

WORKS OF LIJIANGUO

李建国

作品

LIJIANGUO



湖南美术出版社

HUNAN FINE ART PUBLISHING HOUSE

临界之美

南沙

艺术并不完全是追随时代的变迁而变化的，对有些画家来说他也许定格在某种魂牵梦萦的情绪之中，而根本无须理睬周遭的纷纷扰扰。匆匆而过的人群很容易忽视这种画家的安详——甚至幽闭，但画家自己却十分固守和珍视这种内心的承诺，并赋予了一生的重量。

李建国的油画似乎给人以类似的印象。其实他职业的位置并不缺少能触类旁通的机会，生活履历也不缺少社会背景的多样刺激，但他似乎过早地将自己停留在行程中的某一段落里而不想自拔。这其中必定有着合乎情理的重要理由。从中央美院附中到北大荒插队的人生急拐弯中，李建国同时攥住了属于自己的情感因素和绘画因素，这一瞬间闪亮如此强烈，以致于照亮了今后漫长的艺术历程。于是我们看到一种茫然和希望交织的无奈心态，凝结为李建国油画中的基本质素。

虽然李建国的油画描绘的是人们习以为常的女性人体，但这里却没有东方情调式的妩媚，反而更多的是一种苦涩的思绪。也许这与记忆有关，与早期知青生活的磨难历程相涉。我们不能不注意到笼罩着这一个个女人体的环境背景，它们是晦暗的、肮脏的、粗陋的，如同恶梦缠身。因而，即使人体本身已卸去时代表征的所有衣饰，但我们仍然能从她们所处的劣质环境中体味到一种满盈的内涵。事实上，李建国的一些作品是直接吟出了知青生活的低调旋律，《仲夏》中那个与牲口同处

圈的女性，是很容易让人产生天使受难这样的悲剧性联想。

推动人们创作行为的最大力量，有许多源自自下而上状况中酸甜苦辣的折腾与激荡，但当画家收拢起奔波的翅膀，栖息于画布和颜料之间时，他却反而在追寻一种至纯至美的境界，以抚平灵魂的创伤。

在经历了“伤痕”式的控诉以后，李建国发现关怀逆境中的人性命运，其实最终是对生命本质的体认——重要的乃是生命本身，而非命运的过程。持着这样的理由，李建国开始淡化背景的实指性，将女体提携到更为抽象化的环境。这样做的结果并没有削弱表达的力度，反而在虚拟中蕴酿了更多的信息。确切地说，我们已不再关心客观环境的具体意义的表白，而视女体为纯粹的生命观照。

但这并不是说，我们便因此可能忽视背景的氛围。这种氛围更多的是由光线来营造的。我们能够发现李建国在安排人物的位置时，习惯将她们放在光明和黑暗的临界处。也许窗外已是阳光灿烂的日子，但人物所能感受到的只是残破的温暖。在更多的情形下，光线甚至并非希望中的那样明媚，反而显出刺目的侵入性，它使人物惊恐不安却又无力抗拒，不期而遇的光明已变得遥远而无法承受，是不是这些如菌的顽强生命已经习惯了潮湿背光的无奈生涯了呢？

确切地说，李建国的油画不是某个流连的故事中的情境，也不是浪漫记忆中的



(人体写生) 1987
sketch of human body



片断。它虽然与逝去的那个矛盾与困惑的年代有关，但在总体上，却升华到精神象征的层次。画面中的所有存在看似客观，却很难引导人们回归到现实——画家其实正在宣陈着一种幻象，即使这种幻象脱离现实的基础，但其信息仍然是浮动飘渺的，就象生命中难以言喻的复杂感情。

不过，李建国还是在画面中留下了钥匙，让我们开启他个人性的幻象之门。“白烛”和“青苹果”的符号，部分地提示了画家内心的秘密，也点明了绘画的主题。从符号本身看，这些物品正隐含着生命冲动的象征性，尤其是“青苹果”，它让人自然联想到有关“伊甸园”的古老传说，使之与诱惑、冲动、青春的欢愉以及惩罚等原罪的概念紧密相连。因此，在这样的“禁果”面前，笼罩着“失乐园”的迷雾，女体流露出的焦虑与抑郁情绪也就不足为怪了，阴幽的气氛和隐喻的指向，正是用来挖掘人性内心的惶惑感受。值得一提的是，李建国在“青苹果”系列中，标上“四月”、“五月”、“六月”……的序列，这种如季节坠落的趋势和“白烛”消融的过程一样，似乎是为了见证时光的流逝，而生命本身也逐渐走向颓败的结局，所有的激情将最终消耗为虚无。

李建国的油画一直没有停止过对某种“临界”状态的关注，无论是明与暗、冲动与抑郁，道德与原欲、茫然与希望，他笔下的人物总在这两者中间的地带徘徊和漫游。这种不可言喻的矛盾心迹，却使他的艺术产生令人回味的“临界”之美。



(1900年·画家) 帆布·140cm × 140cm·1989 (与时卫平合作)
studio 1990 cooperated with Mr. Shi Weiping



(人体写生) 帆布·60cm × 50cm·1987
sketch of human body

永恒的女性

徐虹

80年代以来的中国人体绘画，在借鉴西方古典人体绘画这一点上是共同的选择。在这一共同基础上，有的画家侧重将西方古典人体绘画中包含的人文理想转换为当代中国人的“儿女情长”，以突出本土文化的情境。另一些画家则试图改变西方人体绘画经常具有的公众文化背景，而营造符合中国文化观念的个人和私密意味。

这些特点在李建国的作品中都有所表现，但在不同时期的作品中有不同的追求。他所画的女性裸体结构分明，曲线清晰，造型丰满，体现了传统经典叙事的“丰裕”象征，“性”象征和男性幻想中的“美”象征。“她们”与现实的中国女性形体有一定的距离，这是西方古典经典的女性人体如提香、委拉斯贵支、安格尔、戈雅以及印象派画家所描画的女性裸体在中国艺术家心灵中的折射。无论从典雅的神情、优美的姿态，还是光线、细节和背景的处理，都能看出李建国潜心研习大师名作的心得。这些研习又是与他心目中理想的中国女性人体结合起来的，比如肢体的比例、动作的含蓄有节制等，透出一种历史的气息，象尘封的老房子被突然打开了朝街的窗口，清新的春风使昏暗的屋子充满生机，然而春和景明仍去不掉索寞气息，心身的真正自由舒展还得有待投入阳光灿烂的旷野中……。这种历史感从他笔下略带羞涩而拘谨的人体姿势中体现出来；“她们”从不坦然面对观众，或是用黑发挡住了双颊，在扭过头去的瞬间，观众仿佛能觉察到不轻松的呼吸。“她们”

是历史过程中的“旧照片”，反射的是一个略带苦涩的光辉。

西方经典女人体，一直照耀着西方美术史长廊，成为永恒艺术象征。通过这种象征表达出的人生态度和理想，承受了人类各种不同的欲望，从生命、正义、到邪恶和死亡，并且贯穿于整个西方的神话、宗教、历史和文学中。中国文化史没有这种将“女人体”符号化的习惯，只有千篇一律的“脸面”以及裙钗之类才是女人的文化象征。这些象征物中，女人是母亲妻子和情妇，与西方“女人体”的人文理想比较，中国女性角色显然更现实和世俗化。虽然“母亲”与一种族繁衍的理想希望维系一起，但与其他角色区分不开的仍然是个人和家庭的需要，并不具有彼岸的承诺和抽象的理想，因此，相对应的，也没有承担人类邪恶的义务……。从李建国作品中，最能体会到中国社会男性在对待女性的文化态度，是一种私家的日常情感。他的女人体的背景，经常有一块平民家庭所用的那种陈旧织物，一排粗糙的木栅，潮湿的墙地，简陋的窗框，昔日的“老虎灶”的木桶和石板，或者是一个乡村牲口圈等，显示日出而作，日落而息，结婚生子，吃饭劳作的日常环境。他画面中的女人体大都具有“贤妻”、“良母”式的温顺、健康和沉静，是居家过日子的“可人儿”。虽然，这些“女裸”形体结构参照西方经典形象，与现实生活中削肩薄胸、细腿突腹、矮小瘦黄的形象相去甚远，甚至女性的“性征”都显得十分突出，但“她们”

显然不是西方的“爱神”和“智慧女神”，更不是流溢着感官欢愉和动物性活力的女性。“她们”是中国现实中被理想化了的“女人”，所谓“用一片温柔的心撑起了一个世界”的中国男性梦想的家庭妇女。

西方古典女人体的经典化模式所赋予的“丰裕”、“欢乐”、“美的理想”符号，成



《人体写生》亚麻布·80cm × 60cm · 1990
sketch of human body

《青苹果》帆布·80cm × 60cm · 1991
Green apple



为一种传统，为西方社会广泛认同。中国的“女人体”出现时间较晚，经历时间较短，还未及形成某种为民族文化认同的象征模式。现有的女性人体形象的两大资源，只能是学院的写生课堂和画家私人生活经验。许多中国画家通过对西方绘画的学习，对西方人体形象用个人经验和个人理想加以移植改造。李建国的作品显然与他个人经历相关，他作为一名“知青”曾经在黑龙江“改天换地”，他青春时代的热情、幻想和渴求，都是与广袤的黑土地联系在一起。画面中频频出现的朴实的农村环境，燃烧的蜡烛，女人的朴素沉默的表情，甚至那拘谨和腼腆，那细细的错落参差的珍珠项链，那村姑般的短发，都散发出一种基于乡村环境的怀旧和质朴的丰饶与清新，让人感到一种亲切和温馨的抚摸过的感情记忆，照旧给人感动和叹息。值得一提的是，他屡屡在他的“偶像”边画上一只青苹果，无论西方典故中对“青苹果”作如何解释，在他画中出现“青苹果”与那花布、蜡烛一样，含有个人生活的记忆与愿望，与曾经有过的激情波动和生动记忆有关，是属画家个人最珍贵、最隐密的爱情的礼物……。

无论在生活中，还是在艺术中，女性都是永恒的，李建国画中的女性蕴含着记忆中的纯朴和清新。虽然纯朴清新不一定是精神世界的最高境界，但它是最值得忆念和眷恋的境界。以纯朴和清新阐释女性形体，也许是永远不会过时的艺术现象。



《风景》 亚麻布·80cm × 60cm·1998
Landscape



《写生》1983
sketch

《写生》1979
sketch



《写生》1979
sketch



Bordering Beauty

Nan Sha

Simply from the perspective of an individual's experience, art is not entirely changing in accordance with the passage of time. For a certain painter, she might be perpetually set in a particular complex which she clings to, while paying no attention to the clamor and disturbance around. The hasty passersby easily overlook the tranquillity, even isolation of the painter. However, the painter him/herself fully keeps and cherishes the promise in heart, to which she anchors his/her whole life.

Li Jianguo's paintings seem to give the viewers this impression. Actually, his occupation does not deprive him of any opportunity for extensive contact with and comprehension of the outside world and his life does not lack various stimulation of the society. However, he seems to settle down too early in one phase of his journey with no intention of new starting off, for which there must be critical or reasonable causes. At the sharp turn of his life from the senior middle school to the Great Northern Wilderness where he, as a young graduate, was sent to live and work, Li Jianguo simultaneously took possession of both his own emotional and artistic belongings. The enlightenment of this moment was so strong that it lightened up the long artistic journey then onward. Then we can see, a sense of helplessness blended with both bewilderment and hope constitutes the basic element in his oil-painting.

Although in Li Jianguo's works women figures which viewers are so used to are depicted, there is no oriental charm but a medley of bitter thoughts. Perhaps it is connected with his memories, and the tough and testing times in his early life as a young graduate sent to the countryside. We can hardly ignore the settings surrounding the women figures, which are dim, filthy, shabby and nightmarish. Accordingly, although the figure herself is taken off all the clothes and ornamentation typical of a particular time, we can still sense the fully contained messages from the banal environment they are situated. In fact, some of Li's works directly croon the low melodies of those young intellectuals' life, such as one represented by a painting titled *Mid-Summer*, in which

a woman is put in a corner with a draught animal. This can easily arouse empathic imagination of a suffering angel.

The greatest power that propels people's creativity largely comes from the trials and agitation in life. When a painter folds his restless wings and settles down in his canvas and oils, he is pursuing a state of utmost purity and beauty to heal the wound of his soul. After protesting the scarring experience of his life as well as that of a whole generation of young intellectuals, Li Jianguo has discovered that the concern of human destiny in adversities is literally the ultimate understanding of the essential nature of life--it is life itself that matters rather than the process. As a result, Li Jianguo starts to reduce the realism of the settings and to locate his women figures in a more abstract background. This does not weaken the forcefulness of his expressiveness; on the contrary, it subsumes more information in a fictitious environment. To put it more precisely, he no longer cares about representing the concrete meaning of an objective environment, but conceives of women figures as a pure reflection of life.

But this is not to say that hence we can ignore the ambience of the settings, which, to a greater extent, is created by the use of light. We can find that when Li is arranging the positions of the figures, he is used to placing them in a border area between the light and dark. Maybe outside the window the sun is shining brilliantly, but the figures in the pictures can only feel the waning warmth. In more situations, even the light is not as bright as expected, rather it turns out to be strikingly offensive and aggressive to the eyes, panicking the helpless figures. The unexpectedly confronted light becomes distant and unbearable. Is it the case that those fungus-like unyielding lives have been so acclimated to the helpless living in the damp and dark?

To put it aptly, Li's paintings do not consist of particular situations in a long told story or fragments in romantic memories. Although it is concerned with the gone-by age full of controversies and confusions, it is, as a whole, forcing itself to a higher point of spiritual symbolism. Ostensi-



bly objective, all the images in his paintings can hardly lead the viewers back to the reality--the painter is in fact introducing a world of fantasy, which, similar to the complex feelings in our lives, though derived from reality, is still vague and indefinable in its messages.

In spite of this, Li Jianguo has left in his paintings the key to the door of his own fantasies. The signifying *White Candles* and *Green Apples* partly reveal the secrets in his inner world and the motif of paintings. As for the signifiers per se, those objects are emblems of human impulses; especially the green apple, which is closely related to the concepts of temptation, drives, pleasures of youth, sin and punishment, naturally reminds the audience of the old legend of Garden of Eden. Therefore, before the forbidden fruit enclosed by the mist of the lost paradise, it is no wonder that the female figures betray repressed anxieties. The sullen atmosphere and figurative implications are just constructed to uncover the perturbed feelings in human heart. One thing worth mentioning is that Li numbers his series of *Green Apples* in an order of 'April, May, June, etc.'. Such season-like permutation, similar to the melting of candles, seems to testify the elapse of time, while life itself goes gradually towards the dilapidated end with all its passions finally consumed to naught.

Li Jianguo has never stopped his concerning with certain bordering states in his paintings. Whether light or dark, impulsive or repressed, moral or sensual, helpless or hopeful, the figures under his brushwork are always lingering and wandering in the middle territory between the opposite sides. However, the inarticulate contradictory feelings render his art a lasting flavor of bordering beauty.

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Eternal Femininity

Xu Hong

Chinese figure paintings since 1980s have come to the common choice of modeling western classic figures. Based on the same foundation, some painters concern themselves more with adapting humanitarianism in the western tradition to sensibilities of modern Chinese people, aiming at the foregrounding of native cultural context. Other painters, however, attempt to alter the public cultural background common in western figure paintings and to create a sense of personal privacy and intimacy in conformance with Chinese cultural norms.

These characteristics are all present in Li Jianguo's works but in different periods they exemplify the artist's varied pursuit. The women nudes in his paintings are distinct in composition, clear in shaping and well filled-out in body, symbolizing such qualities in classic epics as 'abundance', 'sexuality' and 'beauty' in male fancy. These female 'they', to some extent, are distant from Chinese women in reality and in a Chinese painter's heart, reflections of the western classic women figures, such as those depicted by Titian, Goya, and the impressionists. Be it the graceful expression, elegant bearing of the figures or the delicate treatment of light, details and background, it easily tells Li's achievement of applying himself to the study and copying of masterworks. These studies are further combined with the ideal Chinese women figures held in his heart. For instance, the proportion of their limbs, the reserved control of their movements all suggest a historical ambience. It is just like that in an old, dust-covered house, a window facing the street suddenly opens and the fresh spring wind brings life to the dim rooms, but the tender and bright spring time still cannot remove the sullen and melancholy atmosphere and the real freedom of heart and body has to be awaited until a plunge into the brilliantly sunlit wilderness. This sense of history is revealed by the shy and reserved postures of those figures¹²¹ they never face the viewers directly, their black hair sheltering their cheeks; with their faces turned away, their inhibited breathing can almost be sensed by the audience. They are 'old photographs' in the historical process, reflecting the glory of an age tainted with bitterness, longing and seeking.

Western classic women figures shining in the gallery of art history have become the everlasting symbol of art. It expresses the values and ideals of life, demonstrates the desires of human kind, from life, justice to evil and death, and threads the entire text of western myths, religion, history and literature. In Chinese cultural history, there is no convention of using female figures as emblems or signifying codes; only the never-changing 'faces', shirts or hair pins are the cultural symbols of femininity. Of all the symbolized ideas, women are mothers, wives and mistresses. Compared with the humanitarianism found in western female bodies, the roles of Chinese women tend to be more realistic and vernacular. Although the concept of 'mother' is closely related to the ideal and hope of race reproduction, what cannot be separated from other roles is still the one to satisfy the need of individuals and family, which does not incur any promise of an after-life and any abstract aspirations, and which accordingly, does not imply an obligation to carry the good and evil of human beings. In Li Jianguo's works, one can easily sense the cultural attitude of Chinese men toward women, a common daily feeling in a private home. The background of his women figures often includes an old fabric easily found in ordinary families, a set of roughly-made sideboards, damp walls and floors, wooden bucket and stone plate of the old kitchen range, or a livestock pen, all of which show a daily life of laboring from sunrise to sunset, of marriage and child-bearing, and of eating and working. The figures in his paintings are often characterized as docile, healthy and placid, typical of a good wife and a loving mother, lovable for her devoted caring of her home. The shapes of these nudes, modeled on western classic figures, differ drastically from the short and skinny Chinese women in reality with sloping shoulders, flat breast, thin thighs and bulging stomach. They have salient sex features, but obviously bear no similarity with the western 'Venus'; neither are they women full of sensual pleasures and desirability. They are idealized women in Chinese reality, so-called housewives, who support a world with their tender shoulders in Chinese men's

dreams.

The tokens of 'abundance', 'joy' and 'dream of beauty' granted by the classic schema of western women figures have become a convention widely accepted by western society. However, Chinese women figures emerged much later with shorter history hence formed no symbolic pattern recognized and accepted by the nation's culture. Current resources of women figures only exist in the in-class sketching in academies and private life experiences of painters. Many Chinese painters, through their study of western paintings, transplant and modify the image of western figures according to their personal experiences and ideals. It's easy to see that Li's works are related to his past experience -- he spent his youth in Heilongjiang Province trying to transform the appearance of the land as an 'educated youth' in Culture Revolution -- all of his passions, longings and fancies in his youth were connected with the vast black soil land. In his paintings, the frequently employed countryside background, the burning candles, the simple and silent facial expression of women, even the reserved and abashed complexion, the tenuous and beautifully set pearl necklace, and the short hair of the village girl, all convey a nostalgia for a pastoral life with all the richness and freshness of simplicity, which brings back sincere, warm and touchable memories and feelings invariably moving and sigh-provoking. One thing that should be mentioned is that he always puts green apples beside his 'idols'. No matter how the green apple is interpreted in western allusion, the apple in his paintings, similar to the patterned cloth and candles, contains his memories and hopes in his personal experience, linked to the passion and vivid recalling he has ever had. It is the painter's most precious and secret gift of love.

Be it in art or in life, the femininity is eternal. Women figures in Li Jianguo's paintings retain the purity and freshness in his memory. Although they are not the ultimate realm in his spiritual world, it is his most memorable and cherished land. Maybe to portray female figures with purity and freshness will be an artistic phenomenon never out of date.

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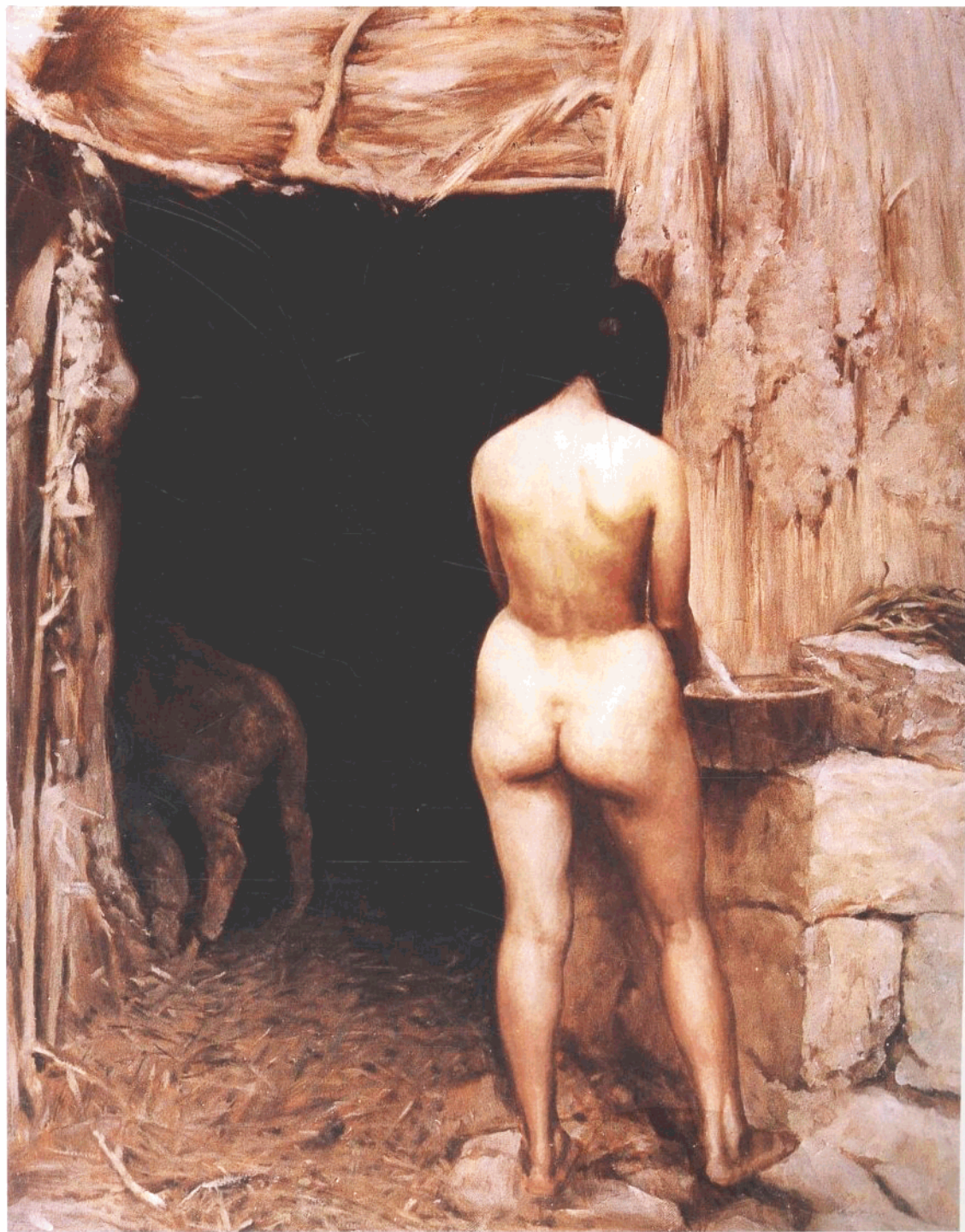
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13 春日	Spring Day
14 白烛·晓风	White Candle, Dawn Wind
15 青苹果·伊甸园	Green Apple, Paradise
16 白烛	White Candle
17 青苹果·八月	Green Apple, August
18 青苹果·落下	Green Apple, Falling
19 青苹果·午后	Green Apple, Afternoon
20 青苹果·夏日	Green Apple, Summer Day
21 春雨	Spring Rain
22 山梦	Mountain Dream
23 春雨	Spring Rain
24 青苹果的故事	The Story of Green Apple
25 遥远的安大略湖之一	Remote Lake Ontario (1)
26 遥远的安大略湖之二	Remote Lake Ontario (2)
27 遥远的安大略湖之三	Remote Lake Ontario (3)
28 遥远的安大略湖之五	Remote Lake Ontario (5)
29 人体	Human Body
30 遥远的安大略湖之六	Remote Lake Ontario (6)
31 青苹果	Green Apple
32 童年的路路	Lulu in His Childhood
33 金石滩	Jinshi Beach
34 春风	The Spring Wind
35 遥远的安大略湖之七	Remote Lake Ontario (7)
36 清晨	Morning
艺术简历	ART RESUME



《北大荒的回忆》亚麻布·80cm × 60cm · 1980
Recollections of the Great Northern Wilderness



《战友们》 亚麻布 · 140cm × 130cm · 1984
Comrades-in-army

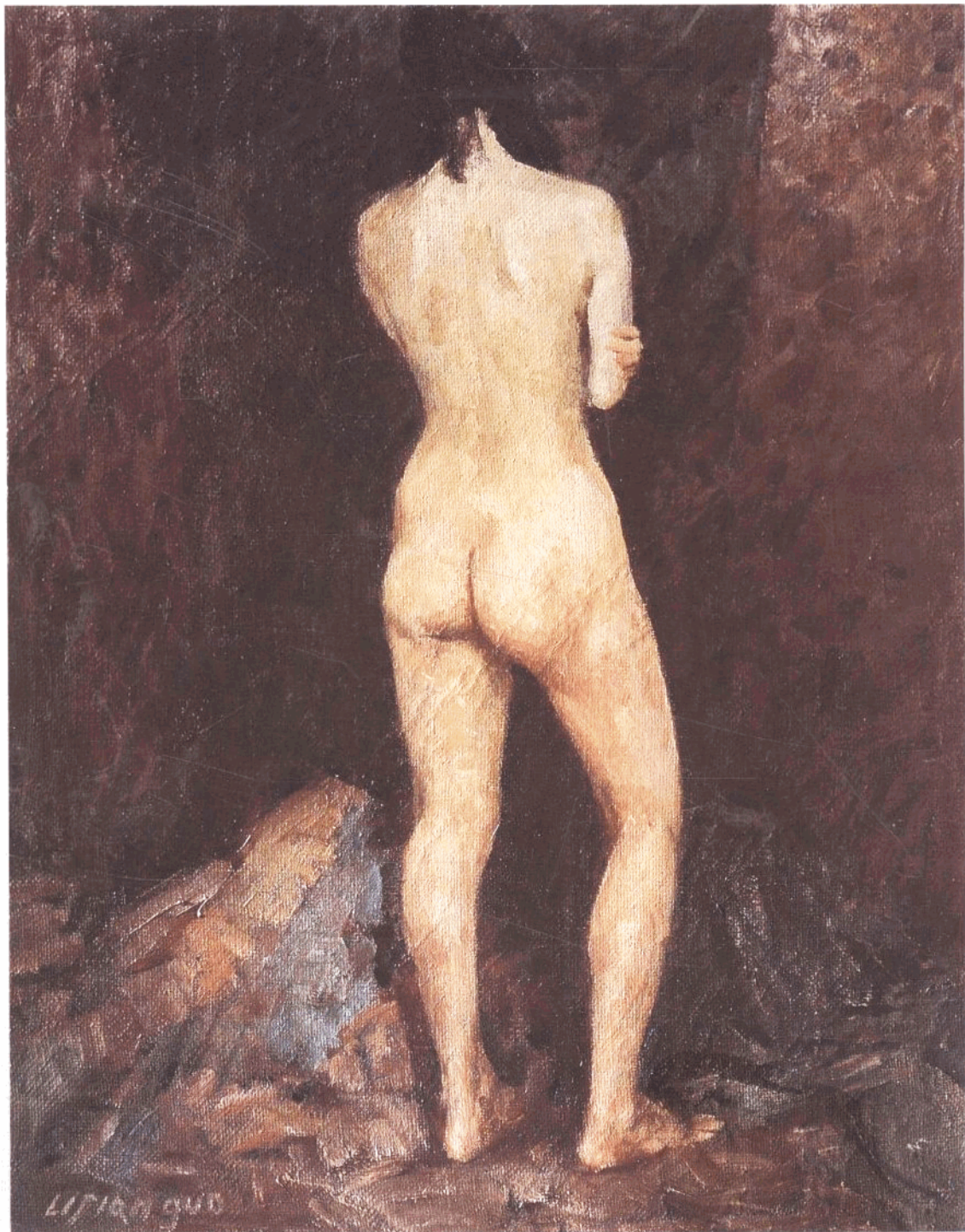


《仲夏》亚麻布·80.3cm × 65.2cm · 1991

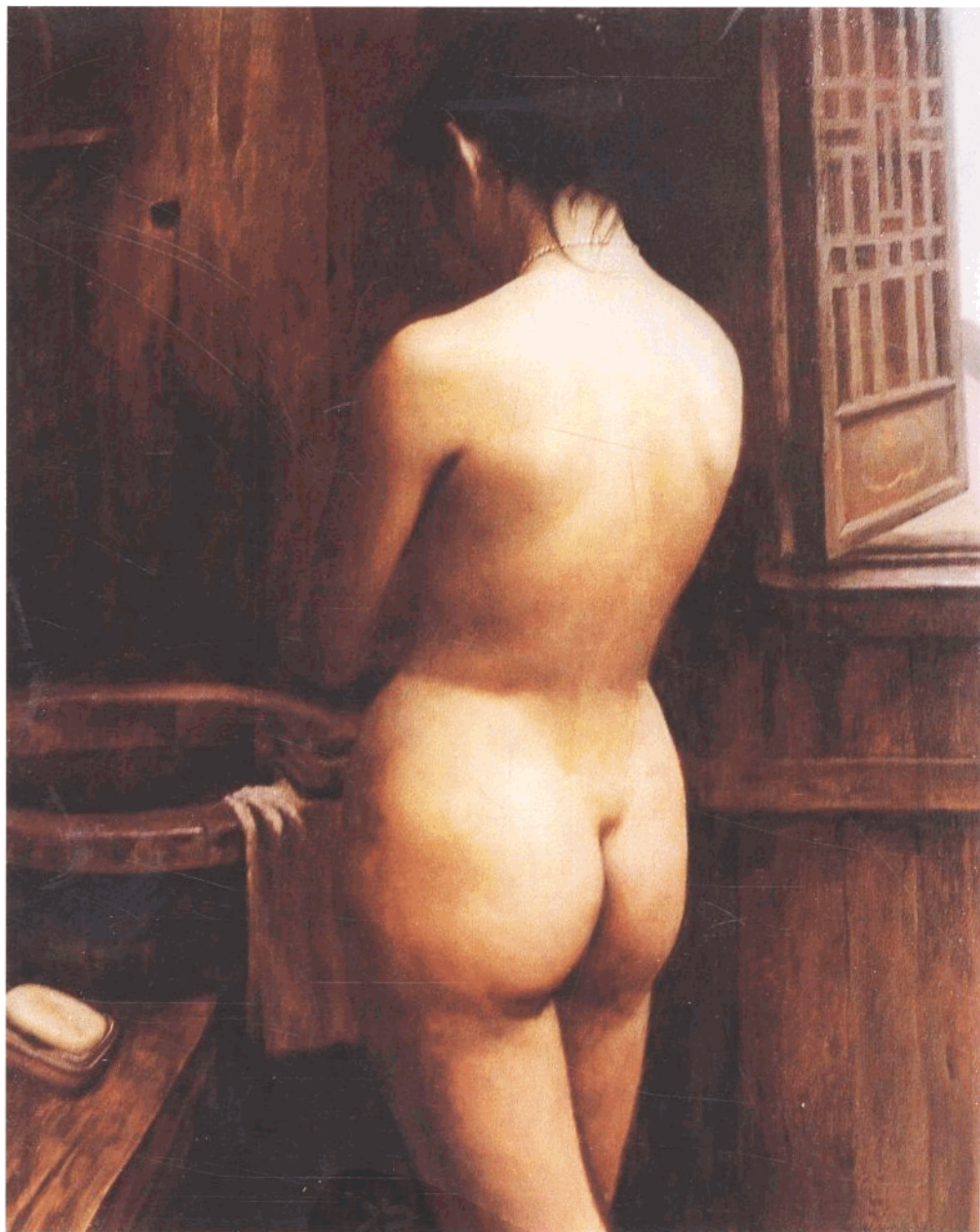
Midsummer



《童年的回忆》亚麻布·80cm × 80cm · 1990
Recollections of Childhood



《人体写生》亚麻布·80cm × 60cm · 1990
Sketch of Human Body



《午后》亚麻布·80cm × 60cm · 1991

Afternoon



《五月》亚麻布·80.3cm × 65.4cm·1993

May



《白烛》亚麻布·72cm × 60.5cm·1992

White Candle



《红烛》亚麻布·85cm × 85cm·1993

Red Candle