

秦風

Qin Feng

主編 栗多壯
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An abstract ink painting on a light background. The composition features bold, expressive black brushstrokes that sweep across the frame. A large, dark, textured mass dominates the lower half, while several thick, curved strokes arch over it. Fine, wispy lines and splatters are scattered throughout, particularly in the upper and lower left areas, creating a sense of movement and depth.

秦風：墨變

QIN FENG:INK PLUS

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秦風：集大成者

文 / 馬琳娜·唐娜修

從藝 35 年來，秦風（Qin Feng）參展無數，長年定居海外，足跡遍布全球，積累了豐富的人生閱歷，并贏得了藝術界上極高的成就與藝術界的尊敬。

時至今日，秦風依然保持着那份率真，跟在山東工藝美院讀書時沒什麼兩樣。這份率真或許可以追溯到更早的時候，充滿了童真，無一絲做作，為他的藝術注入了強大的力量。

有一次我去北京，與秦風碰面閒聊，恰逢他的一副畫作剛剛收筆。那是一副水墨抽象畫，巨大的畫布上，一人裸體而奔，簡潔而不失磅礴之氣，創意大膽，堪稱完美，瞬間，我便被深深吸引。記得在紐約，我第一次見到秦風的作品，心中便種下了一個疑問：

要怎樣，一幅畫作才算是完成？要怎樣，用墨與留白才算相得益彰，增一筆則太繁，減一筆，則太寡？

他沉思半晌，回答我說：

“小的時候，什麼都沒有，天天就是放羊，成百上千祇地放。太陽升起的時候，我打開圈門，哪兒有草，它們就去哪，太陽下山，我再喚它們回來，還要清點數目，確保一祇不少。其實壓根兒不用數，我趕着羊兒，羊兒們攏着我，我要是覺得够數了那就够數了，從沒出過亂子。”

秦風的作品經常在頂級畫展、畫廊亮相，如威尼斯雙年展、波士頓美術館、大都會博物館、上海喜瑪拉雅美術館、北京當代藝術館、大英博物館、佩斯畫廊等等。這祇是其中一小部分，想要寫盡的話，怕是再多幾頁紙也不够。

秦風的國際項目和聯絡人遍布亞歐和美國，想收藏他的畫作的，想結識他這個人的，比比皆是，其中有藍籌藝術經紀人，如薩奇（Saatchi），也有專業機構，如哈佛大學（Harvard University）——當然，這些機構找到秦風，并不是為了買畫，而要向他取經，請他講學。

飽經世事，仍似赤子純真無邪，已然大成，却還孜孜不倦向前，藝術之于秦風，關乎心靈，同樣關乎智識，關乎自己，也關乎別人。

成名以後，評論秦風成了一時風尚，他的生平早已被咀了又咀，嚼了又嚼。

藝術與生活密不可分，打量秦風的生平而反觀其藝術，可以幫助我們更好地解讀他的作品，了解他在當代藝術史上的重要地位。

秦風多數時間住在德國、紐約或波士頓，國內的住所位于宋莊，那裏坐落着他一手創建的北京當代藝術館。

雖比不上當代藝術館的巧奪天工，秦風的家却是鬧中取靜，別有一番韵味。房頂矮矮的，一路斜下來，也并不陡，

門上嵌着玻璃，牆上貼着枯木和碎石，中式裝飾元素隨處可見。總之，極富亞洲特色，適宜放飛思想。步入其中，仿佛穿越回上世紀 40 年代的中國，裏面的一切，都像極了詩人或胥吏的府邸。可那祇是一瞬間的錯覺，琳琅滿目的當代藝術珍品，會在頃刻之間把你拉回 21 世紀的今天。餐廳與書房做了些幾何造型。東方、西方在這裏相遇，歷史與當下在這裏融合，一切都來得那麼和諧自然。

當城市的喧囂散去，踏上門外的小徑，嗅着花香，聽池水流淌，最能感受才思激蕩。整個小區，放眼望去，巨大而井然，圓與方的交替，看似簡單，却包羅萬象。

2015 年我們再來重新審視藝術家秦風，意義何在？毫無疑問，秦風是一個跨文化標志人物，他一直關注并且尋找中國和歐洲之間的藝術結合點，在他那裏，古與今，自然與人力，早已超越了藝術創作的範疇。由此出發，我們可以認識一個更全面的秦風，更好地理解他的思想、行爲，以及生活方式。

有時，圖能傳意，更勝千言萬語。秦風的家裏擺放着一張照片，很醒目，占了整面牆，進門就會看到。這是張復原放大後的照片，處理得很精致，透過其中的人物着裝以及烏塗的背景，你可以窺到一個遙遠的過去，那可能是工業化時代之前的中國。照片裏，秦風和他的母親以及一奶同胞的兄弟，都是衣衫簡樸，看上去十分寒酸。他們就那樣直直地立着，瞪大了眼睛瞧着你，顯得那麼安靜、平和、達觀。這一景象，一映入眼簾，便常駐我心，在我還沒理清它跟秦風的生活背景以及藝術追求之間的關係之前。後來我才知道，文化大革命以及上山下鄉活動開始之初，秦風的家人——因其地主身份或思想問題，更有可能是因爲後者——而受到了非人的迫害。小小的秦風也受到牽累，讀大學之前祇能在生產隊放羊、幹農活，就連讀書識字的機會也被剝奪了。可就是靠着自學，沒有接受過一天正規教育的秦風，硬是考上了一所省內響當當的大學。

整張照片，彌漫着陰鬱的氣息，獨獨最小的那個孩童，也就是秦風，渾身散發着蓬勃的朝氣。照片中的秦風，四歲光景，雖然立正站着，一動不動，但那不可抑制的生命力却透過站姿、表情，噴薄而出，催人前行、探索、改變。

兩千年來，中國學者一直認爲，照片中小男孩身上傳遞的出來的能量，并非中祇存在于孩童，這與弗洛伊德和西方心理學界的普遍看法大相徑庭。道家強調和諧，認爲氣普遍存在人及一切生物體，生命不滅，氣行不止。并且認爲，在文明及政權、宗教、政治、經濟等上層建築的影響下，現代人已經與天人合一的理想狀態漸行漸遠。

新中國的每一代，都會跟古代的——至少是有社會主義之前的——思想和價值觀念產生共鳴，其中就包括古人關於生命力的闡釋。雖然古代精英階層信奉的神秘論，與馬克思主義可謂格格不入，可大多數中國人，包括年輕人，在狂熱追求國際風尚的同時，一方面表現出了對老套思想的反感，另一方面却在養生、居住、擇偶等方面遵循着“能量平衡”的古訓。許多優秀的當代抽象藝術家、表演藝術家，也做了不少及時而出色的作品，以期弘揚和諧之力。然而，總會有人跳出來反對，痛斥他們深陷文化糟粕而不可自拔，再扣上倒退、落後的帽子，掘斷了中國傳統文化參與國際文化交流的前路。

我雖然研究亞洲哲學，也教授亞洲哲學，但如要命我就其他的中國藝術家再寫一篇文章，也談到氣，我卻是不太情願的。因爲氣的概念過於深奧，即便不做深論，也不是三言兩句就可以了事的。對於秦風，我祇想說，中國傳統的東西，在現今中國的文化和藝術當中，是不可直陳祇能隱喻的。很欣慰，秦風做得很好。

我們交流的時候——當然是通過翻譯，秦風每每談到創作意圖，一般很少使用“氣”這個字眼，相關的概念也不太提及。他對於生命力的理解，從嚴格意義上說，并不是道家的，甚至不完全是中國的。這跟他的藝術和生活如

出一轍，多學科、多文化在那裏碰撞交融。是歷史的必然，也是命運的安排，秦風生活在一個思想動蕩的年代，判斷標準一天三變。什麼是“正確”的存在？什麼是“正確”的藝術？70 年代被貼上“墮落”、“資產階級”標籤的藝術形式，到了 80 年竟然引來喝彩聲一片，是開放中國的標示，是文化交流的產物。一夜之間，言社會現實主義必沃霍爾（Warhol），古老的書法藝術也再度逢春，竟與 20 世紀 30 年的現代藝術結了連理。

這頗具諷刺意味的一出出鬧劇，教秦風學會了思考。後來他考入了一所應用藝術院校，畢業成績優秀。在校期間，他學習壁畫專業，接受社會現實主義教育，用壁畫謳歌共產主義那一套。與此同時，該校氛圍寬鬆，經常鼓勵學生打破常規，積極嘗試非人物藝術。1985 年秦風從學校畢業，隨即遠赴新疆、北京、柏林生活十多年，直接或間接地受到了概念派藝術家如漢斯·哈克（Hans Haacke）、行動派人體藝術家如甘瑟·布魯斯（Gunther Brus）、材料創新大師西格瑪爾·波爾克（Sigmar Polk）、二戰後表現主義的代表性人物安塞爾姆·基弗（Anselm Kiefer）等人的影響。

在藝術風格尚未定型的時候，秦風長年在海外居住、工作、教學，積累了大量第一手材料，認識到不同的人通過不同的方法，再加以時間的淬煉，最終找到了屬於自己的創造與表現形式，從而形成了今天極具特色的個人風格和創作語言。

秦風的新作“God What Ate Thou”，是系列作品，每個單獨的作品都像是一本殘頁的書，內容全用手繪，看上去像密碼，像殘詞，找得到英文、阿拉伯文、中文的影子，祇是那影子重重疊疊，似是而非，充滿了神秘怪誕的意味。

秦風告訴我，這裏面不但有道家經典、水墨丹青、埃及象形文字，有八大山人、紐約畫派，還有對教皇的揶揄、對觀念藝術的雜評，總之是信手寫下，不加甄選。

秦風強調說，真是尋根的話，自己的藝術緣起不在被奉為正統的那些書法大家，而在被視為離經叛道的八大山人。八大山人生活在 17 世紀中葉，有着與秦風極為相似的身世。同樣出身顯赫，同樣經歷了政權更迭，明朝建立後，八大山人及其家人也沒逃過被放逐的命運。

當發現自己已不被上層社會所接納，甚至與內心的自我形象漸行漸遠，身為學者和藝術家的秦風陷入一片茫然，不禁自問：活着是為了什麼？身處此種境地，相信你我都會有此一問。是財富？是權勢？是高位？是欲望？亦或是讓我們感覺良好的其他東西？八大山人用藝術作答。在那個年代，他的藝術可謂離經叛道，與傳統大異其趣。與秦風類似，八大山人的作品表現力極強，情感充沛，個性十足，想象力豐富。

八大山人，雖堪稱藝術巨匠，但因政治背景、藝術形式而受累，到頭來潦倒一生。“文明風景”是秦風致敬八大山人之作，作品由一系列大而抽象的畫面組成，展開着，像是一本巨書或是冊頁，上面用簡單而誇張的墨色勾勒出情緒的跌宕起伏，從波瀾不驚到怒發衝冠。

在我看來，之所以拿八大山人跟秦風類比，不僅因為二者有着較為接近的藝術態度，更因為他們觀察生活、回應生活的方式一脈相承。二位藝術家，對於所處時代的主流價值觀念都懷着敬意，但為了探討存在的意義，為了揭示社會現實，為了認識自我，也為了在大千世界中找到自己的位置，他們都表現出了極大的勇氣，并以巧妙的方式擺脫了時代的束縛。

八大山人和秦風都是離經叛道的思想家。17 世紀的時候，亞洲學者在建造園林時，依然遵循着亘古不變的法則，

試圖勾勒出理想中的自然秩序。與此同時，在歐洲，伽利略(Galileo)、威廉·哈維(William Harvey)、牛頓(Newton)等人却正忙于構建理性科學體系，隨着巴洛克藝術以及照相術的興起，精確觀察越來越受到人們的重視。而八大山人此時，正用毛筆勾畫出一個個神秘怪誕的形象，在他那裏，有些主流藝術理念受到青睞，另一些則遭人白眼。而在他的文人風景畫和動物畫中，鳥兒的頭上往往浮動奇怪的巨石，象徵着靈魂不堪物欲之重。

八大山人筆下的石、魚、鳥都極具個人色彩，透過這些鮮明的形象，可窺到一個與欲望、想往、缺失相抗爭的藝術家本人。當然，也有很多人對此不屑，認為這是他思想保守、缺乏想象力的表現。

曾經一度，中國藝術界希望發出自己的聲音，中國藝術家們或者跟古人取經，或者向歐洲問道，此時的秦風苦思冥想的，則是哲學思考與詩意傳達之間的矛盾關係。他 2006 年問世的裝置作品《生長的極限》，就表現出了藝術家對現實矛盾的思考：童年這張白紙，本應寫滿了對自然的敬畏，但城市化改變了這一切，人離開了土地，原本的和諧統一頃刻之間支離破碎——四面白牆合圍之中，三棵禿樹倒挂着，樹根直衝着天花板。冬季裏的一天，瑞雪新降，那雪景就定格在藝術家的記憶中……觀此作品，人們不禁感懷，這份情懷裏有向往，也有神傷。

內與外，個人與集體，正與反，自然活動與人類活動，透過秦風處理這些問題的手法，依稀可見八大山人的影子，就如同公共藝術(Public)及大地藝術(Land Art)受到概念派藝術家馬塞爾·布達埃爾(Marcel Broodthaers)的影響一樣。

對於傳統的東西，秦風跟八大山人一樣，有繼承，有保留。那些在秦風抽象作品、建築設計圖、裝置作品中經常出現的直線、圓圈和方塊，其實是取法于中國傳統書法和思想。在書法中，一條直線代表“一”，一個圓圈則代表“零”或者“無”。綫與圓的結合，構成了一切漢字的基礎。先有字，然後有詞，進而有了語言，人類于是學會了表達思想。在道家思想中，一乃天地之祖，孕育萬物；圓代表往復循環，無始無終。

秦風秉持類似的理念，使用簡單點的綫條和橢圓，創造出了一種全新的語言體系，專屬而龐雜，經過不斷完善，已經結出累累碩果，誕生了一件件視覺藝術精品。

秦風與八大山人一樣，對於本民族的文化及藝術傳統，不僅理解入微而且推崇備至；對於工筆書法，都毫無興趣；而且都善于用于古人的藝術表現形式，來表達自身的感受和境遇，人生五味，揮毫書就。

威廉·梵高(Van Gogh)給他的哥哥特奧(Theo)寫信說，他不是在畫雪地上的靴子，而是為內心最深處的情感找到外在的栖所。

這並不是說秦風過於“西化”。從根本上說，秦風的繪畫、雕塑、裝置都是中國式的，祇要是心智正常的人，都能感受到他作品濃濃的中國味道，哪怕那些令人眼花繚亂甚至看似無稽的作品也不例外。我敢說，秦風是個地道的中國藝術家，而且他本人也深以為榮，祇是他的作品并不能以國家之名，民族主義簡單定義。

跟八大山人一樣，秦風其人及其藝術均不被某一種文化或歷史所囿限，他的思想和藝術形式是開放的，亞洲的和非亞洲的思想在他那裏匯聚交融。傳統的中國藝術，精致而內斂，然而秦風的筆觸却大氣磅礴、自由舒展、古怪刁鑽，全無半分含蓄。他的創作，盡管神似，却不循定法，哪怕是他自己的法則。他先在一張畫布上畫了一個大大的橢圓，然後拿刀子隨手一揮，一時之間，布迸墨脫。

這讓我想到了八大山人和畢加索。前者曾將園林裏精心堆放的石頭盡數推到，而後者創造力旺盛，破壞力也不弱，

喜歡對一些經典的立體派靜物造型進行改良，不是這兒貼一片廢報紙，就是那兒纏幾股破繩索，經常搞得面目全非。

氣就是氣，無關其名。

何謂中國藝術？何謂非中國藝術？為何師西？如何師西？孰新孰舊？孰源孰流？孰先孰後？當人拋出諸如之類看似常規問題時，秦風總顯得有些摸不着頭腦。在這一點上，我們的認識是一致的。當前的中國藝術錯綜複雜，遠非這類問題所能觸及，而在人性和人倫的問題上，秦風的藝術表現手法也難以言說。

跟那些略顯內斂的中國當代藝術家不同，這些人的作品，無論水墨、瓷器還是裝置，都透着安寧之氣。而秦風，無論書法還是其他任何作品，都顯得棱角分明、辛辣而犀利，呈現出晦暗而喧鬧的美感。在秦風看來，問題解決之前，鬥爭總是難免的。

秦風的作品，雖也注重完整，却不見一絲刻板。它們不凝滯，却富于感情，讓人不禁聯想到成長、改變以及未來。正因如此，許多評論家，甚至連秦風本人，也都覺得他的作品有抽象表現主義（Abstract Expressionism）或行動畫派（Action）的影子。要知道，許多行動派畫家都曾研究過亞洲哲學和藝術。他還說過，自己好像對本真、自由、不加雕琢的表現形式情有獨鍾，而這一切當然離不開扎實的技法功底。



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Portraits of The Great No.108/ Ink and Acrylic on Linen Paper / 150x300cm/ 2014

Qin Feng: Intersections

By/ Marlena Donohue

In his 35 years' career Qin Feng has evolved into an internationally recognized artist who travels the globe, exhibits in a number of continents and resides in several world capitals.

At the same time, from his earliest years as a student at the Shan Dong Academy, to the present Qin Feng has retained a quality of unrestrained spontaneity we tend to associate with the very young, with the forces of Nature, and with truly bold art.

As I talk with Qin Feng during one of my visits to Beijing, I am struck by a painting he has just finished -- one grand gesture in ink, streaking across a mostly blank space – bold and perfect. Through my wonderful colleague Michael Suh who kindly translates, I ask the artist a question I've had since I saw my first Qin Feng work in New York:

When do you know a painting is done, that a simple stroke is complete? When do you know that the black ink and the open spaces are in perfect relation to each other, that there's nothing more you need to add?

He thinks quietly for a long while and then he says:

When I was a boy growing up with nothing, I had one job – to watch sheep, hundreds of sheep. I let them out to graze in the dawn, they wandered away and at night I had to bring each one back, and make sure I had exactly the number at night that I had in the morning. They would gather around me as we returned and I always knew exactly when I had the right number grouped; I did not need to count, I felt it and I was always right.

Qin Feng grew up very close to Nature, to its rhythms and cycles, and this raw connection remains a part of the artist and the work. At the same time, Qin Feng's stature is such that his work is shown in the most sophisticated venues, including 2015 Venice Biennale, the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Himalaya Museum in Shanghai, The Modern Art Museum in Beijing, the British Museum, and Pace Galleries, to name a very few in a résumé that goes on for pages.

Qin Feng's international projects and the scope of his contacts span Europe, Asia and the US; those who seek his work and those acquaintance run from hardcore art brokers handling only top valued art (Saatchi), to respected academic institutions that invite Qin Feng not to sell art but to teach (Harvard University).

Both a veteran and an innocent, a sophisticate and an unjaded naturalist, Qin Feng makes art to activate the soul and the intellect – his own and ours in – equal measure.

Through The Lens of Biography

As his fame has grown, critics rush to write essays; and certain facts about his life and early experiences are repeated over and over like a picturesque “Qin Feng” legend.

When not superficial, considerations of Qin Feng's personal history and its impact on his work provide an expanded look

into this complex work and its important place in contemporary art.

Qin Feng's Chinese home (he spends extended stays in Germany, NY, Boston) is located in Beijing's Song Zhuang district and is part of complex designed by the artist to house the Museum of Contemporary Art and other stunning high tech lofts offered to fellow artists.

In contrast to the architecturally cutting edge Museum and studios, the artist's house is intimate, with low ceilings, paneled doors, walls built from aged woods and stones. Filled with authentic Chinese artifacts, it is a distinctly contemplative Asian space. When inside, you feel like you could be in the home of a poet or functionary in the China of the 1940s. You are reminded of the 21st century only because premier contemporary hangs everywhere, and because Qin Feng designed the dining and studio areas to sweep up in tall contemporary looking geometric angles. Surrounding his home are tiny pathways, clusters of moody trees, small ponds here and there that transport you, when the city beyond quiets down, into a literati garden. These fusions of sensibilities and times found everywhere are never jarring – on the contrary they are seamless, pleasing to the eye and oddly satisfying.

Why is any of this important in a serious critical overview of Qin Feng's artwork in 2015? Because in the most experientially direct and actual way, the above anecdote indicates to us that Qin Feng's attention to the intersections between Sino/Euro; ancient/current, natural/engineered are not a simply an art "style" for which he is known; this perspective is part of who Qin Feng is, how he sees and moves in the world and how he deliberately lives his daily life. Sometimes a picture is worth 1000 critics' words. There is a photo in Qin Feng's home that takes up a whole wall and is the first thing you see on entering. The dress and tones in this beautifully enlarged and restored photo convey a time long past, maybe pre industrialized China. Qin Feng's lovely mother and siblings -- all dressed in typical village clothes – stand frontally, stare out at us, elegant, still, resilient. In this otherwise somber family photo, there is a point of unusual energy emanating from the smallest child -- Qin Feng at perhaps four years old. Even at this age his body and expression communicate what can only be described as an irrepressible, percolating life force, an active, inquisitive will not likely to be penned in.

The photo haunted me long before I knew details of Qin Feng's background. At the start of the Cultural Revolution and fierce re-education that followed civil strife between supporters of a Chinese Republic and advocates of Communist rule, the artist's family (possibly land holders, most certainly independent thinkers) was persecuted harshly. Qin Feng spent his youth until college humbly herding sheep and farming in a village where even high school was rarity. The artist received no formal schooling and entered a good but conservative Shang Dong applied arts college based on what he taught himself.

Intersections: Qin Feng's Multiple World Views

Ancient Chinese scholars taught that this life force I clearly felt from the image of Qin Feng as a boy is not an energy that manifests only during the freedom of childhood (as proposed by Freud and Western psychology in general). On the contrary, Tao taught this chi exists in all people, all creatures at all times throughout the whole of creation. Under the pressure of civilized culture or the demands of any fixed mindset, Chinese mystics believed we become separated from

this source. One might think of Qin Feng's work as a way he stays mindful of some creative essence. . .even as contemporary life distracts us more and more.

Fate and history placed Qin Feng at fortunate if confusing crossroads. As a teen growing up in the 1970s, one has to assume that he witnessed the consolidation of power under socialism, that he was exposed (as were all Chinese people) to strict standards for correct Communist living and correct Communist representations in art. As a college student in the 1980s, he then watched China enter the world economy, cautiously open and then turn quite actively toward Western models. State-sponsored realism suddenly looked more like American Pop, and Chinese calligraphic traditions were re-fashioned as fairly derivative remakes of 50 year old European modern art. Neither of these options appealed to Qin Feng; one can imagine him taking all this in with amused cynicism.

In the midst of these changes Qin Feng attended college, graduated with a degree in mural painting at an academy of applied arts whose provincial focus was art serving the state. In mid 80s he graduated with highest honors for skill, though part of the repeated Qin Feng "lore" is that he was constantly disciplined for excessive experimentation. After starting one of the first cutting edge, truly contemporary galleries in Beijing, in the 1990s Qin Feng lived and worked abroad; in Berlin installation artists like Hans Haacke, or German Action/Body artists like Gunther Brus, media appropriators like Sigmar Polk and forceful post WW II Expressionists like Anselm Kiefer must have directly and indirectly expanded his imaginative scope.

Over the course of his subsequent career, Qin Feng quite openly mined multiple world perspectives, symbols and ideas drawing freely from Tao, Egypt's Old Kingdom, Islam, Confucian philosophy, Christianity, Pop Art, cartooning, Dada, graphic design, Assemblage and more. Inspired by but always altering his sources to reflect his unique restless vision, Qin Feng has painted gestures on nude bodies like Yves Klein, tore holes in canvases like Arte Povera; and in a kind of Dada anti-art strategy that found him challenging his own paradigms, he even painted a breathtakingly elegant Qin Feng oval, only to blithely slash the surface and sketch a funny toilet alongside the lyrical mark.

Of all his culturally varied and wide ranging influences, however, Qin Feng says his greatest inspiration remains close to home -- in the form of the art and attitude of Bada Shanren, a Chinese eccentric artist active in the mid 17th century. His unwillingness to follow classic Chinese models, his discovery of himself in times of radical and rapid change mirror Qin Feng in striking ways. Bada Shanren (also known as Zhu Da, 1622 to 1705) had family ties to Ming nobility. When the Qing overthrew that dynasty, his family, like Qin Feng's, suffered. More or less exiled to a remote part of China, stripped by circumstance of all his normal social markers of status, clan, or identity, Bada Shanren was forced to ask himself what it means to "be?"

Like Qin Feng, Bada was an extremely gifted, fiercely independent spirit. While 17th century Asian scholars made landscapes honoring ageless rules for depicting an ideal Natural Order, and while in Europe, Galileo Galilei, William Harvey, and Isaac Newton were busy inventing rational science, and while Baroque art and the camera obscura celebrated precise detailed observations of the world, Bada Shanren ventured into the imagination creating unprecedented, charged symbols that somehow acknowledged and over turned classical landscape and animal painting paradigms in his day. Dramatic images of rocks hovered over fragile birds symbolizing the soul's free flight crushed by his desires and by social dogmas.

In his 2006 installation "Limits of Growth" Qin Feng uses similar tactic to create a work whose open ended visual poetry is able to reach back into the Asian (and human) collective unconscious, and still remain intensely personal to who he is. Three leafless, beautiful uprooted trees are suspended upside down, their raw roots to the ceiling inside stark white gallery walls. I cannot tell you how, but the objects somehow produce the feeling of a quiet literati winter scene – nostalgic and still. Though not a realistic 'picture' inked on a courtly scroll, the arrangement of real life objects in real space produce a visceral

human mourning for lost Nature, and a very specific longing for the countryside in newly fallen snow.

Qin Feng honored Bada (who lived in obscurity for his ‘incorrect’ political ties and ‘incorrect’ art) in the works called Civilization Landscape, a series of huge abstract and figurative panels that unfold like a book executed on an environmental scale, each transmitting the ‘seasons’ of human emotion, from tumult to calm.

Like Bada Shanren, Qin Feng is irrevocably connected to his homeland, to his Chinese heritage. The formal refinement, control, focus and flow of Qin Feng’s abstract marks and sculptures are quintessentially Chinese; the events of his life, the feel of his home help us to understand the strength of these ties. But like Bada, Qin Feng’s works for symbolic and conceptual reasons often embody the opposite of what is imagined to be stereotypically Asian. Traditional art is intimate and exact; Qin Feng’s strokes and objects are commanding in size, loose, eccentric, and anything but reserved.

Wherever he travels, Qin Feng is, I would venture, proudly a Chinese artist, but his calligraphic works and oeuvre in general are too smart and complex to ever suggest a straightforward celebration of any one nationalism or any one aesthetic approach.

Qin Feng's Calligraphic Marks: Metaphors and Motifs

Qin Feng manipulates a venerated tradition in a manner that respects and questions both the past and present. He uses calligraphy as a motif or vehicle to engage in broader dialogues. Like Bada, Qin Feng has little interest in perfect Asian characters – his marks are tools for intense self expression. Like Bada Shanren’s use of boulders to symbolize something far more profound than skill in courtly landscapes, Qin Feng too adjusts and reinvents calligraphy. The lines, sweeps, subtle curves, and bodily grace that have defined classical ink and scroll work are altered in ways that allow marks to invoke feelings like ecstasy, power, despair, nostalgia, loss, solitude, silence, humility.

This notion that any perceived form – the outline of a sea wave or the shapes in art – can invite us to see more deeply recurs not just in the Tao, Zen or Bada; Plato and Aquinas advocated we look through the easily observed for the True, Cezanne said his only interest in hills and fruit was the opportunity they provided him to discover simple structural geometries underlying all reality; Van Gogh wrote to Theo his brother that when he painted boots in snow, or an absinthe bar, he was not recording, but allowing form to reveal human pathos. An artist as traveled and alert as Qin Feng has been exposed to these intersections and they are part of the vast and fluid vocabulary from which he is continually inventing.

When Qin Feng’s eccentric Asian characters suggest some mysterious alphabet known by only him, it strikes me that he is not simply pushing back against the tyranny of tradition – this is far too obvious for his sort of creative mind. I feel that Qin Feng is always thinking about language and human communication in general. In this he seems to update, render in accessible visual form the ideas of Wittgenstein or Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure who viewed language as not fossilized system we master, but a flexible, evolving tool able to call forth all sorts of associations and realities. The work “God What Ate Thou” (an ironic play on words, their ambiguity and our reliance on them), includes book-like objects with pages cut away to reveal a hybrid fantasy alphabet of words/half phrases hand painted by Qin Feng in a mixture of English, Arabic, and Chinese-looking scripts.

The Law of Constant Change

From variations on the line and oval (central to Chinese language and philosophy, mentioned by Plato), some 400 intricate

Chinese characters are made; from these characters come words, sentences, and then language—a tool for self expression. In like manner, Qin Feng has built an expansive, ever-innovative formal and conceptual language using his varied, subjective responses to those two basic shapes. This act of constant re-invention, of building from basic units the totally new reminds me of Bada using one component of the classical garden – rocks to transform the power of painting; this reminds me of Picasso expanding the super simple syntax of ‘classical’ Cubism with applied newspaper, trash and old junk.

Though one always recognizes the basic vocabulary of Qin Feng’s style, his gestures, objects and installations are defined by their subjectivity, unpredictability, and willingness to surprise us. To borrow the words of U.S. artist, theorist and Zen master Allan Kaprow in his description of Jackson Pollock, Qin Feng like Pollock “gives us an all over unity . . . with a means to respond continuously to the freshness of personal choice.” Was not “freshness,” i.e. constant flux the very essence of Tao, the goal of the modernist avant garde and the defining feature of our dizzying reality today?

Abstract Expressionism As Chi

Unlike more contemplative Chinese artists working today, whose inked work, ceramic objects, installations convey some enduring sense of closure and repose, almost everything Qin Feng creates has a forceful, dramatic edge, a dark and tumultuous beauty, or a sharp ironic humor that tends to focus on the struggle that comes just before the repose.

Though in every media Qin Feng creates some of the most graceful and complete works I have seen in recent art, his creations are nonetheless filled with motion, emotion, a feeling of expansion, growth, profusion, and the visual implication of a next step or event that is about to unfold. This quality leads to comparisons with Ab Ex Action Painters, popularized by art historian Harold Rosenberg. In the 1950s and 1960s, many American Abstract Expressionist artists and a variety of Western thinkers besides Kaprow (like John Cage, or Alan Watts who wrote the book *Philosophies of Asia* tracing the foundations of Asian mystical teachings) became serious students of Eastern culture, and began to view the artist’s painted gesture as an extension of a distinct life force. Qin Feng openly admires Ab Ex painters like Motherwell, feels a kinship with their unedited commitment to the singular creative act and their insistence that complex feeling is best conveyed through the “controlled freedom” of abstract forms.

However, I do not think that Qin Feng mentions these artistic similarities so that we can make limiting, out dated comparisons, such as Ab Ex is derived from calligraphy, or contemporary ink painting looks to the West for models. Qin Feng seems interested in these and many other entangled but very distinct art styles because they intersect at similar investigations into mankind’s desire, despair and delight.

Qin Feng: Uniquely of Our Times

Ironically enough it took 1500 years for Europe to catch up, but by the 1960s/1970s, Eastern concepts of “being,” of Tao and chi had become respected, even popular in Western art, in intellectual and popular circles – In an interesting reversal of colonialism, young hippies rejected consumer society, gravitated towards Eastern mystics. Existentialist scholars like John Dewey, Jean Paul Sartre, Robert Alberts, as well as Ab Ex painters were some of the first Westerners to rediscover Bada Shanren, and like Qin Feng saw in his life and work powerful innovation, plus a struggle to know and express the self fully. These reciprocal exchanges between East and West have continued. Expanded dimensions of awareness that we can derive from mindful attention to the everyday are ancient Chinese values that found their way into Fluxus, Guy Debord’s Situationists, Pop Art, Performance, Josef Beuys’ revolutionary academy of conceptual practice in Dusseldorf. These schools of art and thought formed the interdisciplinary, boundary-breaking experiments that pointed the West (and recently the world) toward our current contemporary moment, an era of constant, perpetual flow of hybridized diversity in all things and a truly wild life force that we must quickly learn to harness if we are to survive.

Qin Feng's important role today is that with masterful craft he perfectly reflects the legacy of many pasts, and the character of our post modern moment—filled as it is with rapid cycles of creative-destructive energy, and in desperate need of authentic self-scrutiny. In Qin Feng's refusal to play into tired East-West art comparisons, his work shows us that the dialogues and issues in creative practice must become more imaginative than us-them. Chi gong translates loosely as “the controlled flow of life force;” channeling energy in all its physical and metaphysical forms toward collective delight and the common good is no longer ancient, old school stuff, no longer weird philosophical musings— this should be our collective goal.

If I were asked to describe the overarching subject and process underlying Qin Feng's diverse, extremely successful art – and life-- it would be that regardless of media his art and life seem to be meditative artful actions intended to keep himself – and the astute viewer -- ever connected to our most positive generative impulse – whatever word we use to describe it.

Like Bada Shanren, Qin Feng is deeply, irrevocably connected to his homeland, his Chinese heritage – the formal refinement, control, focus and flow of Qin Feng's abstract marks are quintessentially Chinese – his home and his family history help us to understand the strength of these cultural ties. Yet all of Qin Feng's paintings can be said to be in some way the opposite of what is typically imagined to be Chinese: traditional art is intimate and exact; Qin Feng's strokes and objects are bold in scale, loose, eccentric, commanding and anything but reserved.

His 2006 installation “Limits of Growth“ expresses profoundly multiple co existing, strong narratives: the artist's enduring reverence for nature, our loss of that via urbanization, and finally the deeper Toa and current eco view that man and land are part of one co- dependent whole. In the work, three leafless, strikingly lyrical uprooted trees are suspended upside down with roots to the ceiling inside stark white gallery walls. The work is a sophisticated symbolic simulacrum of a literati winter scene. It captures not a realistic “picture” in two graphic dimensions like a classical scroll, but through a symbolic arrangement of real life objects in real space that produce this delicate longing for newly fallen snow a very emotional mourning for fading Nature and.

He is, I would venture, proudly a Chinese artist, but his work is never a straightforward celebration of any one nationalism or any one aesthetic.

Qin Feng's life and early world exposure at a very formative age seems to have given him a lasting first hand awareness that there are many ways in which varying cultures through time have channeled and displayed the relentless imaginative impulse that defines us as a species.

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Qin Feng 2015

Museum art-st-urban, Switzerland
Basel Art Center, Switzerland
La Biennale di Venezia, Italy
Museum of Contemporary Art Beijing
Asia Art Center, Taipei