

## In a painterly and adrift world

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In Wang Yabin's exhibition "Pavilion of memories", we can stay long before every painting and enter a fictive place. Time becomes solid there, and space becomes flat, to translate the now and past into a gaze and soothe our shattered ambitions. "Pavilion of memories" is not about memory, but some kind of beginning, or ending. Therefore, it's also about painting itself. Every painting is between emerging images and vanishing traces, making everything simultaneous, recording some kind of inspirations and the following emptiness. In "Pavilion of memories", emptiness brings new inspirations, as something really matters is deeply inside the painting.

In the past ten years, the first solo exhibition of Wang Yabin is called "Searching around the mountain", and then "My king diamond", "Elephant constellation", "Unexpected fragrance", "I am the landscape"...Just like these names, the exhibitions emerged from a boundless mythological world without any discipline. This time, "Pavilion of memories" is still hastening, but no longer walking alone. It's like one of the climbers in the painting "Summit of the Goddess"(2012), who turns back and looks into the distance while waving goodbye, as if he suddenly thinks of something. Therefore, in another "Summit of the Goddess"(2013), a Goddess emerges from the valley. Fictive stories are usually closer to the inner reality. In our Time, life is colorful and as walking on thin ice. The meaning of the phrase "Man is adrift in this world as if he were in a dream" becomes a little bit different today. Unexplainable emotions may be found on the canvas.

### Similar

"Flourishing Woods"(2012) is the ending of a section and the start of "Pavilion of memories". In this painting, a young man is shooting a huge spider web with a vintage camera. The woods is partly hidden and partly visible, or floating in an empty space. The spider web sometimes suddenly turns into a close-up, so the young man and the place he stands on turns into a montage and appears even further than the web. The background can't become woods without the indication of the title. When we look into a subject, we are used to find its similars, especially when it's abstract. The difference that lies in this painting is that, when the painter paints the background, his motions turns into his vision, guiding his touches which forms something like woods, and woods is there. Therefore, it's not that the touches want to form the similars of the woods, but that the woods become the similars of certain abstract emotions. In "Flowing clouds"(2012), three or four people are wandering in their groves of pine. This scene is related with his earlier works. Suddenly, a huge human figure emerges from the background,

just like the woods in "Flourishing Woods". The figure is like the painter himself, as if he sees himself as the narrator while narrating an adrift emotion.

In the past few years, Wang Yabin concentrated on paintings around 100x100cm or smaller sizes. Those works have textures and colors with abstruse sense of time which pulls vision into an ever retreating space. Every figure in the paintings is floating in a changing space and becoming symbols of a mysterious system of signs, indicating different emotions. Starting from "Dense Woods", the unfixed background turns more figurative while remaining unfixable. The figures inside finally have their places to stay. Symbols and signs have been cancelled and turned into cognizable scenes. In fact, there is no story behind the scenes. The scenes are only the similars of the painter's emotions. They are not for narratives or rhetorics, but for visible "empathizes", which are not about the logical or reasonable acknowledge of the audience, but draw the audience directly into gaze and "musement" and bring them ontic feelings. In "Pavilion of memories", empathizes come from the reception of scenes while staying independent of them. Empathize originates from the habits of identification and invention of similars from vision and memory, and emerge from everyone's vivid memories. The emotions in "Pavilion of memories" are related not only with the painter, but also with everyone who stands before the paintings.

In "Light Trees"(2012), two teen-age youths, in a mountain or a bank of mountain stones, are looking into pinewood from a distance. (or not far away?) As the figure in "Dense Woods", they are using optic instrument, this time a telescope, as if their view is related with certain process of "imaging". Many figures and objects in Wang Yabin's paintings are not chosen a-priori, but painted-in along with his feelings in the process. The imaging tools have appeared in his early paintings, maybe when he paints figures, he would be fascinated from time to time in a sense of visual wandering. The light sprinkles along the branches and produces blurred visions, just like the tracing of "similars". In "Light Lady"(2012), another painting related with light, the lights become the clothing of a Goddess or a modern lady. This figure has a sense of anachronism. She has not really appeared anywhere. She is no more than a similar of certain emotion, so she looks familiar. Probably, she is the one who has been searched by the youth in "Light Trees"? After "Dense Woods", "pine" becomes clear as an object in several works such as "Falling Pine in the Mountain"(2012), "Road of pine shadow"(2013), accompanying the lovers or the climbers. Wang Wei, a poet from Tang Dynasty has a famous line: "Moonlight in its groves of pine, stones of crystal in its Brooks". In Wang Yabin's paintings, we can rediscover the breadth of the verse: infinite stories can happen there.

In his new paintings, scenes are the trace and shadow of emotion. They are abstract from the beginning, comforting the feelings which have no country to stay. "Pavilion of memories" is a name given a-posteriori, so this name also becomes the similars of the works as a whole, recording the time passing swiftly like flowing water. According to Henri Bergson, Memory is all we have and all we can Be

in the world. In this sense, "Pavilion of memories" is about an adrift world. A certain painter in early modern times said, photography can never be compared with painting, because it can't represent heaven and hell. Today, religion is no longer the centre of time, and the mythology of heaven and hell has turned into a kind of emotion. The emotion is also a kind of mythology, and painting is the similar of emotion itself. This is the most important part of the paintings today.

### Gathering fragments

The wall in "Light Trees" is fake, just like a transparent frame before real pinewood. While in "Road of pine shadow", the three straight lines that indicate an indoor room can no longer be ignored. And the road for the climbers is only reaching the edge of a cliff. These elements express a sense of alienation by forming paradoxical spaces. The unfixed background in his early works has been turned into a settled fiction and the pine in the foreground is becoming a composition as well. These settings remind us of the old photographs from the time of Republic of China. False landscape is full of authentic poetry, even the falsehood itself becomes part of the poetry. In the meantime, the hazy mountains and clouds and their vivid temper are too real for a setting. Thus the vision goes continuously into the deep of the far-reaching composition, while trembling between pulling and pushing forces. This is just like the emotion in his paintings: through the landscape, seeing all the things and stories that happened in life and in the life before, before the vision being frapped as the dream ends, and nothing can be said there.

"Three men traveling in a carpet painting"(2013) seems to be the beginning of "Road of pine shadow" above. Its title reveals almost everything: there's another painting inside the painting, between these two are wandering people. It can be seen as a work about painter and his/her paintings. "Man in a red stripe skirt"(2013) presents a traveler in another latitude who is tired and has given up the endless journey. He sits in an empty room, fully aware of the fact that the pinewood is no more than an illusion on the wall. His skirt with red strip may be a place where another group of travelers lost their way. For "Pavilion of memories", the illusiveness of the landscape comes from the fact that a painter can never enter his/her painting. The gap between painter and canvas is eternal. It exists everywhere in every Time, as no matter where and when the painter lives. The distance between life and death, between inner and outer world, between self and the canvas, will not change. A painter is always on his/her way of searching and fully prepared for the emptiness, as every emptiness is the beginning of a new transient landscape.

"Pine"(2012) is such a landscape. The painter isolates it from a bigger landscape and re-explores it. When it breaks away from a scene and it's own position inside, it's identity becomes suspicious. It can

be a sketch of a real pine, or part of the painter's other works, or even quoted from pines in some Chinese classical paintings, as it reminds of those calm old pines in the ink and water paintings from Yuan Dynasty, which don't convey any expression and become pause or blankness of emotions. Like a still-life, it's only its own image in the painter's mind. It becomes the similar of itself. "June"(2013) and "Red Flowers"(2013) are also from the painter's mind. Their colors seem fading and dusty, with beauty from the brick carving or damask from the Song Dynasty. They also seem to be the flowers that we can see with eyes closed. In works like "Summit of the Goddess"(2013), a female figure from the Goddess or Bodhisattva in antique wall paintings is wandering around flowers and mountains, seeing everything of the world. Rivers and plants are still from her country, as June is the same June, and red flowers are in the same red. All these views are like an illusion, and only illusions can travel across a very long time and become legends in the painting.

Knowing that painting is the similar of emotion itself, we can pry the width and scale of the emotion inside "Pavilion of memories" from these landscapes. Pine, flower, snow, and mountains, these objects exist in China's paintings from antique times and have been described timelessly in the continuation of the culture. The ancients have predicted our emotions today, as emotion never changes; but how can they understand today's life. It seems that the lovers in "Falling Pine in the Mountain" have been standing there for centuries. The snow around them are the end of a prosper time, melting in the wind of spring, welcoming the new coming encounter and parting. Rises and declines alternate in the history of thousands of years; meetings and partings happen in the ever lasting samsara, what can we say about them?

In another "Summit of the Goddess"(2012), there are no more paradoxical spaces or shattered landscapes. The mountains with only outlines in his early works has been replaced with mountains in volumes. The figure of the mountains comes clearly from the northern China, with giant rocks and towering narrow peaks, which recall the huge mountains in Chinese classical paintings. In the work, four climbers walk under the twilight sky. The painter doesn't sketch the human figures with simple lines, like what the ancient Chinese painters usually did, but draw them with careful attitude found in European classical drawings. Thus the expressionist picture looks more like a freeze-frame of a film. One of the climbers is waving goodbye. The meaning of "goodbye" is too hard to explain and too hard to control. In an old film, the heroine told her friend in telephone: when he leaves, don't say "goodbye" to him, say "farewell".

Beginning and ending

In Wang Yabin's new paintings, we can find more direct drawings. The outlines of mountains include changes in degree of finish to present the volume. Pines are drawn in fast and firm touches, which go along with the temper of the pines. The flowers are painted with flowing touches according to the way of growing of the plant. Objects in nature are the most familiar and particularly testing the observation and treatment of a painter, while implying the way he/she sees the world. Wang Yabin paints as if the picture grows out of his touches. He doesn't draw from photos, but from his visual experiences and imagination. What's more, he is not showing his technique sedulously. After the drawing, he will continue with complicated treatments and adjustments to change the direct touches into covered traces.

His paintings usually change the true-life lighting into pure colors. Although he uses different colors, he controls them with an abstract system of color which is closer to the black and white in ink and wash paintings. Sometimes, his paintings remind us of the mysterious names of color given by ancient artists, such as "fragrance of autumn". We may further understand the subtlety of his color if we see his dark palette. For him, different visions correspond with different emotions, so the way of painting often changes. His rhythm of painting changes and every painting is an unique trace of a particular condition. He uses every possible way to build channels that connect heart and form to fulfill his wish for a work.

The traditional relationship between oil and canvas is based on a sense of attachment. At the level of cultural character, Chinese painters prefer the sense of fusion between ink and rice paper. Therefore, the painters in China need to control the materials of oil painting in a new way that corresponds to their cultural intuitions. Wang Yabin has found his way to control them and give the extroverted materials an introverted temper, so his personal emotion and cultural nature emerge unconsciously in his painting. His works don't rely on theme, image, touch, color or concept, but progress as a developing entirety, with accurate transmission and tangible visual quality.

For an artist, technique, acknowledge, or thought, are no more than a background. The irreplaceable part of an artist is the trained intuition and the ability to translate into forms. The paintings of Wang Yabin is an entirety from his experience in life, his survey of arts from antiquity to today, his exploration in painting technique, and discernment. In fact, any description in theory is not as rich as his understanding of "Life drifts along like a dream". Marlene Dumas names one of her catalogues "Measuring your own grave". The title seems sinister, but in other words, the beginning and ending of every paintings is measuring the width of life of a painter.

Painting today

Without any doubt, the work of Wang Yabin is typically painting, which has been attacked since the 1960's. And "the biggest problem of painting, is that it's a flat square hung on the wall". "The death of painting" appeared in Roman Empire, when people believed that painting has already corrupted; it also appeared in Venice during the Renaissance, when people thought that painting can no longer advance after Titian. During the last 20 years, "the death of painting" has finally reached its end once again along with the discussion on a group of new paintings around the world. And the medias of the "New medias arts" are no longer the flag of "stands" by themselves as all medias of arts are back on a same level. Unfortunately, these changes are not yet widely recognized. Seen in most of the new events, painting is still struggling in the contemporary vogue which is actually becoming more and more "representationalist". Today, no matter in China, Europe or America, many works that appear related with painting, are standing out side the "painting" as a whole, trying to change its look through countless experiments, and to prolongate "the death of painting" in its death. This understanding painting comes from the linear logic of modernism and the so-called post-modernism, which sees the existence of arts only in innovation and expandability. In fact, this is a logic of design which turns arts into instrument of different kind of techniques, concepts or benefits. If it doesn't change, the last thing to become instrumental will be human's heart.

For painting as a whole, the works of Wang Yabin presents no innovation, as he has always been exploring the inner core of painting. All his experiments are inside and introspective. He is not painting for the discovery of new possibilities, thus his painting is not restrained at all. In his paintings, the climbers, lovers, trees and flowers are there for the simplest and deepest reasons. They are traveling in the flat square which is familiar and unknown at the same time, just like the painter himself. A true painter never looks for reasons for his/her own paintings. In this shattered world of art today, reason is the last thing to worry.

Painting doesn't come from the blank area of art history, but grows from substantial lives. A poem by Su Shi from the Song Dynasty says: "Don't be nostalgia for the past, just try new tea with new fire, alcohol and poem never wait." "Contemporary" means today and our own life. The way that the ancient artists faced their own "contemporary art" is helping us to get rid of the trap of "post-modern". The logic of art is rather circular than linear, just like the alternation of seasons and flowers. In "Pavilion of memories", we can see spring and autumn, happiness and sadness at the same time, as they become painterly. That's how we can peak eternity in our own adrift life.