

I've known Chen Yufan for over seven years since graduated. When the first time I saw his work, I was doing some research about the style of Chinese traditional landscape, then I found his work was pretty "traditional". His work was silent, a real silent, with a few white color as traces of smoke created some unstable elements hiding inside; compare to others, his work cached more spirits as a real landscape. Couple years later, somehow I realized that "tradition" could never be the same down the ages, they could be changed anytime by people, then I no longer seeking "traditional" anymore. Saying a work are "traditional", is just like simply saying a meal is "tasted-good", and how good about isn't clear at all. For years, his works changed fast but I wasn't get chance to take a closer view, until this time I visited his studio.

The day when I walked into his studio, a work called "Uncertain Landscape" right in my sight. I admit I lost my voice, I couldn't find a single word to describe it. Like its name, the work is really an uncertain, indescribable scene or landscape. If a picture made by illusion, system error, or any other trick, then we could just look in closely to see in particular; or perhaps if it has a metaphor then even easier — easier to get bored. But for this one, is just like an outcome repeatedly "messed up" by artist between canvas and woods. Color, mold, abstraction factor, nothing is relevant; it seems has many features of contemporary art, meanwhile has none of them. If we forced to give it a description, it might poetically but nothing different just as a copy of an art review by Greenberg. The work is neither much "talented", nor "graceful", least not much than his previous works on paper. But it's thoughtful to describing. I spent a lot of time, then finally have a word for it — "disharmony". A piece of wood at middle with two canvases on side is "disharmony". Because of it, they become themselves as independence, not spare parts of a work.

The work "Derivative" has the similar logic. It made up by wooden pieces; try to "acting" a scene that a canvas been dragged out by twisted frame. But the harder these pieces try to imitate as canvas, then the farther they lose on track, they will never look similar as a canvas but a wooden complex. These woods are resisting being a canvas, by showing their obedience. The work "House Plant" could be a little complicated, it first "acting" as a normal house plant; but in meantime, the word "House Plant" is not a single concept, and it can be enlarge by different way of viewing. For example, a building, could be viewing as a house plant of a city. By this point, who can deny the work isn't a real "house plant"? Even though it clearly not.

The work "Into One" clears out the same point from these works: In the world of Chen Yufan, everything is just an emblem of another, no matter what they were. For example, the wood in "Uncertain Landscape" isn't just a wood itself but presenting every wood along with canvas, same view as the canvas in reverse. In "Derivative", each wood piece isn't acting a particular piece of canvas; they are presenting all of the woods, and contact with all of the canvas. In "House Plant", that house plant is the contact between artist and every "house plant". Wood, canvas, paint, plant, even a pencil trace on

paper, are no more as spares to serve any single art work, they are presenting the whole object each they belong to. So what are these objects blending, contacting and clashing for? It reminds me a line from Sarah Kane's play: "Don't call me. Don't bother me. Don't ask me. Don't touch me. Don't leave me."

His tearoom is well decorated; I could see he spent much works on his own designed wooden wall, tatami, and teapoy — well I'm sure he been "crazed" on woods. Although is a well-cared space, the lease on it only has 3 years to run. Yufan said: "I have to always keep myself in comfortable, duration is never a matter." To be respect on each single moment, on each corner of own space; these are luxury we could rarely have in life even though are momentary; but they are necessary — if you still respect to your spiritual life. I currently have wrote some articles about "object", which Yufan said he found interesting in it; we both started from "traditional", walked alone, went all round of a circle, then finally meet together again, at the point of "object".

For "object", this might needs some time to explain. It's not an unreliable concept. "Object" can be any specific thing, even a matter, a thought, or a question. In ancient China, people defined "object" as things or issues could investigate or research; such as "object" in anatomy is human body, in botany is plant, in physics is structure and movement of material... same logic can fits in humanity as well: "object" in sociology is social development and property; in history is the connection of momentous events... These objects have respective ways and purposes to investigate. However, there is a big system hiding in their back in order to define their ways and purposes, the system called philosophy.

The philosophies which guided in "object" isn't strange to us, they are "materialism" and "idealism". As been confirmed, sciences are all materialism since the basis of science is to prove object through observation. In ancient China, Zhu Xi as materialism pointed that all the truth are hiding inside different "objects" — thus in order to reach truth, we should get involved in relevant topic to research. In opposite, Lu Jiuyuan thought truth is belongs to "heart", all the purpose of research is in order to mirror human's mind and spirit, which is clearly idealism. Therefore, for Zhu Xi's position, we need to investigate as much "object" as we can to reach truth; and for Lu Jiuyuan, we need just a partial, because "object" is only a part of factor in order to vector us to reflect our spirit.

Definitely, Zhu Xi was more close to the concept we currently hold in science. However the idealism of Lu Jiuyuan has a great glamour in contemporary art. It doesn't rejecting science, but the majority is always about heart and spirit; "Japanese craftsmanship" is a good example based on such concept. As Zhu Xi, man has to collecting knowledge as much as he can to reach truth; as Lu Jiuyuan, even an unschooled chef can still be able to get closer to truth if he expert in cake baking. Last not least, after

few centuries both two groups were united, the word “object” also changed to things that “based on truth” instead of “taken for truth”. Truth essentially exists in heart, investigation isn’t necessary needs to reach it, “object” is just keep making correction of your mind and ongoing forever. Actually, this further version of concept was still based on idealism of Lu Jiuyuan; but I think I’m going too far, let’s back to Chen Yufan.

In brief, Chen Yufan’s “object” is clearly the idealism one. As works by most artists, they all choose foreign object as base media. The different is, first he will take every single object to becomes the representation of its class; such as woods represent its natural class, canvases can represent every human-made canvases, paints represent just paints in physically — not their primary colors. That is, instead of being a part of the work, each object becomes independent with own properties. Then, the purpose of the process between artist and each independent object is not for creating an external result; what we need to care is the process which reflecting the connection between “heart” and “object”.

So why those woods, canvas and glassy pieces can connect with “object” anyway? Chen Yufan said the selection was just a coincidence. Simply speaking, they were just the things appeared most times during his common live — because of that, they knew each other deeply, deeply that could see each’s spirit and emotion. The starting point of his works is not from “contemporary art”, is “common”; it seems subtle but we should admit that all good artists have to find their own way to jump out from the box of “contemporary art”.

After tea time, I looked around of some works he was still working on, like “Underworld”. The work used huge amount of small wood pieces separately placed in each grid with square cells, each wooden pieces were singly designed, somehow they seems relevant — maybe because of his way of carving, but they got some kind of inner. It was hard to explain, but I could see a scene which is after many years when he becomes elder, back to his “Mulan River”, telling children around with his stories of youth. He shall become an old-fogey, getting easier to make argument and showing his popping eyes, but he will also become a fount of wisdom and curiosity; just like a great pirate back home from an adventure, can’t say for sure if he will soon return to the “underworld”.

But now he still young. Every experience he is facing, usually carrying with worry and unstable, and yet couldn’t easily transfer to story tales, like the work “Throw it to the sky”. The theme is based on the fragmental memories of homeland. If you have seen his past series “Mulan River” about the feeling of homeland, moving and vagabond life, you may find the similar romantic and sadness. In Chinese history of wars, many invaders had been defeated by used of songs from their hometown. The

invaders were initially discarded their old lands and lives while they attacking others, but while they heard the songs, all of the memories and emotions drew back in their mind, and finally they understood what's the real meaning of home. The sky in "Throw it to the sky" is fragmented, under the sky there's no way back to home neither we won't, but home is always an attractive place.

Past of years, the theme of Chen Yufan's works always based on his "Mulan River" — the project he collaborated with brother Chen Yujun. "Mulan River" is the place that two brothers had in their past, it's a poetic, abstractive and origin point, with no way return, and no way jump over. Every people needs to find a support, a terminal or a safe haven while they standing on reality. The topic of this exhibition "Ideal Places" is such the place we are looking for. It's not far, not away from you, nor in the future; is it in the present with peace and silent. Yufan now began no more to praise his hometown; he is aiming the place, which every people's soul belongs to.

The "Ideal Places" is inside the "object" he had chosen. Those things are unreasoned, unharmed but chaperoning all the time. They are reflecting and storing Yufan's heart. As a rover, brings everything together in a pack. To comparing this as a haven, might seem over the track, or a little bit compelled. A profound concept is just a way of showing natural emotion in this logical world. So does everybody found their haven already? Is there really a place that can save our emotion, aesthetic, daily, or even our life? Nobody knows, but when people are getting bored of seeking answers; at least, I can still find a rarely peaceful from Chen Yufan's works.