

# 李志强画

COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS  
BY LI ZHIQIANG

# 集



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# 心灵的处女地

——《李志强画集》序

冯骥才

印度大诗人泰戈尔有句诗：  
“鸟儿愿为一团云，云儿愿为一只鸟。”

当代世界城乡之间，也在强烈地表现着这种奇妙的心态。农民大批涌向城市，他们不单谋求一份付现金的工作，更向往城市乱花迷眼的繁华，撩动着购物欲的千奇百怪的商品，以及无所不在的机遇；而久居都市的人们，心灵却痴望着远离尘嚣的田野山川。他们终日被水泥切割的空间闭锁着，阳光、月色、绿意与微风，只能享受些许；雨点般纷繁的信息使他们的心潮难得片刻的波平浪静；在过多相互竞争中，愈来愈少信赖，愈来愈多戒备、排它和绞尽脑汁的精明……哪儿才是心儿的安憩之所？于是，他们要重返大自然，回归原始，寻觅未被现代社会浸染过的处女地。这是现代人的苦闷，也是现代人的梦想。哪怕在那里活得单调乏味，清贫荒寂，只要真实纯朴，随心所欲就好，就象画家李志强为我们展现的这一方天地。

这天地里有充足的阳光，到处流动着无污染、多氧的空气，大片大片肥沃的绿地，盛壮的植物，深幽的水潭以及倒影其间行走的白云，再有便是那些散发着青草和木头清香的村舍了。画中人物，生活方式古老，绝无现代痕迹。那酣睡树荫里的裸女，闲坐的村妇，吹打着乐器的汉子，全都悠闲自在。他们的面上很少表情，甚至有些象画面上那些公牛的神态，平静得发呆，可能正是这样才没有半点紧张和一丝压力。人物的心律与大自然的节律，一样的平和舒缓，一如中世纪的田园牧歌那样令人神往，但这不是一种缅怀，一种复古，而正是现代人渴求的抚慰啊。

也许画家追求得过于鲜明，他的语言(包括风格、形式、方法、色彩)都那么清晰明白。画面上很少无关的细节，景物接近简单，色彩多是原色，有时一大块原色摆上去，有如山歌，没有伴奏，都是心的叫喊；笔触拙重，避免任何俏皮的意味；一切一切，朴素无华，追求着纯而又纯。那幅《母与子》中相互亲吻的母子两张脸干脆是一块纯白，世上还有比这种爱更纯洁无暇？画家笔下的人物，在略略夸张和变形中全都圆厚结实，肉重肌沉，充斥着生命的元气；画家极力张扬人体的力量，以至把人物的情绪表现也排除在外，是不是要将这生命本身的纯净做为社会理想的象征？

艺术是艺术家的生命方式，也是他个人的精神天堂。然而，艺术家生活在世人中间，他与世人一同呼吸，一同吃穿，一同苦乐，他最自我的画面也会成为同时代人的心灵图象。因此，本集中的作品，不管在方法上有多少写实成份，它的精神实质却地地道道是理想主义的。这理想既属于画家本人，也属于同时代人，但它不是对现代生活的厌弃与痛绝，而是对人类生存方式更完美的追求与梦想。

这便是李志强这些作品的价值。而李志强这些作品还有另一层价值，便是他在把西方现代绘画(后期印象主义，如高更、马蒂斯等)与中国民间文化(民歌、年画、剪纸等)相结合所做出的令人注目的努力。相信每个读者都能从中得出高明的见解，我遂停下手中之笔，与画家本人一同静静地侧耳恭听。

1992.8.天津三乐斋

# The Virgin Soil of One's Soul

Foreword to

Li Zhiqiang's

A Collection of Paintings

Feng Ji-cai

The following lines are taken from a poem by the great Indian poet Tagore:

"The bird would like to be a cloud, and the cloud would like to be a bird."

Between town and country in the contemporary world, such a marvellous state of mind is being strongly expressed. Large numbers of peasants are pouring into cities. They not only want to obtain jobs paid in cash, but are more yearning for the dazzling glories of the city, the various kinds of strange and novel goods that will tantalize their shopping desire, and the ubiquitous opportunities.

On the contrary, for those who have lived in cities for a long time, their souls are wistfully thinking of open country, mountains and rivers far away from the hubbub of cities. They are confined all day within a space partitioned by cement-concrete slabs, and as to sunshine, moonlight, the sense of greenness and gentle breeze, they can only enjoy a little. The numerous and complicated pieces of information like rain drops have made it hard for the lake of their heart to have a short while of the calming down of the stormy waves. In the mutual competition between overmany people, trust becomes less and less, and alertness, exclusion and shrewdness to the point of racking one's brains become more and more. Where then is the place that can set one's mind at rest? Consequently, they want to be back to nature and back to the primitive to seek a virgin land unspoiled by contemporary society. This is the depression of contemporaries, and also their fond dream. However monotonous, poor and desolate the living there may be, it will be all right, so long as one can be really honest and unsophisticated, and do as one pleases as if in the region of heaven and earth unfolded before our eyes by the painter Li Zhiqiang.

This world is full of sunshine, and everywhere is the flowing unpolluted and much-oxygen air, vast stretches of fertile green land, flourishing plants, deep and quiet pools, and inverted reflection of floating clouds in water. Besides, those village cottages are sending forth the fragrance of thatch and wood. The figures in the paintings and the mode of life are archaic without any modern vestige in the least. The naked girl fast asleep in the tree shade, the leisurely-sitting village women, and the men playing Chinese wind and percussion instruments are all leisurely carefree. Their faces show very little expressions, even some like those of the bulls on the tableau, so perfectly quiet as if in a trance. Probably it is exactly due to this state, they look without the least bit of nervousness and a trace of pressure. The heart rhythm of the figures, and nature's rhythm are equally mild and leisurely, just like the enchanting pastoral song in the Middle Ages. Neither is this a cherished memory of the past, nor a restoration to ancient ways, but it is just the consolation the contemporaries are yearning for.

Perhaps what the painter is in pursuit of is so excessively distinct that his language including style, form, method and colour is very clear and obvious. Very few of the details on the general appearance of a picture are found of no importance, the scenery approaches simplicity, and most colours are primary colours, and sometimes a large patch of primary colour is put on, like a folk song without accompaniment. It is all a call of the heart. His heavy and awkward touches in Chinese paintings avoid any smack of smartness. Everything is simple and unadorned, and what the painter is after is the pure of the purest. In the painting of "Mother and Son", the two faces of mother and son kissing each other is simply a patch of pure white. Can't there be any other love more pure and flawless than this ever found in the world? Except for some slight exaggeration and deformation, the figures under the painter's brush are all round, thick, sturdy, muscular, and full of vitality. The painter has done his utmost to publicize the strength of the human body, so much so that the emotional expressions of the figures are excluded. Is it not that the purity of the life itself should be regarded as the social ideal symbol?

Art is the mode of life of artists, and is also his own mental heaven. As artists live among the people in the world, he breathes, eats, and shares weal and woe together with the people, and his most self-expressing general appearance of his paintings can become the image of the contemporary souls. Therefore, no matter how much realistic composition is involved in the method, the mental essence of the works in this Collection is pure idealism. This ideal belongs to both the painter himself and the contemporaries. It does not detest, reject, and hate bitterly the contemporary life. Instead, it is pursuit and dream of keeping perfecting the mode of human existence.

This is the value of these works by Li Zhiqiang. In addition, there is another phase of value in regard to his paintings, that is, he has managed to make eye-catching endeavour in combining the Western contemporary painting post-impressionism, such as Gauguin and Matisse with Chinese folk culture (such as folk song, New Year picture, and paper cutting.) I believe our readers can get from it some brilliant views. Now I put down my pen and together with the painter listen to their opinions attentively.

August, 1992

Sanlezhai, Tianjin

# 真 诚

——李志强其人其画

侯军

那一回，李志强跑到西双版纳去写生，去时兴高采烈，回来后却对我说：“不行，没找到感觉，一张画也没画成！”

过些天，他因公去大西北，本来没打算画画，回来时却兴高采烈，对我说：“嘿，这回找着感觉了，画了一大批画！”

我笑道：“你果真是黄土地的儿子！”

旧时曾有一联语云：“骏马秋风冀北，杏花春雨江南”，表面上写的是大江南北的不同景致，实质上却揭示了中国文化的同源异流，体现在美学观念上，前者尚阳刚，后者重阴柔；前者多壮美，后者多柔美；前者如烈酒，后者若清茶。李志强生于冀北幽燕之地，长于海河之滨。中国北方淳厚粗豪的民风浸润着他，黄河文明的营养，也早已不知不觉地渗入了他的血脉和骨髓，因此，他似乎同黄河以北的黄土大漠有着与生俱来的亲情，对这方水土所孕育的阳刚之美粗犷之美野性之美，则更是一拍即合一见钟情一往情深。江南的丽山秀水、玉女金童、杏花春雨固然可以成为许多画家百画不厌的题材，但却无法激发李志强的创作灵感。他固执地抵制纤细柔弱，抵制妩媚甜俗，甚至抵制婷婷玉立、婀娜多姿。他爱画人体，他把人体视为大自然最杰出、最无与伦比的创造。然而，他却执拗地不肯把瘦弱、纤细、病态的曲线和搔首弄姿赋予他的人物。尽管，贾宝玉早就讲过：“女人都是水做的”；尽管，水和女人都是自古公认的阴柔之美的极致，但是她们到了李志强笔下，却象被灌入了无穷的生命力，那么强壮、那么丰满、那么“足绷”，肌肉中仿佛蕴藏着内在的张力，再加上那粗犷的线条，奔放的笔触、大面积纵横涂抹的色块，都使画面中的女性充溢着北方所特有的骨气豪力丈夫气，既使是以傣族妇女为母题所创作的西双版纳系列油画，他也无例外地注入了某种粗犷的阳刚之气，使素以柔媚似水著称的傣家女，也凭添了几分壮美的因子。而这恰恰是李志强心目中的理想之美。

他天性喜爱那莽莽荒原猎猎秋风；喜爱那力的狂腾情的狂热；喜爱那纯朴的黄土地和与黄土一般纯朴的男人和女人。他为他们造像为他们传神，为他们勾勒未加修饰的线条，辅洒未经调和的颜料，他想画出他们的本色原色特色，他想追出他们的神情神韵神髓。然而不论他怎样去画去追，最终留在画上的主人公却只有一个，那就是画家自己。

画如其人，李志强的画质朴得出奇，那是因为他本人出奇的质朴；李志强的画色彩反差极大，黑白红黄蓝，泾渭分明，绝少中间色，那是因为他本人色彩反差极大，喜怒哀乐皆形之于色，从来不掩饰；李志强的画总是透着一种纯真的稚拙感，仿佛一个孩子洞开的心窗，那是因为他本人至今依然保持着孩子般的天真，虽然在他的眸子里并不缺少机敏甚至狡诈，然而每当他调皮地向你挤挤眼睛时，你却分明看到了

一泓清澈见底的心泉。

李志强爱画公牛，那是雄强和伟力的象征。在《大地》中、在《女人、孩子和牛》中，在《太阳出来喜洋洋》中都有。然而他笔下的公牛虽然强悍，虽然壮健，但又何等温顺、何等憨厚，充满了脉脉温情。难怪他常说：“这些公牛全都象我！”

## 二

李志强1982年毕业于天津美院国画系。可是在此后的艺术履历中，却留下了很长一段时间的空白，就像是乐曲中出现了不应有的休止符。

1984年，年方29岁的李志强被任命为久负盛名的杨柳青画社社长，随后又兼任了总编辑。他在领导岗位上干了一就是七年，锻炼了他思维的敏锐、决策的果断和分析问题的严谨全面。但是，繁重的行政工作也迫使放下了画笔，天长日久，人们几乎忘记了他会画画，只知道他是一位精明干练的领导者。他自己也不得不压抑着不时涌动的创作激情，把全部精力投入画社的事业。

如果不是一个偶然的契机，强烈地触动了他的心弦，或许，他会轻车熟路地干一辈子行政管理，从此不再作画。然而，值得庆幸的是，命运之神刚好在一个关键的十字路口，给他安排了一次不大不小的屈辱，结果倒促使他浴火再生——那是全国某协会的一次年会，李志强以画社社长的身份应邀赴会。但在会议开幕前的一瞬，一位工作人员看看他递上的人会表格，竟毫不客气地说：“我们这是画家的协会，你是行政官员，又不是画家，怎么能参加？”李志强一时语塞。他没作任何解释，悄然离开了会场。他漫无目的地在街上游荡，心中填满了无以言状的屈辱和郁闷。尽管在他缺席的情况下，与会代表们仍把他选为理事，但这却丝毫不能补偿他内心所受到的重创。回到家里，他铁青着脸对妻子说：“从今天起，我要画画了！”

象火山喷发，象溶岩奔流，压抑得愈久，爆发力愈大。他象一头因禁多年的蛮牛。一旦挣脱羁绊，便拼命狂奔。他画得好苦——没有人算得出他熬过多少不眠之夜，没有人知道为了挤出一点作画的时间，他要费几番运筹，计几多分钟。人们只看见他上下班的自行车上，从此多了一个驮带画框的支架；只看见他的画作越来越多地出现在各类展厅里、画刊上；只看见他为了开拓新的艺术天地，风雨无阻地出入母校，在进修修了三年油画；只看见他在画社的管理和决策上，视野更加开

阔，目光更加锐利，更加胸有成竹，如虎添翼……

渐渐地，人们的眼光变了，不再只把他看作一个行政领导，一个“官儿”。他终于以加倍的心血和汗水，以惊人的牛劲和韧劲，重新迈上了他几年来魂牵梦绕的艺术之路。

## 三

李志强的艺术之足，第一步便迈向了黄土，迈向了民间，迈向了西风古道，迈向了滚滚黄沙。

十多年前，当他还是一个年轻气盛时，他就被山西芮城那片黄土高坡上的永乐宫壁画迷住了。在那黑洞洞的大殿里，他虔诚虔诚，笔追神摹，那一根根飞动的线条，那一缕缕飘拂的须发，令他叹服，令他沉醉，令他寝食俱废，令他物我两忘。正是永乐宫壁画，使他参悟了中国传统绘画“骨法用笔”的精髓，并练就了过硬的线条功夫。而更重要的是，将他最早带入了黄河文化的艺术氛围，使他对华夏艺术中所蕴藏的雄强之美雄壮之美雄浑之美，有了最初的认知和崇拜，这就如同一粒艺术的籽种，一落地便把根须扎在了民族民间的黄土垄上。

比永乐宫更向西去的敦煌，是李志强心目中的另一个艺术圣地。十年前他闯进大漠，在鸣沙山下一住就是一个多月。在这里，他沐浴着中华先民从远古传递而来的美的灵光，他体味着那熔铸于绚烂色彩与奇诡造型之中华的真谛。他曾经蛰居于狭仄身身的洞窟，借助微弱的光线摹画壁上的飞天；他曾经冒着危险攀上几十米高的峭壁，钻进人迹罕至的小洞，去寻觅那被他人遗忘的艺术奇葩；他曾经饿饿交加，“弹尽粮绝”，以至情急之下，打电话向初交的女友求助“几双宣纸，几管颜料”……这些往事，他很少对人提起。然而，当众人看到他那一卷卷精心摹绘的敦煌彩图时，顿时明白了：原来李志强在搁笔多年之后能如此迅速地重新崛起，并不是偶然的！

李志强象渴鹰饿虎般地由滚滚黄沙弥漫黄沙厚黄土中，吮吸着中华民族的传统艺术的养份，并由此构筑起自己的美学观念。他不媚俗，不邀宠，不怕被别人讥笑，为土为丑为憨为笨，他将拙朴自然视为更高层面的美。为了追求这种美，他拒绝雕饰拒绝浮滑拒绝细腻拒绝纤巧，他宁可粗陋宁可稚拙宁可生涩甚至宁可丑陋。而这却恰好使他的艺术生面别开，迥异于人。从他的某些画作中已经初露以大朴而近大雅的风貌。

与这种美学观念一脉相承，他还特别喜爱民间艺术。除了他所擅擅的民间年画之外，举凡各地民间流行的剪纸、泥



塑、编织、刺绣、木雕、砖刻乃至民间玩具、民间泥模，只要沾上“民间”二字，他都爱不释手。在他的多幅工笔重彩画中，若《夫妻逗趣》、若《兰花花》、若《看秧歌》、若《茉莉花》，无不深深地打下了民间艺术影响的烙印。

同样基于这种审美观念，当他把艺术触角从国画伸向油画，从东方伸向西方时，他自然而然地与西方那些具有东方气质和原始风格的绘画大师们，隔代相知，意合神侔——他偏爱塞尚的稚拙感与质量感；偏爱凡·高的狂热和暴烈；偏爱高更的野性和原始的风格；偏爱马蒂斯东方式的线描和平涂的色调；偏爱蒙克的直觉表现和梦幻般的怪诞……总之，他完全是借这些大师的酒杯，浇自家胸中的块垒，他生就一副强健的脾胃，贪婪地吞食着一切有用的东西，甭管是东方的西方的，古代的现代的，粗俗的高雅的，易于接受与难以接受的，统统先吃下去再说。尽管难免咀嚼不烂消化不良，但毕竟总有一部分营养会溶于他的血液。于是，在他的作品中，便幻化出缤纷五色、别样风神；国画中时见油画笔法，如《雨不洒花枝不红》，便颇有马蒂斯的风味；而油画中又不时揉进国画的韵致，如《戏剧人物》，俨然就是写意国画的变种；《阅读》一作显见借用了敦煌壁画的某些表现手法；而同题材的《读书女》，则分明是塞尚“圆柱体”理论的活用……

李志强象一株正值生长旺盛期的树木，其根系牢牢扎根在民族民间艺术的沃土，其枝杈却在竭力伸展着，承接者现代艺术的阳光雨露八面来风。如今，他把自己结出的第一批果实，采入了这本画册。它们有的已经成熟，形色俱佳，其甘如饴；有的芬芳初溢，尤带青涩，尚须假以时日；也有少数果实显然尚未成熟。但是我坚信，这些果实经过沃沃选和优育，一定会成为品质卓越的良种，并再生出更加优异的新品。这是因为，李志强毕竟还很年轻，其生命力和创造力还远未达到高峰，他的真正丰收季节，还在那可以预期的未来！

#### 四

一日，我翻看着李志强的画照，向他发问：“你生在城市，长在城市，为什么不画画都市生活？”

他略一思忖，答曰：“城市是人造的，而原野却是大自然造的，我喜欢大自然！”

我又问：“那么你画人体，为什么偏要把她们搬到野外？”

他答曰：“在城里，人与人交往，容易变得虚伪圆滑；在野外，人与大自然交往，容易变得纯洁真诚。我喜欢真诚！”

我无言，转而去和他的画。那幅画的题目叫做《圣洁》……

朴实无华的大地，朴实无华的树林，朴实无华的山川，朴实无华的江河，与那朴实无华的人物融合在一起，交缠在一起，构成了大自然与人的亲密无间，揭示着人与大自然的深厚恋情——这是人类永恒的爱，这是大自然爱的永恒，在这天地之间最真挚最纯净的爱河中，我们同那画中的痴情母女一起，躬下腰身，投入河水，虔诚地接受大自然的“洗礼”。于是，我们获得了心灵的慰藉，如同经历了一次“醍醐灌顶”，涤除了灵与肉的污秽，从而懂得了何谓“圣洁”……

我由此顿悟，为什么李志强如此偏爱这幅黄色调的画作，以至执意要把它印在画册的封面。

李志强作画从不复制什么理论，他任凭着自己的直觉，以画笔倾诉着自己的心声，每当他赤裸着身躯，把自己反锁在画室里，面对着一张皓如白雪的宣纸或者画布时，他就如同面对着水恒的自然，心灵完全挣脱了尘俗的羁绊，如此空灵如此宁静如此纯洁如此赤诚，手中的画笔好像化为琴师的十指，而色彩、线条、物象则如流动的音符；或忧伤或愤怒或欢快或激昂，一时间全都冲破了理智的闸门奔涌着咆哮着铺洒到画面上，此时此刻，什么技法规范具象抽象，统统退避三舍，他只需遵从生命的呼唤，凭虚御风，吐纳八荒，听任心中的勃郁孤愤哀怨欣喜七情六欲一骨倒地直泻而出，这是真正的天马行空，直抒胸臆，在这样的境界中完成一幅画作，真好似奏响一曲生命的乐章，李志强每每沉浸在这样的境地而乐不思返陶然忘归。只有这时他才真正地感到绘画对他来说，与其说是一种使命一种事业，勿宁说是一种生命的本能。

国画大师李可染先生曾有名言曰：“把本领变成本能”。斯言至矣！一个画家，只有当其完全抛弃掉一切功利的欲求，只是本能地抒写心灵与大自然相贯通相交融相撞击所产生的真实感受时，他才能真正做到“精警八极，心游万仞”，“胸无挂碍，得大自在”；他才有可能自发肺腑，自鸣天籁，与大自然“神遇而迹化”，李志强所追求的正是这样一种高超妙高远之境。我相信他会成功，因为在他的画作中，我分明已看到了他对艺术对人生的这种真诚！

1992年8月20~21日于津门寄圣斋中

# Sincerity

Li Zhiqiang: The Person and His Paintings

Hou Jun

1

Once when Li Zhiqiang went to Xishuangbana in south China to draw wild life, he was in high spirits when leaving, but when returning, he said to me, "It didn't work. I couldn't find the feeling. I didn't finish a single painting!"

After some days, he went to the northwest region on business. Originally he hadn't planned to draw any painting, but this time after returning home, he was in quite a different mood. He said to me, "Hey! This time I found the feeling and painted a batch of paintings."

I laughed saying, "You truly are a child of the yellow soil!" A Chinese couplet of old times goes: "Across the northern plains run fire horses and autumn winds. Across the southern deltas fall apricot petals and spring rains." On the surface, the poem describes the different scenery of China's northern and southern regions. Actually, it reveals the common source but different currents of Chinese culture. In embodying the aesthetic concept, the former esteems shining might, and the latter values misty gentleness; the former shows robust beauty, and the latter delicate beauty; the former is like strong wine, and the latter like weak tea. Li Zhiqiang was born in the northern plains of Hebei Province and grew up near a salty coastal river. He was steeped in the traditional, simple and honest straightforwardness peculiar to north China. His veins and bones unknowingly are imbued with the nourishment of the Yellow River culture. That is why he seems to have an innate sentiment for the desert of yellow soil north of the Yellow River. For the mighty, uninhibited and wild beauty, with which that land is pregnant, he could do nothing but fall in love with it at first sight. Although the picturesque mountains and beautiful waters, mythical creatures and beautiful maidens, apricot petals and spring rains of the south have undoubtedly been natural subject matters worth drawing for no end of times by artists, yet they are unable to arouse Li Zhiqiang's creative inspiration. He stubbornly resists slenderness, delicateness, vulgar seductiveness, and even the gracefulness and charm of a female form. He likes to draw the human figure. He regards it as nature's most outstanding and most unrivalled creation. He is unwilling to endow his subjects with such morbid curves as thinness, weakness and coquetry.

In spite of the fact that Jia Boyu said, "Women are all made of water", and that water and women both have been commonly regarded as the epitome of the feminine beauty from ancient times, under Li zhiqiang's brush they look as if filled with inexhaustible vitality, so strong and so plentiful. Their muscles seem to contain full inner tension. Add to this, the uninhibited lines, the bold and flowing touches, and the crisp-cross daubs of colors in large area make the females in his paintings overflow with the proud strength of character, heroic spirit and manliness peculiar to the area north of the Changjiang River. Even in the Xishuangbana series of paintings with the Dai nationality women as main themes, Li Zhiqiang has poured into the figures a certain coarse and masculine atmosphere, thus making the Dai girls famous for being as gentle and lovely as water have a few more factors of beauty. But that is precisely the ideal beauty in his eyes.

He has natural instincts for the sound of autumn winds across that vast land; for the intensity of those hurricane winds; for the pure and simple and yellow soil and the men and women like the pure and simple soil. He creates their images, makes their likenesses, and sketches without touching up lines. By spreading and daubing the pigments without mixing, he wants to paint their true, original and special characteristics, and traces out their expressions, charms and marrow. However, no matter how he endeavors to paint or sketch, in the end there is only one hero left on the canvas, and that is the artist himself.

His paintings are like himself. His paintings are unusually unaffected, that's because of his unusual unaffectedness. In his paintings, the contrast between colors is very great—black and white; red, yellow and blue—all clearly delineated and almost without any intermediate tone. This is due to the fact that in his life the contrast between colors is great. His happiness, anger, grief and joy are visibly expressed on his face, and never covered up. His paintings are always permeated with a pure and childlike naivete as if they were a wide-open window on a child's heart, because up to now he has still retained a child's innocence. Although there is no alertness nor cunningness lacking in his eyes, every time he winks at you naughtily, you can see to the bottom of his deep crystal-clear heart spring.

Li Zhiqiang is a fond of painting bulls, a symbol of power and grandeur and mighty force. His paintings of "Mother Earth", "Woman, Child and Buffalo" and "Happy When The Sun Rising" all have bulls. However, though the bulls under his brush are bold and strong, yet they are also rather docile, good-natured and full of tender feeling. No wonder he often says, "These bulls all look like me!"

2

Li Zhiqiang graduated from the Chinese Painting Department of Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts in 1982. But since then there was a long gap of time in his art antecedents, just like a musical rest which should not have occurred in the middle of singing.

In 1984, Li Zhiqiang, then aged 29, was appointed president of the well-known Yangliuqing Publishing House, and later was concurrently chief editor. During his leadership for some seven years at a stretch, he became able to temper the acuteness of his thinking, to be decisive in making decisions, and strict in analyzing problems all-aidely. However, the strenuous forced him to put down his brush. After a considerable lapse of time, people almost forgot that he could paint, and only knew he was an astute and experienced leader. He could not help but suppress the intense emotion of creation surging up frequently, and apply his energies to the work of the Publishing House.

If it weren't for an accidental occurrence, which strongly affected him, he might have followed the course of "driving in a light carriage on a familiar road" to do a lifetime of administrative work and given up painting forever. But what is wrong rejoicing is that at the critical juncture, fate brought upon him a neither great nor small humiliation, which gave him a new life. At an annual meeting of a certain national association, he, as President of the Publishing House, was invited to attend it. But just before the meeting began, looking at the admission form produced by him, an usher very rudely said, "This is an artists meeting. You are an administrator, and not a painter. How can you attend it?" Li Zhiqiang was struck speechless. Without making any explanation, he went away in silence. He wandered aimlessly on the streets, feeling unutterably depressed and humiliated. During his absence from the meeting, the other representative chose him director, but this could in no way make up for the affront inflicted upon him. On, getting home, his face all pale, he said to his wife, "Form now on, I will take up my drawing again." Like a volcanic eruption and the rushing down of lava, the greater the pressure build-up, the greater the force of explosion. He was like a wild bull, having been imprisoned for many years, and once when it suddenly succeeded in throwing off its fetters, it would run about all the more wildly. His drawing really gave him a hard time—nobody can tell how many sleepless nights he went through, and nobody knows how he had to make repeated calculations in order to squeeze what little time he could find for his painting. From then, people often noticed

an easel stand on the bike he rode to work, and more and more of his paintings appearing in various galleries and art publications. They also often saw him, rain of shine, riding to school for on duty advanced training in oil painting for three years so that he might open up a new artistic ground. The result was that in management and decision-making, his field of vision was wider, his sight keener, his plans more carefully laid out, and his ability redoubled.

Gradually, people's idea about him began to change. No longer did they regard him as merely an administrator, or an "official". In the end, with surprising tenacity and much blood and sweat, he made a big stride forward on the artistic road, by the thought of which he had been obsessed for years.

### 3

The first stride of Li Zhiqiang's art was toward the Loess Plateau, the country people, the west wind ancient road, and the rolling northern desert. More than ten years ago when he was just a young art student, he was captivated by the murals of Yongle Monastery erected on the high yellow soil slope in the Ruicheng County, Shanxi Province. In that large dime hall, piously facing the murals, he tried to copy a true likeness with his brush. Those flying lines and those streaming hairs so aroused his admiration and so intoxicated him that he completely forgot to eat and sleep, and everything around him. It was the murals of Yongle Monastery that made him realize the essence of the traditional Chinese brush technique, and taught him a perfect mastery of the art of lines. What was more important is that murals of Yongle Monastery brought him very early into the artistic atmosphere of the Yellow River culture, and enabled him to have a preliminary recognition of and worship the strong, rugged, "northern" beauty contained in Chinese art. This was like an art seed taking root in the furrowed mound of yellow soil among the masses of the country people.

Lying even further to the west than Yongle Monastery, Dunhuang is another sacred spot of art in Li Zhiqiang's eyes. Ten years ago, he hiked into the desert and spent more than a month near Mingsha Mountain. There, he bathed in the spirit of beauty passed down from far and wide by his ancestors. He saw for himself how the true beauty had been melted into the glorious colors, and grotesque and fantastic shapes. Once he curled himself up in a narrow cave, which barely had room for him, and with the help of feeble rays of light, he copied lying Apasara on the wall. Once he braved the danger to scale a high cliff, and burrowed into a small cave which showed little trace of human habitation to search for artifacts left behind from old times. Once he was ill with hunger, and "ran short of ammunition and food supplies." Under this condition, he sent a telegram to a female friend, asking for a few sheets of Xuan paper and a few tubes of pigment. These things he has seldom mentioned to anybody. However, when people saw the Dunhuang colored drawings sheet after sheet meticulously reproduced by him, they suddenly realized that it was not accidental why Li Zhiqiang rose up again so quickly after putting aside his brush for so many years.

Like a thirsty eagle and a hungry tiger, Li Zhiqiang took in the nourishment of the Chinese people's traditional art from the billowing Yellow River and vast rolling desert and plains of yellow soil. Thus he has built up his artistic concept. He doesn't fawn on the vulgar and seek favor. Neither is he afraid of people sneering at his being rustic, ugly, silly or stupid. Instead, he regards un sophistication and nature as a higher beauty. In order to seek this beauty, he has rejected ornateness, ostentatiousness, exquisiteness and ingenuity. He would rather be crude, clumsy, choppy, or even ugly. It is exactly these qualities that have made it possible for his art to break new ground and

to be quite different from others. An inkling of simplicity and elegance has begun to show in some of his works.

In the same vein, he especially likes folk art. Besides his special expertise in New Year Pictures, he is so delighted with all popular folk arts from paper cutting, clay sculpture, knitting, embroidery, wood carving, brick carving down to folk toys and clay modelling that he can hardly put them down. Many of his colorful and strongly-brushed paintings, such as "Husband and Wife Amusing Each Other", "Lan Hua Hua", "Watching Yangko Dancing" and "Jasmine Flowers" are all branded with the mark of folk-art influence. Having this aesthetic preference, when he stretched out his artistic antennas toward painting from the East to the West, he naturally sought the company of those great painters as far as two generations back of similar spirits possessing a more Eastern temperament and primitive style. He preferred Cezanne's childlike feeling and sense of quality, Van Gogh's frantic enthusiasm and explosive temperament, Gauguin's wild and primitive style, Matisse's Eastern-style tracings and even-spread colours, Munch's intuitive expression and dreamlike absurdity. In short, he was using the containers of great masters to cast the ramparts in his own mind. With a strong and healthy sense of taste, he greedily swallowed everything useful, no matter Eastern or Western, ancient or contemporary, coarse or refined, easily accepted or difficult to accept, all were taken in and then digested. Although there was some food difficult to chew and digest, yet there was always some nourishment his blood could take in. As a result, in his works appears a multitude of colors and styles: the brush-work of oil painting in the midst of Chinese painting, such as the partiality to a Matisse style in "Blossoming for Rainwater", or the style of a Chinese painting kneaded into an oil painting, such as "Drama Characters", which is just like a mutation of the free-hand brush work of Chinese painting. The work "Reading" shows a use of some brush technique from the Dunhuang murals. A work with the same theme "White Flowers" clearly displays a use of Cezanne's "cylindrical" theory.

Li Zhiqiang is like a tall vigorous tree, its roots firmly planted in the rich soil of folk art, its branches spreading out and taking in sunlight, rain, dew, and wind of contemporary art from all directions. Now he has made a selection of his first batch of fruits for this album. Some are already ripe, form and color just right and tasting sweet; some are just becoming fragrant, yet a bit green and harsh, still needing a little more time; and some appear not yet ripe. However, I firmly believe that after having gone through a careful selection and choice breeding, these fruits will produce excellent and high-quality seeds for still better yield. After all, Li Zhiqiang is still young. His vitality and creativity still have far to go before they reach their peak, his truly plentiful season, a future for us to look forward to.

### 4

One day as I was looking over the photos of Li Zhiqiang's paintings, I asked him, "You were born in the city and brought up in the city too. Why don't you paint city life?"

He thought for a moment and replied, "Cities are man-made, but the wilderness is nature-made. I prefer nature!"

I asked again, "But as for your painting a human body, why must you sit her in the wild?" At this, he said, "In the city the intercourse between people is liable to hypocrisy, slickness and shyness while in the wild the intercourse between people and nature is easy to be pure and sincere. I love sincerity."

I said not a word, and went on to enjoy his paintings. The title of the one I was glancing at was "Sacred Purity". The simple and unadorned Mother Earth,

trees, mountains and rivers merging and copulating with the simple and unadorned people, the formation of the intimacy between nature and mankind, the revelation of the deep affection between mankind and nature—this is the eternal love of mankind, the eternity of nature's love. In the most sincere and pure river of love, we together with the passionate mother and daughter in the painting bow low and jump into the water piously to receive the nature's "baptism". Thus we obtain consolation for our souls and the filth is cleansed from our bodies and souls. Now I understand what is meant by "Sacred Purity".

At last it dawned on me why Li Zhiqiang liked this yellow-toned painting so much that he insisted on putting it on the front cover of the album.

He never reproduces any theory in painting. He only relies on his intuition and uses his brush to pour his heart-felt wishes. Every time he locks himself naded in his studio before a sheet of snow-white Xuan paper or canvas, it seems that he is facing the eternity of nature. His soul becomes completely free of all wordly shackles, so empty, tranquil, pure and absolutely sincere. The brush in his hand is transformed into the fingers of a master musician while the colors, lines and forms are like flowing music notes: now grief, now anger, now happiness, now excitation and indignation—all burst at once the floodgate of intellect, rushing, roaring and scattering across the painting. At this time, all techniques, norms, concretes, abstracts and anything must give way. He needs only to abide by the call of life and let all the joy, anger, sorrow, fear, hate and desire pour out freely from his heart without let-up. This is indeed a true "unconstrained" style of genuine emotion. Completing a painting in this kind of environment is just like playing a musical movement of life. Whenever Li Zhiqiang is immersed in such an environment, he is so happy as to forget to return. According to him, only at such an occasion does he truly feel that to him, painting is an instinct of life rather than a mission or a cause.

The Chinese painting master, Li Keran, once said, "Turn ability into instinct." He's exactly right. Only when a painter has abandoned his desire for all material gains, and only when he instinctively describes how he felt while his soul was linking up and in harmony with nature, can he really "spread his wings and fly". Then he can speak straight from the heart and receive nature's divine inspiration. What Li Zhiqiang is seeking is an superb and climactic environment. I believe he will succeed because I have clearly seen his sincerity in his paintings.

August 21, 1992  
Jiquanzhai, Tianjin

李  
志  
强  
画  
集

COLLECTION OF PAINTINGS  
BY LI ZHIQIANG



人民美术出版社

1. 两个做饭的傣家女  
人(1992)  
油画, 150×150cm

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Two Cooking Women of the Dai  
Nationality (1992)  
Oil on Canvas, 150×150cm



2. 大地(1992)

油画, 150×150cm

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Mother Earth (1992)

Oil on Canvas, 150×150cm



