

Spirit in Heart, Heart in Mountains

Huang Yang

Probably in my four years old, I learned to copy the "Dragon and Phoenix Prosperity" pattern on the moon cake boxes. One time, I went to church with my parents, and listened to the priest talking a lot of stories about the "Holy Spirit". Because the pronunciation of "spirit" is similar with "Dragon" in Chaoshan dialect, I always thought he was telling something called "Holy Dragon". I imagined it should look alike with the colorful dragons on the moon cake boxes. However, my mother said, "Holy Spirit" is something in the human heart, which neither cannot ride the clouds, nor have a head. Although I am very curious, a neatly trimmed headless dragon is entrenched lonely in the darkness heart - such special image of the "Holy Spirit" still makes me fascinated for a long time.

Why I am thinking of these memories, because more than a decade, every time I see the Xinji's paintings, I am always amazed at his ability of pushing an unspeakable inner "spirit" to the audience directly and frankly. Shi Xinji's paintings not only make me see a clear but mysterious world, but also more believe in animism. How the artist believes what he "sees", in fact, it has a tortuous way to explore.

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As we all known, artists engaged in the creation, based on a consistent belief as a support. In the history, religions or traditional habits both can be used as the artist's belief resource. However, ever since the May 4th Movement, beliefs and traditions are gradually dismantling, and replace by the official trust to western science. Affected by above, the mysticism quality of artists connecting with myths, spirituality or individual sentiment has also been stripped clean. It becomes more like a learning of logical positivism and speculative analysis. Especially after the completion of the social and political mission, in the teaching system of the Academy of Fine Arts, the arts was classified into different professional faculties such as Chinese painting, oil painting, printmaking, etc. However, as the carrier of personal ideas and spiritual expression, artistic creation is different from the discipline construction. Regardless of academic level, as long as it is conducive to the precise expression of feelings, even if you want to break up the faculty edge to give play freely, it is totally unrestricted. The duality of this concept makes those studious and thoughtful students have to ask: What is the object of

artistic creation? Reflecting the spirit of the times, or expression of self feelings? If "Holy Spirit" in my heart is ready to come out, does it have any value to show?

Objectively, the course criterion and reward system both hint that the students are creating for the integrity of the discipline. And the urgent individual talent makes them have the subjective "original impulse". For example, when I was in the Printmaking Department at the same time with Shi Xinji, in virtue of my preferences to film and literature preferences, I intended to use the advantages of both types of art in the time dimension, and give woodcut prints the function of real-time present the inner signs. The problem is, however, if the printmaking department has a "woodcut animation" branch for this reason, is it the inevitable result of art creation? If someone is thirsty, it's directly to turn on the tap and drinking water. Does it need hands excavation canals? Once we used to the creative thinking of discipline type, the anxiety academic originality will torture us, so that before they tell whether they are thirsty, or whether they have creative impulse, they have already tortured and lost their common sense by the huge ambitions of how to dam.

On the other hand, Shi Xinji's paintings are more relaxed: a leftover chicken skull, pebbles, even the sketches of model portrait in class, are all expressed by him with the undecorated sense strokes. They are charming natural, and hidden some unsolved mysteries as well, arouse people's spellbound gazing. From him, I suddenly realize that I have some serious deficiencies: frank and sincere creative attitude, or the ability of self-protection to the original sensibility? I remember when we went to sketch in Shanxi, at a starry night, we guys slept a big brick bed, I did not know whether because we were hungry without having any meat for days, or because of Shi Xinji's paintings which swing in our hearts, in short, we bickered a lot for whether there is standard of art. We are always confused the professional research and personal creation, and consider the "hindsight" as a future personal development. All above emergence stem from the result of that art as knowledge cannot cultivate our beliefs. The recognition and respect to the mystical experience in religion become the absolute reason of artistic creation; while the traditional continuation reflects a repeated habit of action, which is the conviction of artists' creation which does not need to ask. Only inevitable scenarios of knowledge fragments in the modern education, make the artists accustomed to the "consciousness of problems" as the paving stones in their creation way. But in fact it plays a stumbling block on contrary.

As the growth of life takes time, artistic creation is not a "problem solving" struggling with the matter, but the natural growth of specific timing. However, subjects education, theory first and market effect, are all in the manufacture of a variety of "Destructive Enthusiasm" phenomenon. One of the most obvious is the philosophizing of art. Originally, the ability of

rational analysis the academy confers artist should apply to the individual creative thinking. But now it transforms into a kind “concept-running model”, which hopes to get the best value through saving the cost and quick movement. And the chasing and advocating to the “concept” make many works just like such creations which are designed to welcome the Academic and significance dismantling.

In fact, the so-called "concept" is by no means a superficial understanding of the textbook. For example, we can say that the concept of “people who have attained wisdom can become God” made the popularity of immortal images in Han Dynasty. But if the individual artist doesn’t “digest” the past art images by the role of memory or thinking, how did they create out those interesting images, such as Jade Toad, Feather Man, the Lady Queen Mother? Just like what I said in the opening, in childhood people often make the facticity of images equivalent to the inner truths, so that to constitute a unique life experience. The misunderstanding of the pronunciations between “Spirit” and “Dragon”, mixing with traditional pattern of dragons, made the headless dragon become the only "Holy Spirit" image I recognized. The outsiders regarded as absurd, but I confirm so much. Therefore, if the artists not only take into account themselves at the moment, but also include those lost experience including and bare its self-evident quality in their creation, then the images heritage of ancient culture are almost the only guide. When we appreciate the fairy images of <Legends of Mountains and Seas>, the time gap of thousands of years causes us to take an expectant attitude to confirm the relationship between their strangeness and our own. And the contemporary artist’s contribution is: their works can erase the today’s strangeness caused by historical images, activate people's imagination, open all curiosity and exploration on the origin in the soul, and thus accept the complexity and vividness of the world in good faith.

Shi Xinji’s works are the perfect case. The geological morphology mountains are everlasting. In Gao Xingjian's description, the forest is a space of cure, once the patient is cured, he can go out of the mountains. So <Soul Mountain> is more like a spiritual clinic reports. Thomas Mann's <Der Zauberberg (Magic Mountain)> directly describes the forest as a health resort; in fact, he was more concerned about the philosophical reaction in scene in nature. The forest is the land of introspection, place of washing heart and the source of chaos. It uses its vagaries landscape and lush vitality to match people's psychological structure, feeling the variety possibilities of life.

Last year, Beijing just began the autumn. One day, Xinji waked me from dream. And then we start a mountain trip: the barren hills, wild road, and nameless streams. We stop for overlook, or rest near by springs. After climb to the top, when we saw the towering hills, we can not help shouting out. From time to time to visit the mountains, has already become an important part of Xiji's spiritual life. If we can keep the habit of "Walking in wild" in lives, then there will be a more realistic experience of the allusions of Confucius' "Go west and get Lin" or Liu Yuxi's "be holy with the presence of a dragon". Although it's hard to capture the holy animals in mountain, that kind of vivid feeling of expectations is what the mysterious forest gives us. For the artists, tasting this obscure psychology will help restore the history into scene feelings, to bring out the creative inspiration. In Xinji's paintings, the black forest quietly stretching in indigo night, the giant spider sitting on net, or those small animals wandering on foot of the mountain after snowy day, are all giving us hints for the existence of the "spirit". For example, rocks-filled wild field, clear and translucent world, violet color tone, wild trees, paths, a red-eye macaques is in foreground. All these images are circled by a thin yellow line, lovely, and gradually extend to the back mountain, and become a mysterious energy, to connect with sky.

There is no "Dragon / Unicorn" in the mountains. Use the heart, and what you get is "spirit". With this experience, that is "heart for help" (same pronunciation with Xinji in Chinese). Xinji uses the "Xinji Shan Ren" for his gracious name, which is clear to show his apperception of unity of life behavior and the creative act, and also his sensitive to the importance of forest. Perhaps, "Spiritual Mountain", as the ideal images many artists pursuit exhaustive whole life, is just the part, which is in the forms of their works, in their respective life path. Although those are occasionally scattered, and cannot pick them all, they are strive in their lifetime to structure out the complete picture of the Pure Land, to see the profound meaning of the life origins.