

Innocent and wise painter

Li Zhi

It was 2006 when I met Sheng Tianhong at the first time. Unknowingly, it passed eight years. Eight years, for politicians, can do many things. Mr. A can lead the millions of people to withstand the armored fighting vehicles from the powerful neighbor; Mr. B can show great fortitude under humiliating circumstances and accumulate the power to win the world. But for an artist under exploring, eight years is just two thousand days of meditation and consideration.

In these eight years, we work in own place separately. I sometimes travel for photography, sometimes paint; Tianhong sometimes has short trip to Germany, sometimes paint in his studio. The days indulging in art were quiet lonely but full of fun, monotonous but colorful. When we have time after finish painting or trip, we always get together; have a dinner or a cup of coffee; talk about our recent troubles and experiences. So in all, Tianhong and I are much closed both in geographic and spiritual distance in these eight years. Maybe that's why Tianhong invites me to write this essay for his second solo exhibition after he returns to China.

I had carefully observed Tianhong's first solo exhibition. That was a centralized display of his works after he was back to country. In that exhibition, I really like one work which describes the installation in forest, crystal clear. That exhibition fully expressed his nature, innocence, bright colors, sensibility, funny detail in his daily life, youth, and the beautiful imagination to girls... Tianhong just returned from Germany, and have his first independent art studio. He showed his great mood which was nourished in German art school for many years onto his canvas.

And a few years passed, the artist's painting and creative environment has been changed obviously. The real estate industry develops into the village where the artists gather. The gray color of north china, the smell of burning rubbish in suburb, the building site out of window, the occasionally thieves, and the rumors in internet are slowly infiltrated into artist's life. The former studio torn down, he moved into new studio. The buildings which are surrounding new studio torn down again and the new studio becomes the only building nearby. And Tianhong paint, read and live in this solitary building. He re-sorts the western modern art history, further temper his own artistic language, and also think more about the people and events in modern history of China. Both theme and language of his art are changed.

Each artist has their own art history. Tianhong is the scholar-type painter who maintains childishness, innocent and wise painter. Picasso has become the most important reference when he sorts his own art history. Maybe because Picasso's multiple exploration brought more hints to modern art. Or because Sheng Tianhong has some similarities with Picasso's energetic creativity, purified elegant free art language. Anyway, the artist must have his own reason. He re-sorted those masters who were contributed to Western modern art history in recent years under the reference of Picasso. This kind of exploration and thinking not only affect his art language, but also the creative theme. His new paintings pay more attention on the images in western modern art history and Chinese modern history. Recent years, when I walk across the building site and go into his studio, besides the flower fragrance, I also attracted by the dozens of small paintings on the wall. They are rich in content: portrait, scenery, event, memory, etc. Most of the theme based on the characters of Western modern art history or the current affairs in newspapers all over the world. It is seemingly easy to get, but need perspicacity sight. He always compares himself to the one who practice oil painting as engraving with much effort: Paul Cézanne was facing to the landscape of Nicolas Poussin in those years, and now Tianhong paints Cézanne facing the photos.

Maybe because of the similar nature, Tianhong's early works always made people remind Mr. Guan Liang. The free unrestrained brush work, innocence, full of talent and temperament. We can find these in his first solo exhibition, with the talent of brushwork and coloring. But his new paintings focus more on shape, showing out his wittiness, his effort in recent years, and also the deep thinking of art and society.

With the free brushwork, inner preciseness, natural innocence and acquired wisdom, in nearly his forties, Tianhong gradually emerge his new look after several year of penance: free style shows difficulty; humor projects apartness of intellectuals.

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