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目 录

限制与创造

003

梅冰风度

015

图版

023

盛梅冰的绘画

145

履历

151

Contents

Restriction and Creation

010

Meibing's Bearing

019

Plates

023

The Paintings of Sheng Mei Bing

144

Curriculum Vitae

151

盛梅冰

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限制与创造

读梅冰的油画近作有感

曹意强

从理论上说，自由与开放是艺术创作的必要条件，它给予艺术家更多的选择、更大的自主性。然而，在实践上，这种有利条件也给艺术家增加了选择与判断的难度。在相对封闭的艺术情境中，艺术家必须在特定的风格限制中工作，其参照系和评断标准比较明确，犹如在体育竞技中，运动员必须在严格的规则之中显示个人技艺，在限制中突破。梅冰与我同龄，我们这代画家曾经度过了现代中国艺术史上最封闭的年代，尔后随着改革开放而进入了最振奋人心的时代，享受着前所未有的思想与创作自由。这两个极端的情境对艺术提出了不同的要求，迫使艺术家作出不同的抉择。

梅冰于1978年考入南京艺术学院油画系，1982年毕业后，任教南京师范大学。在他学艺的岁月里，中国油画以“前苏联”写实风格为主导，列宾、苏里科夫的作品是我们的学习楷模，而《星火画报》则是我们饥渴参照的唯一外国美术资料。我们所敬仰的前辈如靳尚谊、詹建俊等中国当代油画家都是苏派传人，而我们江南习画者从留苏归国的全山石、徐明华等人那里领略到苏派绘画的真谛：重视素描明暗处理，强调写生与速写，关注色彩调子的和谐。梅冰学生时代的素描、油画与速写都旨在追求这些效果。

所谓苏派绘画的一个重要源头是法国印象主义。20世纪70年代末在上海举办的法国19世纪农村风景画展，让我们这批渴望西方油画的年轻人亲眼欣赏到E.马奈、C.毕沙罗、A.西斯莱的原作，可谓是难以想象的视觉飨宴！我们每个人的画风都受到其震荡，梅冰也不例外，当时他所画的油画开始更讲究色彩的变化与透明，素描也变得更流畅，留下了这个历史性的画展对我们的冲击迹象。

在那个年代，因为所见有限，难免出现统一的风格倾向，而这种状况虽在某种程度上成为牵制个性的因素，但却建立起一个严格的评判标准，艺术品质的优劣在同类相比的尺度里，妍媸不辨自明。

我们如今进入了一个崇尚个性的时代，很多人错误地把个性张扬视为艺术创新的重要因素。其实无论如何模仿别人，个性永远是挥之不去之物。马奈终其一生模拟委拉斯贵支而终成马奈，谁能想象现代最具个人风格的大师，如抽象表现主义者J.波洛克曾孜孜不倦地临摹过E.格列柯，而弗洛伊德心仪神往的是M.夏加尔！对老大师的模仿并未扼杀其艺术个性。个性是一种中性因素，而风格是艺术的类型。个性或风格有好



雪景 | Snowscape

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
2008 | 80cm x 100cm



凋谢的玉兰 | Withered Magnolia

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
1992 | 60cm x 72cm

坏高低之别，决不等于艺术本身，更不是判断艺术品质的价值标准。人人天生都有个性，天生都有风格。个性犹如野马，放纵个性并不能成为艺术家，而真正的艺术家就是个性野马的驯服者。前述大师临摹大师就是要压制自己的天性而获得更理想的绘画风格与品质。固守自身小我的个性并非艺术的真诚。我们一些画家误解浪漫主义者高唱的艺术要忠实于自己的口号，盲目张扬个性，追逐风格特异，反倒失去自我，失去艺术的真诚。艺术的真诚是对自身、表现对象和媒介限制进行不断超越的恒定勇气。每一位艺术家必须诚实地与其所表现的内容即自然，与由此而激发的灵感或情感，以及籍以表达自然与情感的技巧打交道。此道古来已然，《文心雕龙》即以“情”、“事”、“辞”为“三准”。“情”为灵感，“事”为对象，“辞”为可资使用的表现技巧与媒介。情以物迁，辞以情发，“言必顾心，心必副事，三者符合，不相越逾”，均同画理。这本是从事艺术创作者应循之道，但在当今的画坛，充斥着顾此失彼，失去三者平衡与相互作用的作品。偏求技巧新奇而无内容者有之，巨细无遗地刻画物象而无情感者有之，发泄情感而画不逮意、意不称物者有之。

当代中国油画的一个明显问题是，大多数作品缺乏扣动人心的东西，这说明画家本身对事物丧失了敏感性。梅冰始终遵守“三准”原则。他不忘从自然中汲取灵感，磨砺对事物的敏感性，其2008年大雪之际的窗外写生即为佳例，而灵感和敏感性在画布上的转化必定要以娴熟的技巧为前提。梅冰对西方油画史和色彩史做过较深入的研究，他对提香、伦勃朗、P.塞尚、A.莫迪利亚尼的技法有所借鉴。他1996年游学美国，有机会在各博物馆零距离地研究了西方名作。他当时画的一批风景作品，深受西方人喜爱，在个展后订购一空。他将意大利18世纪的风景画技法与法国印象派的色彩以及塞尚的空间和结构处理融会贯通，加之他对异国他乡特有的敏锐感受，赋予了其绘画以特殊的情调。也许梅冰自己没有意识到，他的作品之所以受人青睐，其中一个原因是，他此时的画面，那倾斜而略显不稳定的构成，那深重而透明的冷色，无不隐含着某种难以言喻的神秘感，一种见之于F. de 戈雅，甚至格列柯绘画的冷峻诡秘性。这种奇异的微妙氛围也弥漫在梅冰的摄影作品中，人物的神态和景物的生命被瞬间凝固在奇妙的明暗光影变幻里，只有敏锐的眼光才能捕捉这敏感的生活片刻。这些摄影作品与他的绘画一样成为具有独立审美价值的艺术。



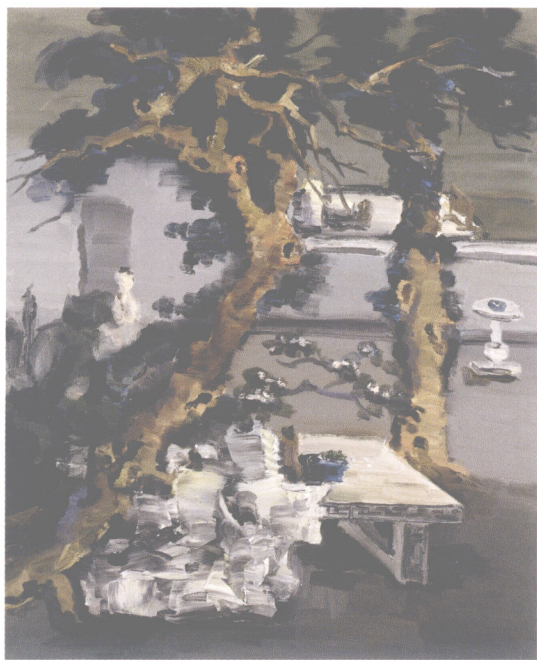
百合 | Lilies

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
2007 | 90cm x 55cm

梅冰承认自然、个性、传统媒介的限制，坚持从事架上油画的创作。对他来说，画家的创造性绝不在于创新，而体现在把表面上难以协调的东西融合出新的能力。中国自改革开放以来，愈来愈多的可能性在画家面前展开，致使许多人在过多的选择中迷失方向。从徐悲鸿到当今的中国艺术家念兹在兹的理想是创造中国式油画。这个理想激励着人们探究中西融合的可能性，同时也导致为追求表面的民族化效果而忽视油画特性的倾向。在现代开放的艺术世界里，艺术家不可避免地要面对后现代主义理论家称为“双重解码”的困境。而这“双重解码”具有横向与纵向的双向性。横向地看，任何画家必须处理其民族文化与世界艺术之间的关系，即他或她必须在世界艺术视野中工作。纵向地看，他或她必须处理自己的创作与传统的关系，即必须在其所在的传统框架里从事当代创造。而这横向与纵向的“双重解码”又错综交织在一起。可以说，现代画家的成败全在此一举。现代主义艺术将革新视为绝对的必要性，经过一个富有创造力的时期之后，显露了其弱点，当革新走到尽头时，难以设想更新的风格，唯一的出路是回归传统。后现代主义就是其结果。然而，后现代主义是以某种玩世不恭的姿态挪用传统，并非旨在通过研究传统精华而汲取智慧。事实上，任何画家既在传统的框架里工作，又难免受其所处时代的氛围影响。

梅冰最近创作的一批油画具有奇特的后现代意味。他以流畅的油画技法表达传统的中国古典精神。一对男女，仿佛是我们学生时代所常见的中年男女，坐在自然形态的石桌旁，欣赏松、梅盆景，在高垣深墙、充满古意的环境中演绎了一场现在与过去的对话，在这对话中，新近的历史与更久远的时代即体现于宋徽宗《听琴图》的意境相接壤。这也是中国古典诗意与现代油画语言的对话。梅冰出身于研究中国古典文学的书香门第，他对中国古代文化艺术及其文物有特殊的情结：秦汉漆器、唐宋雕刻、明清家具，对此他熟悉得如数家珍，独具慧眼。他也喜欢欣赏江南湖石与盆景，把玩文房四宝。这种爱好与兴趣不仅洋溢在他最近的作品中，而且提升了他的艺术品位。梅冰是一位如今难得的儒雅君子，其画如其人，我初见其作品时，就有如此印象。当时所见的《玉兰花》一画，其素雅的色调，如诗般的白色花朵，创造了一种似花非花，不质不形的美妙意象。





双松对话 | A Dialogue between Two Pine Trees

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
2007 | 80cm x 65cm

此处，揭示了梅冰的另一个重要的师承关系。他的导师之一是中国当代油画家的杰出代表苏天赐。如果说融合中西以创造鲜明的中国式油画是数代前辈的统一理想，那么苏天赐是迄今为止接近这个理想的为数不多的画家之一，其作品充满中国艺术特有的诗情画意而不失油画媒质的特性。梅冰的油画颇具其师的笔韵。苏天赐画花，画的是花之韵、花之笔触。在他画中，花即笔触，笔触即花，色即花，花即色，媒介、物象与意象熔为一炉，梅冰得其真传，又能在苏老浑然的色韵中参合些许印象主义和表现主义元素。梅冰今年画的《百合花》更如和风中白色仙女的轻舞，长方形的青瓷花瓶与浓重的绿色花叶团块起到稳定飞舞的花朵的作用，使之动中寓静，凸现中国绘画的韵味，同时强化油画的生动触感。

在与梅冰的私下交流中，我们经常探讨为何中国油画缺乏“油画味”的问题。从欧洲油画史上看，伟大的油画家都注重形体塑造的生命感、触感和色彩的音乐性，即充分发挥油画材质的美去塑造栩栩如生、仿佛有呼吸感、有触感、有音响的形体。W. 康定斯基说：“真正的油画作品往往令人不禁想‘抚摸’它，因为它具有生命与触觉。”而A. 雷诺阿说他在绘画时，殚思竭虑地要把每个色彩奏出高音。梅冰的近作在这些方面做出了可喜的努力，比以前更注重探究油画语言本身的魅力。《双松对话》是一个突出的例证。在画面中，每一个物象：松枝、松叶、古朴的石桌、假山石、院门、院墙，以及点景人物，都是富有生命律动和声音触觉的笔触与色彩。在此，一如在《百合花》中，视觉和听觉通途变奏。

以听通视，听声类形并非西洋美学独有，而我国古人也讲触、听两觉的相类通邮。孔颖达《礼记正义》对《礼记·乐记》的一段注解：“声音感动于人，令人心想其形状如此。”马融在《长笛赋》中说的更明确：“尔乃听声类形，状似流水，又象飞鸿。泛滥溟漠，浩浩洋洋；长翥远引，旋复回皇。”我不知道梅冰是否有意识地在油画创作中寻求与这一传统通感说的联系，但观看他的近作，自然使我联想到这一点。

梅冰艺术的独特之处在于以中国古典题材为引线探究油画的表现力。他在用以表达其思古幽情的同时，把本不同位的载体与媒介融化一体，将之视为实验意笔油画的

借口。例如，在《婴戏图》中，画家借用宋代风俗画戏童的动态与组合，表现似是而非的笔韵、光感和流动感，以呈现油画的“洋味”。

梅冰在今年下半年神奇般地创作了一大批作品，不同的画面可用一个主题加以概括，那就是“对话”。夜月独坐湖畔的茗茶者在与自然对话，月色枯树下的罗汉与猴儿对话，闲坐屏风前吸烟者与文房四宝对话，盘坐在冉冉香雾中的修行者与信仰对话，其他明显的对话场面不一而足。这对话其实是画家本人与两种不同传统——中国与西方，两个不同时间——当下与往昔的切切私语。依照流行的后现代话语，这是最具现代性的双重对话：一方面是对中国古典精神的现代阐释，另一方面是通过这个精神解码而把握外来油画的语言特质。在这个异质对话中，过去与现在，中国精神与西方话语，相互超越而达成和谐。梅冰的古典品位得以使之将往昔化为现代，即从现代人视觉角度去体味和联想构成中国古代情调的特质，而且运用外来的油画媒介加以表现，由此而贴近波特莱尔所说的境界：“往昔之所以引人入胜，不仅仅因为艺术家可从中提炼对之而言乃属现时的美，而且恰恰因为它属于往昔，具有历史的价值。当下也是如此，我们从再现当下中获得乐趣，这不仅是由于当下可被赋予美，而且是由于其成为当下的本质特性。”

惟有思接千载、胸怀全球之人，才能领略这种美：一种通过真诚地尊重传统、现代和艺术媒介本身的限制而创造的油画之美。限制不是创造的限制，而是创造的必要条件。诗人T.S.艾略特曾说，世上只有三位真正世界性的天才诗人：但丁、莎士比亚与歌德。他们像上帝一样富有创造力，而且其创造凝聚了普遍而崇高的人性，为全人类所理解。但丁在完成了伟大的《神曲》的最后一曲时，向上帝作了如下祈祷：

至高无上的光呀！你超出人类思想之外，
你把曾经启示我的
再赐一些回光在我的记忆里吧！
你使我的舌头有足够的力量，
至少传述你光荣的一粒火星，
以之遗留后人的人罢。



赏梅 | Watching Plum Blossoms

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
2007 | 84cm x 100cm

天才的但丁明白，从无有之中创造亦即从无限制中创造，这是上帝的特权。凡人的创造力无非是对上帝所造之物的谦卑地补充。人的创造力必须运用已存在的、可资利用的东西，用出乎预料的方式去改变其形式与效果。创造需要想象力，而非简单的创新与无限的自由。创造力本身即限制。任何具有创造性或独创性的东西必须同时满足两个似乎矛盾的条件：一方面必须以难以预料的新颖方式突破规范，而另一方面又必须早晚被广泛接受与欣赏，终成新的规范。换言之，创新必须违背正常思维方式，而又必须最终让正常思维所理解，纯粹个人化的独创性只是怪癖而非创造性。梅冰和现代中国画家一样，享受着前所未有的创作自由，而自由与限制一样是艺术创作的必要前提。从我们的交谈中，我感到梅冰意识到，艺术的自由并非是狂妄与放任，它只能是通过超越艺术本身的限制，即智慧地把前人伟大的成就、艺术媒介和个人秉性等因素陶铸成某种新颖的东西而获得的自由。西方油画的发展一直以人物为主题，人对于油画而言，不仅是题材，而且是形式本身，因此人物画得好坏应是衡量一个油画家的基本标准，换言之，在油画历史上，由于人物在很长时间占着绝对地位，油画的技法也就主要围绕着表现人物而发明、发展。如果没有画人物的功夫，那就意味着不可能真正掌握油画技巧。J.-B.-S.夏尔丹是静物画巨擘，C.科罗、毕沙罗是风景画大师，但他们都以其卓越的人物画证明自己非凡的造型和表现天赋。为了进一步提高自己，梅冰最近又开始研究人物肖像创作与写生，其近日所画的作品吸收了雷诺阿等名家的技法，注重造型、色彩和笔触的相互作用，画面显得更为饱满了。此处，梅冰借助传统对自己提出更高的要求以规范自身的艺术，我们知道，世上每一位真正的艺术家都会带着如此自觉的限制意识去追求自由，去超越限制，我们期待梅冰继续努力，每一步都能扎实地接近这一理想的创造境界。

RESTRICTION AND CREATION

by Cao Yiqiang

Remarks on Mei Bing's recent paintings

It may be asserted that an environment that allows much freedom for artist is necessary for their prosperity. Freedom means more possibility and more individuality, but it could also mean more difficulties in making choices. On contemporary Chinese history, there was an era when artist had only restricted range of style choices, and had to compete with each other under established rules. Yet during this period standard for artistic quality were widely recognized and were shared by many. Artists were quite certain as to what action they should take as well as potential response they would receive. Mei Bing and I are of the same age, both belong to the generation that has lived to see great changes in Chinese art world for the past few decades. We feel the sharp contrast between old and new era, when artist are presented with different quests and were pushed into different choices.

As professor of Nanjing Normal University, Mei Bing studied Oil Painting at Nanjing Academy of Arts from 1978 to 1982. At that time, realistic style promoted by former Soviet Union dominated the art world in China. Works of Ilya Y. Repin and Vasili I. Surikov were established as official models, and Xinghuo Magazine was the only source where we could find reprints of paintings to imitate. Domestic painters whom are widely respected, such as Jin Shangyi and Zhan Jianjun, all followed Soviet manner. Students from south China also learned Soviet manner through Quan Shanshi, Xu Minghua ---- they were both trained in former Soviet Union. We learned to do correct tonal sketches, make quick studies from life and render our colours in harmony. These qualities we can clearly see from sketches and paintings Mei Bing did during his student days.

The so-called Soviet Style has its origin in French Impressionism. In 1977 an exhibition of French Impressionists was held in Shanghai. Young painters who were eager to see original works of Western painting had their first chance to face masterpieces of Manet, Pissarro and Sisley. The impact is so great that all of us, include Mei Bing, had to some extent changed our way of expression. For a period Mei Bing paid more attention to subtle variation of colour and glazing, his sketch also got bolder. The influence of the exhibition had left its mark on his work of this period.

In those years, artists in China still worked in more or less isolated state, thus showed a uniform tendency in their style. Personality and individuality suffered, but rigorous standard for quality established. With a uniform canon one could easily make judgment on art work.

We are now living in a time when personality is highly praised. Many artists mistakenly regard highly personalized expression as primary element of artistic creation. In fact, personality will always leave traces even on work of imitation. Throughout his life Manet had tried to imitate Velasquez, yet he made an unmistakable Manet out of Velasquez. Some modern masters with extraordinary style had been imitating old masters diligently. Among them abstract expressionist Pollock imitated El'Greco, Freud admired Chagall. Imitation would not smear one's own manner. Personality and style are neutral elements. We can not judge art on these elements. Personality and style are inherited. They are like wild horses, and good artist reins horses, not indulging them. Through imitation of old masters, good artist learns to rein his personality so as to attain ideal quality. Too much care for one's own style has nothing to do with loyalty for art. Some artists have misunderstood Romantic proclamation that artist shall be loyal to his instinct. They blindly promoted their individuality and tried everything to pursue exceptional styles only to find themselves lost, their loyalty for art in vain. Loyalty for art is constant challenge to oneself, to

one's theme and media, and the courage one technique of expression. According to Wen Xin Diao Long, our ancestor had set up "three criteria" for literature criticism, in which "emotion", "theme" and "technique" could be respectively interpreted as inspiration, object and way of expression. Emotion changes with theme, while technique conform emotion. "Language must consider emotion, while emotion must in accordance with event (things); these three elements should conform each other and never interfere with each other." These remarks on literature are also true on painting. Nowadays artists can no longer keep the balance of the three principles. They pursue new for new's sake, or they painstakingly render details without emotion.

One problem of our time is that we have so few striking works. Artists seem to have lost their sensitivities. Mei Bing, however, has never forgotten the "three criteria". He draws inspiration from nature and trains his sense. The result can be seen in his works that were completed in snowy days of 2008. In order to fix his inspiration and what he senses on canvas, Mei Bing has thoroughly studied history of oil technique and theory of colour. He has been particularly nourished by Titian, Rembrandt, Cézanne and Modigliani. In 1993 Mei Bing visited the United States and spent a lot of time studying old masters in museums. He held his one man exhibition soon, showing a series of landscape which were sold out immediately. The combination of 18 century Italian landscape and French Impressionism, plus Cézanne's treatment of space and structure, gave his work a special touch. Perhaps he failed to realize that his work, with slightly unsteady composition, solemn and cold tones, suggested the same mysterious, stern and weird expression seen in Goya and El Greco's work. This uncanny and delicate atmosphere also characterized Mei Bing's work of photography. Human expression and surrounding objects were fixed instantly in the dramatic world of light, which was only to be caught by sensitive eyes. Like his painting, these photographs are also works of art with independent aesthetic value.

Admitting the limitations of traditional media, Mei Bing never gave up easel painting. For him creativity does not necessarily mean "brand new", rather it means the ability to coordinate elements harmoniously and to create a new way of overcoming old difficulties. However, since China entered a new era, many artists have lost in a bewildering world of possibilities. Since Xu Beihong's time, Chinese artists had long cherished the ideal of nationalized oil painting. On one hand, the ideal had encouraged artists to explore the possibility of coordinating eastern and western artistic elements. On the other hand, it had also encouraged the narrow minded nationalism. The artists inevitably fell in predicament of so called "double coding" They have to work within the complex of national identity, globalization and cultural context of tradition. The revolutionary creativity of Modernism has exhausted, it then feel the need to turn back to tradition. Yet the postmodernism abused tradition in a cynical way. In fact, artists would always bare marks of his own time while working in the framework of tradition.

There is an unusual atmosphere of postmodernism in Mei Bing's recent works. With fluent oil technique, he expressed traditional Chinese spirit. The couple under his brush reminds us the daily scene from childhood. They sat at a stone table, appreciating potted pines and plums. The surroundings took an air of antiquity, from which we can feel the dialogue between past and present, between Chinese classic poeticism and modern oil technique. This atmosphere could be traced back to Emperor Huizong's Appreciating Qin Music in Song Dynasty. Mei Bing, born in a family of intellectuals and was well educated in classic literature, has special affiliation to artifacts left from the past. His appreciation for lacquerware of Qing and Han dynasties, sculpture and carving of Tang and Song dynasties and furniture of Ming and Qing dynasties streams out naturally from his heart. Besides he is also quite familiar with desk items literati used to surround their studio. Recently these objects became repeated theme of his painting. Mei Bing is a gentleman who cherishes virtues that are rare to see in these days. The first time I saw his Yulan magnolia, which depicted white, poetic flowers with tranquil, elegant colours, I immediately had the feeling that the painting is just like the artist.



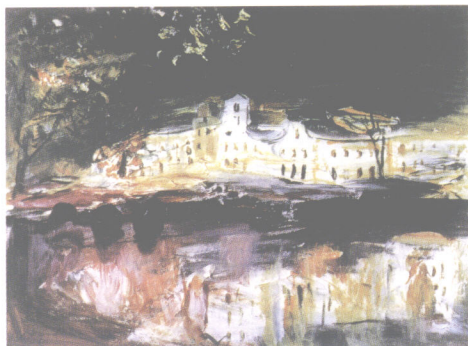
湖石芭蕉 | Lake Stones and Plantains

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
2008 | 60cm x 50cm



虎丘寺 | Huqiu Pagoda

素描 | Pencil on paper
1976 | 15cm x 10cm



阿姆斯特丹之夜 | Amsterdam

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
1997 | 50cm x 70cm



夜 | Night

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
1997 | 70cm x 50cm

It is worth saying that Mei Bing has studied under supervise of Su Tianci, the distinguished painter who enjoy nation wide reputation. If nationalization of oil painting is ever to be realized, than Su Tianci is one of the few artists who are close to that ideal. He succeeded in presenting poetic quality of Chinese art tradition with the media of genuine oil technique. Mei Bing resembles his teacher in this respect. In recently painted work "Lily", the flowers and brushwork interact so with each other that we can hardly identify the moment when strokes switch into objects. Though inherited the manner of Su Tianci, there are elements of Impressionism and Expressionism in Mei Bing's work. The square porcelain vase and thick greenish leaves add sense of stability to the composition, counterbalanced the stirring movement of flowers. The work shows clearly characters of Chinese tradition, but the pictorial surface certainly gives strong feeling of tactility.

In my private conversation with Mei Bing, a repeated topic is why domestic painters often failed to present "the genuine character of oil painting". Turning our eyes to history, we questioned real masters of the media for what they had in common. They are all concerned with the vitality and tactility of form and modeling, and they all care about a music-like character of colours. That is to say, they all drive the best out of the media to create vivid, breathing, touchable and music like forms. Kandinsky once said a good painting lured one to reach out for it, for it does have vitality and tactility. Renoir in another case said that he always struggles to tune each colour to the highest degree. Mei Bing made particular effort to explore the oil language in his recent works. The best of these is "Communication between Two Pines", in which every single image, branches, leaves, old stone table, rockeries, gate and wall of garden, as well as people, are all beating with rhythm of vitality and tactility.

To describe form by analogy with sense of hearing is a method that has long been practiced by both Chinese and European artist. In his annotation of Music Chapter of the Book of Rites, Kong Yingda argued that "music could move people and let them imagine the form" Ma Rong went even further by declaring that "when we hear the sound, there comes in mind the image of water, or a flying swan; the water vast and mighty, the swan fluttering back and for." I'm not sure if Mei Bing willingly made use of the transformation of senses, but his new works certainly reminds me so.

The distinctive character of Mei Bing's art lies on his exploration of oil media through traditional Chinese themes. In Playing Children, the artist borrowed a motif from Song dynasty genre painting, and fully explored the "cream like" texture of oil painting.

It's amazing for Mei Bing to complete so much works in the past six months. The main theme of these works is "dialogue". The man who sit alone at lakeside sipping tea is having dialogue with nature; The arhat under the moon and withered tree is having dialogue with monkeys; The man enjoying his leisure aside an screen is having dialogue with items in the studio; The monk sitting cross-legged in a cloud of incense is having dialogue with his belief. These in fact can be seen as representation of artist's dialogue between Chinese culture and Western culture, past and present. Equipped with good knowledge of classicism, Mei Bing can put Chinese tradition into contemporary framework, and find the best expression with oil technique.

Only those who have good understanding of history, and those who accept and respect the limitations of media could possibly bring out the best of oil painting. Limitation will not harm art, on the contrary, it is necessary and nourishing for art. T. S. Elliot nominated Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe as three poets whose influence spread far beyond their language to reach every corner of the world. Those three create like God, and sublime humanity manifest through their work. Dante completed Divine Comedy with a pray:

O Light Supreme, that dost so far uplift thee
From the conceits of mortals, to my mind
Of what thou didst appear re-lend a little,
And make my tongue of so great puissance,
That but a single sparkle of thy glory
It may bequeath unto the future people.

Dante knew well that unlimited creation, that is to say, the ability of creating out of nothing, is God's privilege. All our mankind can do is no more than humble supplements for what God has created. Man can only work with what has already existed, by way of changing and coordinating, so as to make. Thus creation does not mean cheap, unrestricted new ideas. It is a restricted activity by itself. In art world, what we call creativity or originality has to satisfy two seemingly contradict requirements. On one hand an artist has to break the canon in genius way to be praised for his creativity, while on the other hand his new proposal would sooner or later become new canon. In other words, creation starts with extraordinary thought, but end with wide acceptance. Unlimited individuality is eccentricity rather than creativity. Obviously Mei Bing has already realized all these, though, like other artists of our time, he enjoys great freedom at work. Recently, Mei Bing started to pay more attention to the art of portraiture. This is a new challenge he put for himself, but with great conscious of the relation between creation and restriction, Mei Bing can be expect to reach a new height in the near future.

Translated by Cao Yiqiang



戏猿 | Teasing a Monkey

布面油画 | Oil on canvas
2007 | 100cm x 65cm



刘松年作品 | Work by Liu Songnian