started to systematically study art as a profession, he found that his art teacher was just his abecedarian namely the volunteer tutor. Owing to this, Tang Mingwei felt destined to start his life-long career as an artist. The volunteer teacher contended that as a junior high school student Tang Mingwei had exceeded the senior students in terms of painting. To a student, it was somewhat an encouragement in disguise. Undoubtedly, such an encouragement was rather a good stimulus to Tang Mingwei. Apart from insisting on painting, Tang Mingwei also did good job in compulsory subjects, especially geometry of mathematics, a subject that Tang Mingwei nearly taught himself. With such a pride, Tang Mingwei was admitted to Sichuan Fine Arts Institute as expected in 2004.

It's the freshman's year at university, Tang Mingwei established his own creative style and way of “geometric abstraction” as the motif. Besides, Tang Mingwei had tried performance art, landscape painting, photography and realistic painting and so on. After practicing various ways of art, Tang Mingwei realized that it was none of his intention or the “ultimate belief”. Thus, the “geometric abstraction” that the artist Tang Mingwei grew up with was finalized as the focus of his art creation. As Tang Mingwei recalls, during that time even his landscape painting was filled with geometric blocks. This reveals that geometric abstract painting is an essential part of his life. Meanwhile, it showcases his personal survival status. For Tang Mingwei, the geometric abstraction is not the mechanically constructed point and line in the two-dimensional space, it is to rationally capture every moment of life experience like movie making. Only such a rational and conscious way of thinking enables Tang Mingwei to come up with a sense of natural inspiration. In other words, in the geometric context, he presents the geometry in a most original way of aesthetics from a visual perspective; exempting from the functionality, it is significant to bring in a new kind of possibility.

In the process of studying and practicing art, Tang Mingwei is acutely aware of the importance of art theory. If the various ways of

art practice make him put forward the “geometric abstraction” as the logic basis of his art creation, then we could say that the discussion and communication with the critics including Wang Xiaojian, Wang Lin and Gao Minglu enable him to better and further understand art as well as the “geometric abstraction”, during that time, those critics were active at the Huangjueping school of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute. In other words, Tang Mingwei deeply understands significance of the theory of art system; based on art itself, he reaches a new level to a new rational painting or a theoretical foundation of semiotics and logics. For his part, he attaches equal importance to cultural factor, rational analysis, ability of thinking as well the completeness of creative system. In this way, Tang Mingwei has cultivated a habit of recording his thoughts whenever and wherever possible.

When making the early works, Tang Mingwei showcased the most original and fundamental status of “geometric abstraction”; by constructing a number of stable triangles and circles, he applied a way of combining the main body of the painting and hidden shade, in this way, his painting presented a kind of quasi symmetry in a visual sense. Based on this, Tang Mingwei recently tries to introduce a new schema in his art practice, to be specific, he adds a series of identifiable linear elements in painting and also embeds some frameworks, trying to free from man-made changes; further, it is a kind of extension of geometry, allowing the mechanical elements to be expressed emotionally. At the same time, by preventing from making artwork like designing and avoiding the destructive things, the artist doesn’t deliberately pursue the quasi symmetry of visual effect any more. This allows the artistic instinct and emotion to spread in his paintings, adding a slice of emotionality to the rationally conscious thinking and thereby leading to a different pattern. That is to say, by means of a rather complicated layout, Tang Mingwei makes the psychological space and spiritual dimension to a higher level.

In recent years, the contemporary art has witnessed a rather diverse way of growth, the critical and avant-garde features and other elements symbolizing sociology have been deliberately weakened. More and more artists have been concerned with the logics and value orientation of contemporary art in the current context. Tang Mingwei’s art practice turns out to be a good exemplar for us to research on the turn and shift of logics and value of contemporary art. Generally, discussion on abstract painting usually starts from Jackson Pollock’s emotional catharsis and Piet Cornelies Mondrian’s absolute rationalism, for instance, Hou Hanru proposed the “mid ground” theory of art in early 2000s, pointing out the positioning of Chinese contemporary art in global context. Tang Mingwei’s abstract painting, in fact, lies in such a “mid ground” too, it is neither an attempt of sociological approach that is confrontational, nor a narcissistic style. Based on an embedding way of rational consciousness and intuition of art, the artist simply hides his personal emotions behind the seemingly mechanical geometric patterns, closely relating to the evolution of Chinese contemporary art.

By Qi Tingjie