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风景的发现与文化的穿越

范迪安

当杨凯的风景画作呈现在人们面前的时候,可以让人看到两个鲜明的特点;第一,象他这样几十年以风景画作为艺术专攻目标的画家而今已不多见,他的作品展现的是一条不断走向自然的人生之旅。只有从心灵上真正热爱自然的人,才能几十年锲而不舍地把风景当作自己的精神家园,在长期的远足中发现,在发现的过程中探索。走向自然的道路实际上也是一条孤寂的道路,杨凯在风景画上形成的丰富成果,就印证了他在这个领域艰辛跋涉的历程。第二,纵观杨凯在风景画一主题的沉潜,可以看到他的艺术面貌具有宽阔展开的特点。从早年在国内的创作到前往巴黎求学探艺,从旅法期间的研究到近年定居北京的发展,他在风景油画上的不断深入,呈现出不同时期学术专研的目标,阶段性的艺术特征非常明显。在绘画的表现力愈发强烈的同时,他在风景油画上所展示出的文化追求也愈加明显。这两个特点——一是坚定的信念,一是清晰的学术意识,使得他的风景油画成为当代画坛一方独特的风景。

杨凯早年的风景油画属于"朴素风格"。在中国西北地区接受艺术教育的经历和受到地理环境的影响,他这一时期的风景油画主要是西部风景的写生之作。带着对大自然真切的热爱,他在写生中注意把握面对风景的"临场"感受,尤其擅长用阔略的笔法捕捉自然风景的特定形貌,在概括风景的结构与形象中抒发表现的兴味。正是由于长期坚持写生,他的作品在色调上体现出良好的色彩秉赋,在造型上体现出朴素大方的格调,传达出对中国西部自然景色的独特感受,带有浓郁的乡土气息。怀着深造艺术的理想,也带着了解和研究西方风景画的艺术课题,杨凯前往法国,在那里他经历了自己在风景画上的风格之变,更重要的是,他从对风景写生的淳朴挚爱走上从文化层面认识风景画精神内涵的道路,从而在实现自己画风之变的同时实现了文化的穿越。

在巴黎高等美术学院,杨凯认真地在油画造型表现力上作深入的研习。当这一时期许多前往海外的中国画家都直奔"当代艺术"而去之时,他坚定地选择了看上去属于传统类型的风景油画,表现出不随时流的自我意识。在他的认识中,风景画仍然有深度的学问值得研究,也需要集前人之成而谋发展。欧洲绘画史上的风景画从英国的康斯太勃尔、透纳到法国的柯罗,从十九世纪的印象派诸家到二十世纪初的巴黎画派,都是他研究的对象,其各家之长也为他悄然吸收,重点尤其在于观察自然的角度与方法,在于理解风景画的精神内涵。

这个时期,他仍然坚持写生,但已是有思考前提和研究课题的写生,尤其是将"写生"和"创作"结合起来,使每一幅画作保持了面向风景的新鲜感兴,又注入经营画面结构、塑造风景主题的理性。他的那些收入了巴黎城市景观的作品,展现了一种开阔的视野,也传达出巴黎这座城市明快的性格。他以前人不多使用的视角,专画城市建筑的屋顶,刻画出建筑与天空的边际地带特殊的景象,别开生面地创造了"屋顶的风景"。他在以焦点透视为主的取景法上,将中国绘画的任意透视带入其中,微妙的扩展了画面的视域,使写生作品富有创作的主动意识…… 在长期的积累中,他的色彩感觉达到了精深的程度,在格调上体现出高级的色彩素养,在用笔上也更加从容,把塑形和表意结合起来,作品整体风格呈现出坚实基础上的抒情与流畅。

杨凯回到国内的这两年,又再一次形成了自己的画风之变,那就是从城市风景返身于大自然风景,从偏于写实的造型转向更多的表现性和写意性。他在风景面前铺开大布,直接写生,现场收拾,即兴发挥,从容肯定,嘎然收笔,把中国画的大写意精神与油画的写生技巧结合起来,作品充满了大自然蓬勃的生命力,也洋溢出大艺术家的手笔。这对于他,是更加趋于当代意识的表达,也让我们看到,在风景画这个领域,同样也可以指向当代。

巴黎一北京

艺术纯化之路

PARIS — BEIJING .
THE ROAD TO PURE ART

杨凯

YANGKAI



读者出版集团 PRGC.,L 甘肃人民美术出版社



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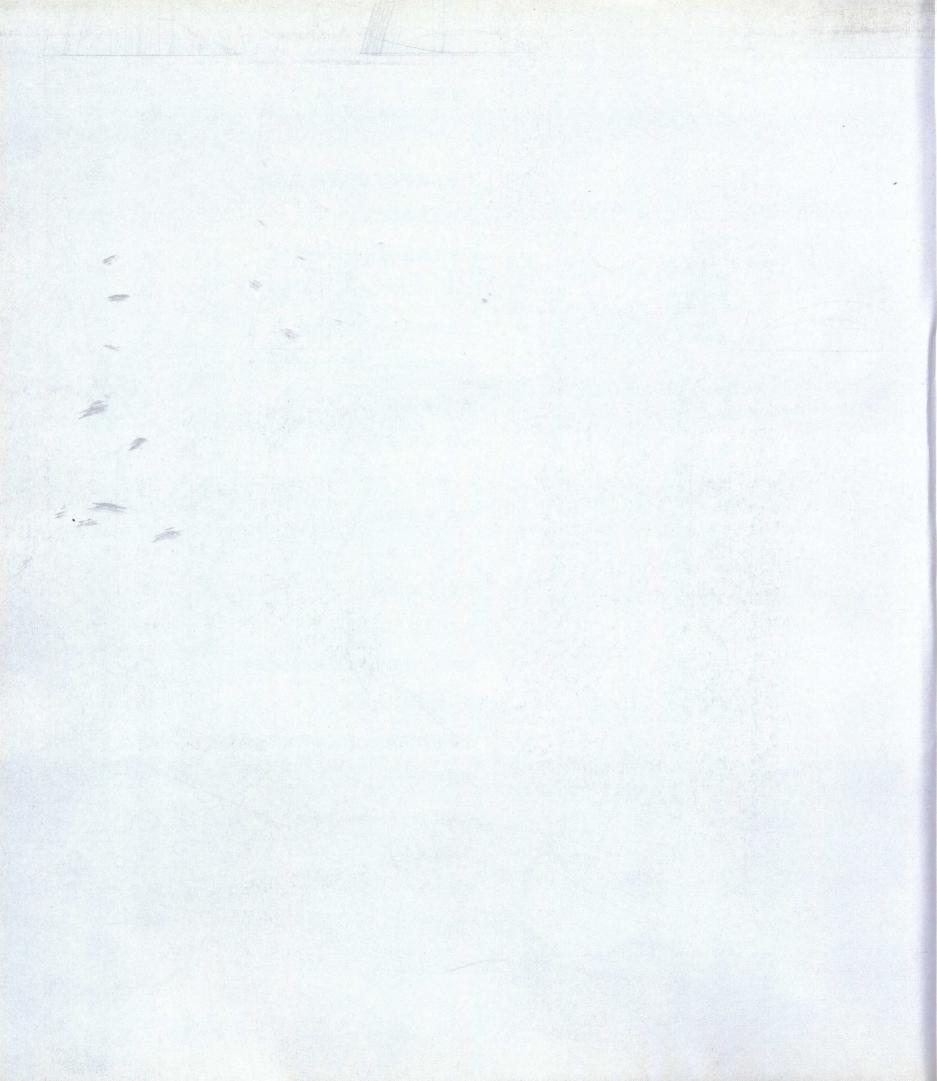
去向纯粹感

会をきます。

超新松化系化

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自述

为了一个理想,为了寻找探索我的艺术之路,于1987年赴世界艺术之都——法国巴黎国立高等美术学院,留学深造至皮埃尔・卡隆油画工作室。巴黎是艺术家向往的地方,也是艺术大师诞生的摇篮,孕育出各种门类的艺术和绘画流派,是一个群芳竞彩的艺术世界。

然而,作为一个来自文明古国,受千百年传统文化熏陶的中国艺术家,在这个艺术海洋中如何驾驭好自己的艺术之舟,既不失东方神韵,又要吸收接纳西方艺术精神与理念,真是需要思考、需要潜心研读西方传统绘画,在此基础上理解当代艺术,欣赏摹写大师作品,穿梭在美术馆、画廊之间,游走于东方与西方,传统与当代之间,在卢浮宫一河之隔的美术学院,将所见所学反复推敲,从对艺术的表现到技法的学习,特别是材料运用及造型、色彩、空间、形式法则等诸多方面的研究与实践,搭建理论体系,逐步形成了自己特有的绘画语言——"新写实"绘画。"新写实"绘画是运用现代意识,以全新的观察与诠释事物的方法,真实的视觉感受,以中国传统绘画精神之"传神写照"的表达方式注入其中,提炼出诗性写意画境。真诚地与大自然对话,作品强调绘画的绘画性、科学性,情感与精神交融。取自然之精华,将东西方文化融合其中,即是客观存在的一景一物,又是主观设计的艺术空间,其中一点一线的都是精心安排的,这种绘画语言的表达如同吟诗颂诵般流畅。一路走来,经过在纯艺术之路上的不懈追索,绘画内容包括巴黎院落、顶楼、都市、田园、天、海、云、花卉、静物、人体、画室系列等,艺术风格亦由画风景到画心境,再至画意境。今夏,回到阔别20年的甘南草原,深深地体会到大自然是艺术的源头,创作灵感再次勃发,画作呈现新面貌。回头一望,已走过20年的光景。与其说是从巴黎到北京,不如说是从西部到巴黎、又回到西部。是对艺术纯化的追索过程,是与大自然、物象心灵的沟通融合的过程,是传承优秀传统的过程,也是个人精神素养与境界演变升华之路。既有法国绘画艺术的浸润,也有传统文化的滋养。2009年初,离开巴黎之时,重读大师作品,再次感受艺术之崇高,同时看到当今画坛上的进步与发展,架上绘画永远是最重要的艺术形式。

油画进入中国已有百余年了,如同英语一样是国际化的语言,油画早已是世界性的语绘,在传承中发展。在近期画作中,我力图把西方绘画中的光与色、此时此刻此景的描绘与中国绘画中的时间空间构建,将两种对待事物的观念传达方式相融合,从理性的构成到自由地抒发写意性、记录性和行为的表达,更加自由使"新写实"绘画又前行了一步。

坚持艺术的纯化之路走向纯粹是我一生的理想。

2009年10月1日 于北京柳林工作室

杨芝儿

走向纯粹——杨凯绘画简论

干端廷

中国艺术研究院研究员

绘画给我们展现了人们能够看到而且应该看到,但往往也是 没有看到的东西。

----歌德 (Goethe)

当杨凯1987年步入法国巴黎国立高等美术学院(Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts)的大门时,他应该知道他不仅走进的是这座世界著名艺术学府,而且遭遇的是近百年中国油画历程,因为自20世纪以来,有包括林风眠、徐悲鸿、吴大羽、颜文樑、刘海粟、吴作人和吴冠中等人在内的二十多位中国画家先后就读于巴黎塞纳河左岸这座创建于1795年的古老名校,正是他们像一个个手拿接力棒的普罗米修斯(Prometheus)将西方油画的火种盗回中国,并筚路蓝缕,将星星之火焕然化为燎原之势,谱写了中国油画绚丽而辉煌的篇章。

光阴荏苒,物换星移。近百年来,巴黎国立高等美术学院迎来又送走了世界各地无数艺术学子,法国和西方艺术史则掀起过一波又一波惊涛骇浪,当杨凯到达巴黎的时候,西方艺术已经完成了从现代主义向后现代主义的转折;在中国,近一个世纪的艺术固然也有波澜起伏,但社会的天翻地覆更让人惊心动魄,而且,由于众所周知的原因,中国的艺术长期笼罩在政治的阴影之下,从民族解放战争到国内革命战争,从中华民国到中华人民共和国,从反右到文化大革命,一系列战争、革命和运动始终制约并左右着艺术的发展。到杨凯走出国门的时候,中国终于第二次打开国门,跨入了改革开放的新时代。

杨凯进入法国当代著名画家和雕塑家皮埃尔·卡隆(Pierre Carron)教授的工作室学习,这是巴黎国立高等美术学院当时仅有的两个具象绘画工作室中的一个。卡隆1932年12月16日生于法国西部滨海塞纳省(Seine-Maritime)海滨城市费康(Fécamp),1951年考入巴黎国立高等美术学院,1960年获"罗马奖学金"(Prix de Roman)赴意大利罗马法兰西学院,在时任院长巴尔蒂斯(Balthus)的指导下继续深造。1967年卡隆成为巴黎国立高等美术学院教授。1990年他被选为法兰西美术院院士,2002年出任院长。卡隆的绘画风格深受巴尔蒂斯影响,具象的

画面简洁而凝重,但与巴尔蒂斯热衷于描绘和表现现实人物及其 内心的孤独和寂寞的艺术追求不尽相同,卡隆的绘画多取宗教主 题,作品在装饰性之外还有一种强烈的神秘色彩。作为巴黎国立 高等美术学院资深教授,几十年来,卡隆指导过的各国学生不计 其数,真可谓桃李满天下,就在杨凯进校前不久,来自中国的徐 芒耀和陈伟德就曾先后受教于卡隆主持的这个具象绘画工作室。

时年31岁的杨凯原本是带着相当充足的自信心走进卡隆油 画工作室的,因为他出国前曾先后就读干西北师范大学美术系和 西安美术学院,并拥有在西北师范大学美术系6年的执教经历. 按照当时国内美术界的标准,他已经具备了相当坚实的绘画基本 功,完全算得上是一个成熟的画家了。但是,杨凯的绘画教学体 系所掌握的经过中国本土文化观念过滤的油画语言,在这位法国 当代画家眼里,杨凯的中国式油画缺乏生气、光色和空间。卡降 告诉杨凯,他必须抛弃过去的绘画习惯,掌握正确的绘画语言。 但像许多西方美术学院的教授一样,卡隆并不强迫学生接受自己 的风格, 也不引导他们进入其他画家开辟的道路, 他主张充分发 挥每个学生的天性和禀赋, 倡导个性, 反对趋同, 他只是提醒杨 凯要用自己的心去体会、用自己的眼睛去观察自然物体内在生命 的活力及其外在光色的微妙变化。卡隆这种只靠言传、不用身教 的教学法。在差不多半年的时间里,杨凯完全在一个改变的过 程,因为他在国内掌握的那一套绘画方法用不上,而新的艺术语 言还没有学到手——这与杨凯初到巴黎时遇到的语言交流问题完 全相同,他只能画一些简单的东西,而且画得不顺手。同时面对 那么多的流派画风如何选择,这是一个令人苦恼的迷惘期,杨凯 只知道努力的方向,但却找不到前进的道路,他仿佛置身于一个 的隧道里,看不到出口,但杨凯没有气馁,更没有停步,他艰难 地寻找、不懈地摸索,终于有一天,杨凯茅塞顿开、化蛹成蝶, 他找到了新的绘画语言, 画出了一组让卡隆点头称赞、十分满意 的作品。

卡隆工作室几乎仍然沿用的是文艺复兴时代绘画作坊式的教学方式,这位教授每个星期来工作室两次指导学生的作画,他还带领学生参观巴黎各个博物馆,现场讲解历代绘画杰作的精妙之

处。他告诉学生,绘画有自己的生命,这个生命在画家与自然对象彼此交融、互相契合中孕育诞生,画家每一次运笔、画面上的每一个笔触都与画家的呼吸、心跳和脉搏息息相通;他特别重视绘画材料的性能与运用,强调画面细节的重要性,他向大家演示,哪怕是针尖那么一丁点颜料的差别都会给一幅绘画带来巨大的变化。对于杨凯而言,在卡隆工作室所接受的教育,与其说是绘画技法的训练,不如说是现代绘画观念的启示,由于卡隆营造的自由艺术气氛的熏陶和巴黎整个艺术环境的滋养,杨凯在潜移默化中完成了脱胎换骨的蜕变。可以说,杨凯在巴黎国立高等美术学院学习的过程就是一个吐故纳新、接受西方现代绘画观念并掌握纯正油画语言的过程。

标志着杨凯的绘画获得新生的作品是一组被称为"巴黎院 落"的系列绘画,它们描绘的是巴黎建筑物上半部的景色,其 中1988年创作的《巴黎美院一角》和《橘色小窗》堪称该系列 绘画的代表作。这些作品看似平淡无奇,但它们是杨凯发现的新 大陆。重要的不是这些作品的题材——这些墙面是杨凯每天从巴 黎国立高等美术学院卡隆工作室窗户看到的景象,尽管这些建筑 已经有几个世纪的历史, 但在巴黎这样的院落比比皆是、随处可 见;令人惊奇是杨凯使用的绘画语言——这不禁让人想起西方现 代艺术史上那个著名的论断: "画什么并不重要,怎样画才是最 重要的。"在这些作品中,杨凯完全抛弃了他曾习以为常的中国 式的油画造型手法,而换上了一套标准的法国当代绘画语汇。看 上去,杨凯的新作仍然是具象的,但逼真再现显然不再是画家创 作的目的;这里,杨凯甚至放弃了三维空间的营造,而强调的是 二维平面的构成; 画面上每一个细节的处理都一丝不苟, 人们可 以看到那些轻淡得几乎了无痕迹的笔触、甚至能够看到树枝投到 墙面上那似有若无的阴影,但这一切仍然服从于画面本身平衡与 协调的需要。塞尚(Paul Cézanne)说: "绘画不是追随自然,而 是与自然平行地存在着。"经受了西方现当代绘画观念的洗礼, 杨凯的绘画焕然一新,他的这些新作不仅与传统的写实绘画大异 其趣, 更与摄影拉开了距离。

杨凯后来将自己的绘画风格称为"新写实主义"(Nouveau

Réalisme),但是,这一名称早在1960年就被法国著名艺术批评家皮埃尔·雷斯塔尼(Pierre Restany,1930—2003)赋予了特定的含义,它指的是以伊夫·克莱因(Yves Klein)、阿尔曼(Arman)和克里斯托(Christo)为代表的以现成品集成、装置、行为和表演为主要创作方式的一个观念主义艺术流派。实际上,在杨凯留学巴黎的这个时期,法国画坛正盛行一股名叫"自由具象"(Figuration libre)的后现代主义绘画潮流。法国"自由具象"绘画的出现并不是一个孤立的艺术现象,它是20世纪80年代涌动于整个西方画坛的"新表现主义"(Neo-Expressionism)国际浪潮的法国版本,换一句话说,"自由具象"是"新表现主义"的法国别称。这一流派还有一个名称叫"新野兽主义"(Nouveau Fauvisme)。当时许多在画布上讨生活的法国画家都被卷入了这一浪潮。该派画家虽然千人千面、形形色色,但其作品有一个基本的共同特征,那就是画面描绘具体形象,但不求逼真再现;作品注重抒发情感,而无意叙述故事。

我们看到杨凯的绘画风格与法国当时的艺术潮流灵犀相通,从这个意义上说,杨凯在艺术上不仅学到了地道的西方语言,而且掌握了法国巴黎的方言。正因为如此,1992年9月杨凯的4幅作品入选了巴黎大王宫(Grand Palais)举办的"具象评论沙龙"(Salon Figuration Critique)展览会,并获得了法国艺术评论界和观众的一致好评。

杨凯有着塞尚一样的创作心境,他沉静而又缜密,能在长久的凝视和仔细的推敲中将一个普通景物绘成一幅耐人寻味的画面,但他的绘画没有塞尚作品中那种理性主义的超然和冷静;从绘画品味上看,杨凯更接近马蒂斯(Henri Matisse)的野兽主义(Fauvisme)艺术主张,对照这位法国大师的传世名言,即"我企望的是一种平衡、纯粹和宁静的艺术,它不含有令人不安或苦恼的题材。对于一个脑力劳动者,不论是公务员或是作家,它好像是一种抚慰,像是一种镇静剂,或者像是一张舒适的安乐椅,可以使人消除疲劳。"我们可看到,杨凯的绘画趣味与马蒂斯的艺术追求一脉相承,其艺术风格也俨然有着法兰西式的优雅。

人们知道,摆脱宗教和政治的束缚、摒弃对文学的依附、超

越对自然的模仿、追求形式本身的独立价值,是西方现代艺术矢志不渝的目标,也是它的真正意义。可以说,一部西方现代艺术史就是一部走向纯粹的艺术史。杨凯到达巴黎后用了半年时间步入了"纯艺术"(Pure Art)的王国,而对于整个中国艺术而言,迈向"纯艺术"之门则花费了半个多世纪的时光。

20世纪20年代末,林风眠和徐悲鸿先后在1917年和1919年 赴法国留学并进入巴黎国立高等美术学院, 一个学习的是新兴的 现代主义艺术,另一个学习的是古典的写实主义绘画,当他们分 别于1925年和1928年回到中国后,林风眠学到的"新艺术"反 遭冷落,而徐悲鸿掌握的"旧艺术"却倍受垂青,究其原因,在 于中国与西方社会历史的发展不同步, 当时的中国需要的是为政 治服务的现实主义艺术而不是非功利的形式主义绘画。1931年, 倪贻德和庞薰琹等人在上海成立"决澜社",在次年发表的《决 澜宣言》中他们豪迈地宣称: "让我们起来吧!用了狂飙一样的 激情,铁一般的理智,来创造我们色、线、形交错的世界吧! 我们以为绘画绝不是宗教的奴隶,也不是文学的说明,我们要自 由地、综合地构成纯造型的世界。"但是"决澜社"艺术家们所 信奉的"纯艺术"理想不久就被抗日战争炮火硝烟摧毁得一干二 净。1950年,吴冠中从怀着满腔爱国热忱从巴黎回到祖国,而解 放后的中国画坛则是社会主义现实主义的一统天下, 他心仪的现 代主义则被当做"资产阶级形式主义"受到批判和排斥。直到20 世纪70年代末, 当中国人的生命课题由阶级斗争转向发展经济的 时候,以徐悲鸿为代表的现实主义艺术才失去了主导地位,而遭 到长期压制的以林风眠为代表的形式主义艺术终于迎来了属于自 己的新时代。

改革开放后负笈海外的中国艺术学子,生逢其时,他们已经挣脱了政治的束缚,可以在"多元化"的西方后现代主义艺术百花园中自由选择。杨凯倾心于抒发性灵的"自由具象"绘画,而这样的画风也正是林风眠当年的挚爱。从一定意义上说,杨凯延续了林风眠的"纯艺术"探索之路,完成了林风眠未竟的事业。

在"巴黎院落系列"之后,杨凯于1992—1993年创作了 "画室系列",那是他第二次进入巴黎国立高等美术学院学习期 间的作品,画面描绘的就是他每天在此作画的卡隆工作室。此时,杨凯的现代绘画意识更加自觉,艺术语言愈加丰富,但画面却更为简洁。看似平常的室内景物经过杨凯的精心安排,组成了一幅幅趣味盎然的绘画。线条的穿插、块面的组织和色彩的配置使得一个个具象的场景又有着构成主义的抽象意味。

1996年,杨凯在巴黎市中心第五区的小尼古拉街(Rue Pierre Nicole)租到了一间位于顶楼的画室,那里是巴黎著名的拉丁区,环境幽雅,周围有先贤祠(Panthéon)、索邦大学(Sorbonne)和卢森堡公园(Jardin du Luxembourg)等名胜古迹,而且地势较高,视野开阔,远处的埃菲尔铁塔(Tour Effel)、蒙帕纳斯大厦(Tour Montparnasse)和圣日尔曼教堂(St. Germain de Prés)尽收眼底。在杨凯眼里,他的窗外就是一幅幅动人的图画,面对这样的人间美景,他画兴大发,接连创作了二十多幅"巴黎顶楼系列"绘画。其中,《寂静院落》和《蓝色巴黎》是这组绘画的代表作。与"巴黎院落系列"的平视角度不同,在这些绘画中,杨凯采用俯视角度,使得画面第一次拥有了纵向的景深。通过丰富的色彩和灵动的笔触,杨凯将巴黎鳞次栉比的建筑描绘得既宁静又温暖。由于视野的扩大,这些作品描绘的景物更加丰富,相对此前的绘画,这可以称得上是一种从小树林到大森林的拓展。这组作品的问世使得杨凯在巴黎画坛得到了一个"画顶楼的人"的绰号。

从1997年开始,杨凯从楼顶下到了地面,也从室内走到了户外,他用足迹和画笔探访巴黎的每一个角落,除了普普通通的街道和树林,蒂伊勒里公园(Jardin des Tuileries)、卢森堡公园、西岱岛(lle de la Cité)、巴黎新桥(Pont Neuf)、巴黎瑞雪、蒙马特高地(Tertre Montmartre)和巴黎植物园(Jardin des Plantes)等著名风景纷纷进入他的画面,巴黎的春夏秋冬也给他的作品带来了姹紫嫣红、五彩斑斓的生气。一组可以称之为"巴黎街景系列"的作品不仅给杨凯的绘画带来了丰富的题材,也使他的艺术语言变得更加奔放;而且,从这组作品开始,杨凯一改此前绘画的立轴式构图而越来越多地采用横卷式结构,画中的景物也从建筑物局部的呈现扩展到对宏观景色的描绘。我们将会看到,随着时间的推移,杨凯的作品尺幅日益变大,画中的风景日渐宏阔,他的

绘画风格也愈益成熟。

从1987年踏进这座世界名城,到2008年回国定居北京,杨 凯在巴黎生活了20年,也将这座城市描绘了20年,更准确地说, 那时的杨凯是一个"画巴黎的画家"。

我们看到,一百多年来,不管是当地居民还是外来旅居者,凡是在巴黎停留和生活过的画家几乎都画过巴黎,由于画家性情的差别及其艺术语言的不同,巴黎在每个画家的作品中呈现出的面貌也千差万别。一千个观众就有一千个哈姆雷特,同样,一千个画家就会画出一千种巴黎的风姿。凡·高(Vincent van Gogh)描绘的巴黎景色是热烈而躁动的,于特里约(Maurice Utrillo)画的巴黎街道是寒冷而苍白的,吴冠中画中的巴黎景象是灵秀而精致的,杨凯呈现的巴黎风景是温暖而又亲切的和寂静的。尽管写实不是杨凯绘画的真正目的,但杨凯那些融入了他内心情感的巴黎风景画仍然能带给观众身临其境的审美感受。不同于旅游者的走马观花,久居巴黎的杨凯已经把这里当成了自己的家乡;没有风情画式的浮光掠影和矫揉造作,杨凯描绘的是日常而本色的巴黎;虽然没有人物身影的点缀,但他画中的巴黎仍然充满了浓郁的生活气息;这是空气中散发着咖啡和烤面包香味的巴黎,是一个可游可居的宜人之地。

2006年对于杨凯个人的艺术史而言有着里程碑式的意义,这 一年他在中国最高艺术殿堂中国美术馆举办了个人画展,受到了 国内美术界的关注和好评。

2008年,杨凯的视野终于超越了巴黎,他的画幅也骤然变大;在长时期钟情于人文景观之后,杨凯开始描绘辽阔的自然风景。《毕沙罗的故乡》是一件具有转折意义的作品,画面以横卷式构图描绘了瓦兹河(Oise)畔一片带有农舍的自然景色。也许是受到大自然本身天高地阔的感染,杨凯在心旷神怡之际放开手脚,纵情挥笔,将毕沙罗(Camille Pissarro)故乡的田园风光表现得诗意盎然。这里,杨凯删繁就简,省略了景物的细节,他追求的是宏大的空间感。虽然画面由斑斑点点的笔触和色彩构成,但整个结构仍然显得严谨而连贯的,在画面的景物中有着空气的流动。紧接着这幅作品,杨凯创作了《神山圣水》,这是他出国20

年之后,第一次用自己学到的西方现代艺术语言描绘家乡的祁连山的风景。2009年,在往返法国和中国之际,杨凯先后创作了《布列塔尼海湾》《天上人家》和《黄河之源——玛曲》等多幅巨型风景画。仍在延续的"自然风景系列"作品正在将杨凯的绘画带到一个画面简洁、气势恢宏的新境界。

迄今为止,杨凯的绘画题材经历了从局部建筑到宏观街景、 从室内到户外、从人文景观到自然风景的演变过程,其绘画语言 也存在着从细腻到粗犷、从拘谨到自由的单纯化倾向。尽管杨凯 也画过人物、裸女和静物,但更迷恋风景。眼下,他对自然风景 画创作的热情已达到如痴如醉的程度。我们相信,在画家与大地 山川的真诚对话中,在心灵与大自然的亲切交融中,杨凯将会以 澎湃的激情不断创作出更加动人心魄的魅力的绘画杰作。

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巴黎国立高等美术学院

Towards Absoluteness My Impressions on Yang Kai's Paintings

Wang Duanting

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Paintings show us things that people can see and should see, but also often do not see.

Goethe

It was in 1987 that Yang Kai went to study at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, when he should know that the step he took was not simply an entrance to a world-famous artistic institution of higher learning but an encounter with a century-old history of traditional Chinese painting. He was not the pioneer, though. Since the 20th Century, more than 20 Chinese master painters, including Lin Fengmian, Xu Beihong, Wu Dayu, Yan Wenliang, Liu Haisu, Wu Zuoren, and Wu Guanzhong, had studied at this school, which was founded in 1795; and they, just like Prometheus holding a baton, had endured great hardships in taking the kindling of Western oil painting back to China, adding glamour to the traditional Chinese painting.

Time speeds past; everything changes with the elapse of time. Over the last century, the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts has sent away countless students of the arts to all corners of the world; and the histories of both France and the Western arts have experienced many ups and downs. At the time when Yang Kai set foot on the land of Paris, Western arts had shifted from modernism to post-modernism, while in China, his motherland, there had been no fluctuation artistically, yet socially. As it's known to all, Chinese arts had long been shadowed in politics—from the wars of national liberation to the revolutionary civil war; from the time of the Republic of China to that of the People's Republic of China; from the anti-rightist movement to the Cultural Revolution—all of which have restricted and controlled the progress of the arts.

It was the big year for Yang Kai to seek further study overseas when China implemented the economic reform policy and opened its doors wider to the rest of the world.

Yang Kai began to study at the studio, one of the two studios for figurative painting in the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, at that time, run by Professor Pierre Carron, a well-known modern French painter and sculptor.

Professor Carron was born in Fécamp, a coastal city in Seine-

Maritime, western France, on December 16, 1932. He studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts in 1951; and continued his study, with Prix de Roman, at the Académie française in Rome, Italy, under the guidance of then President Balthus in 1960. Seven years later, he became professor of the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. In 1990, he was made academician of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. And in 2002, he served as president.

Prof. Carron's painting style has been deeply influenced by Balthus: His motives are described concrete figurative – concise and dignified at the same time. However, there are differences in terms of topics and presentation: The majority of Balthus' are depictions of characters and their loneliness while those of Carron's are religious, strongly mysterious with an appeal of decoration.

Over the past few decades, as a senior professor at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Prof. Carron has guided innumerable students from all parts of the world. He tutored Xu Mangyao and Chen Weide from China at this studio prior to Yang Kai.

Yang Kai, 31 then, was quite confident before he entered Prof. Carron's studio. He graduated from Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts and the Department of Fine Arts, Northwest Normal University, where he later taught for seven years. He should have been a fairly matured painter with solid groundwork of basic skills. What he had learned and taught, however, was only the oil-painting language filtered through the conception of local Chinese culture.

As Prof. Carron saw it, his new student's work in Chinese style was lack of vitality, color of light, and space. Prof. Carron told Yang that he could not grasp the right language of painting unless he abandoned his old habit.

Like many professors in Western academies of fine arts, Prof. Carron never imposed his ideas upon others, nor did he lead them on the path blazed by other painters. What he insisted on is to give full play to the talent of every of his students, advocate individuality, and discourage convergence. He encouraged Yang all the time to feel with his heart and observe with his eyes the vitality inside the natural subjects and the subtle changes of light outside.

Explaining in words rather than teaching by his own example, Prof. Carron put Yang Kai, who was used to the education at home focusing on detailed skills and techniques, in the middle of nowhere.

In almost half a year, Yang Kai got lost and felt himself a complete new hand at painting because what he had learned at home was useless; and more than that, he knew nothing at all about the language of the arts in Paris—just like his language problems: nobody could follow him when he spoke Chinese and he could hardly understand anyone talking in French. The only thing he could do was to draw some simple stuff, stiff.

Yang Kai was more bothered in face of so many choices of schools of painting. He was aware of the direction but had no idea of which way to go. He placed himself in a dark tunnel, far beyond the outlet. He was not desperate, though, but spared unremitting efforts, searching. One day, he suddenly saw the light, and flied, in a sense, from a worm. He became acquainted with the language that belongs to painting, and finally satisfied his tutor with a set of paintings.

Prof. Carron's studio seemed to still use the Renaissance teaching methods. He came to teach twice a week; or he would take his students to all museums in Paris, explaining masterpieces of the past on display.

Prof. Carron asked his students to bear in mind that painting should be bestowed with life, a product of blending and fitting between the painter and his subject. Each of his brush wielding and touching should be closely linked to his heart beat and pulse. Prof. Carron paid special attention to the function and utilization of painting materials as well as the importance of the drawing details. He showed his students how dramatic a work would be changed by using a wee bit of paint.

Yang Kai believes what he has learned in the studio is an enlightenment of modern painting rather than a training of technical skills. His heart completely changed under the imperceptible influence of the free atmosphere created by Prof. Carron and the artistic environment in Paris. As it were, Yang experienced a process of getting rid of the stale creative mode of traditional Chinese oil painting and receiving the fresh genuine language of Western oil painting during his study at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts.

What marks Yang's newborn painting is a set of work, Courtyards of Paris, which mainly depicts the upper part of buildings in Paris, represented by Corner of les Beaux-Arts de Paris and Orange Window, finished in 1988. These works might look nothing remarkable, but they are the New World that Yang has discovered.

The point is that these works are all about what Yang Kai has seen through the windows of Prof. Carron's studio: These structures are centuries old; and they are more than common in Paris. What's amazing is that Yang described them in his own painting language—a reminder of a saying, in the Western art

circles, by Paul Cézanne (1839-1906): "What you paint doesn't matter but what matter is how you paint."

Yang Kai completely left what he had taken for granted, traditional Chinese oil painting, for a standard French language of modern oil painting.

His new works look as concrete as before; but, obviously, lifelike representation is no longer the core of his artistic creation. He even renounced three-dimensional building but stressed on two-dimensional surface composition. No detail is overlooked, even the lightest stroke beyond one's vision: the shadow of branches on the wall – submitting to the balance and coordination of the entire picture.

As Paul Cézanne believed, "Painting is not a pursuit of nature but it exists in parallel with nature."

Educated by modern Western concepts, Yang Kai presents a new look in his paintings, which shows very different tastes and interests from traditional realist painting, and splits farther from photography.

Later on, Yang Kai named his style Nouveau Réalisme, which has been defined by Pierre Restany (1930-2003), an internationally well-known French art critic and cultural philosopher. Restany defined a group of artists, including Yves Klein, Arman and Christo, as bearing in common a "new perspective of reality" through ready-made articles, equipment, behavior, and performance.

As a matter of fact, during Yang's stay in Paris, Figuration libre was very popular in post-realist France. It was not isolated artistic phenomenon; it was actually a French version of Neo-Expressionism that sprang up across the Western painting circles during the 1980s. In another word, Figuration libre was an alternative name for Neo-Expressionism in France.

There is another term for this school—Nouveau Fauvisme, which involved many painters living by canvas in France.

Though varying in works by different artists, one thing was in common. All pictures were vividly depicted—not for the sake of lifelike representation. Instead, they were drawn to express feelings rather than telling the stories.

Yang Kai's painting style met the artistic trend in France at that time. In this sense, not only Yang has learned how to talk in good Western language but he has also learned how to talk in Paris dialect in his artistic creation.

As such, in September 1992, four of Yang Kai's works were chosen to be showcased at Salon Figuration Critique in Grand Palais, Paris; and they won high praise from the viewers and the

French artistic critical circles.

Yang Kai resembles Paul Cézanne during his work. Peaceful and rigorous, he could gaze at an ordinary view and put it on his canvas—meaningful and thought-provoking—after careful goover. Nevertheless, his works are not as rationalistically detached and cool headed as Paul Cézanne's.

As far as taste is concerned, Yang Kai's paintings are more like Henri Matisse's Fauvisme, which holds that "I am waiting for a kind of balanced, pure and quiet art which does not contain any subject of disturbance or distress. For a mental worker, a civil servant or a writer, it could be a comfort, a kind of sedatives, or a comfortable long chair, able to eliminate fatigue."

As we can tell, the painting gusto of Yang Kai has derived from the same origin of the artistic pursuit of Matisse; and its artistic style is as elegant as the French.

It is a faithful goal where the truth lies for modern Western art to get rid of the ties of religion and politics, to slam the door of literature, to surpass natural imitation, and to build the independent value of the art form.

Therefore, we can say, a modern Western history of arts is a history of arts marching towards the absoluteness. It took half a year for Yang Kai to step into the kingdom of Pure Art in Paris; and for the Chinese arts, as a whole, it took more than half a century.

During the late 1920s, Lin Fengmian and Xu Beihong went to Paris in 1917 and 1919, respectively, to study at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. One learned the newlyrising modernist art, another learned classical realism. After returning to China in 1925 and 1928, respectively, Lin's "new art" was left alone while Xu's "old art" won tremendous appreciation. The reason is that China did not develop as fast as the Western world and what was needed was realist art, which could serve politics, rather than the non-utility formalist paintings.

In 1931, Ni Yide and Pang Xunqin established Juelanshe in Shanghai, and the next year, they made a bold and generous declaration in Juelanshe Manifesto: "Come on! Let's create a world of colors, lines, and shapes with the passion of hurricane and the sense of iron! We believe that painting is no more a slave of religion, nor it is an explanation of literature. We want to build a pure world of figuration, freely, comprehensively."

The faith of Pure Art, the artists of Juelanshe held, was soon demolished by the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937-1945).

In 1950, Wu Guanzhong returned to China, his motherland, with patriotic passion and enthusiasm. Soon after the founding

of New China (1949), the Chinese painting circles was dominated by socialist realism; and what Wu admired as modernism was criticized and rejected as "the bourgeois-formalism."

"Class struggle," a subject of the Chinese people's life, was not shifted to the nation's economic development until the late 1970s. Realist art, headed by Xu Beihong, lost its dominant position, giving rise to formalist art, represented by Lin Fengmian.

The Chinese artists studying abroad after China's implementation of reform and opening-up policies are lucky. They had broken loose the political bondage and could choose whatever they wanted in the realm of arts of Western postmodernism.

Yang Kai was one of them, lucky. He was enamored of Figuration libre, then a true love of Lin Fengmian. To a certain extent, Yang continued the exploration of Lin's Pure Art and accomplished his long-cherished dream.

After his Courtyards of Paris, Yang Kai completed another series of work, the Atelier, during 1992 and 1993, when he went back to study at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. They are about Prof. Carron's studio, where he worked everyday.

By that time, Yang Kai's sense of modern painting became more conscious, his artistic language richer, and the picture more concise. The indoor scenery, seemingly ordinary, was turned into pictures full of interest after his thorough arrangement. The interlude of lines, the organization of blocks, and the configuration of colors present significant abstraction of constructivism.

In 1996, Yang Kai rent a studio in an attic on Rue Pierre Nicole in downtown Paris, the well-known Quartier Latin in quiet and tasteful surroundings, with a number of places of historic and cultural interest, such as Panthéon, Sorbonne, and Jardin du Luxembourg. The high physical feature offered a panoramic view of Tour Eiffel, Tour Montparnasse, and Saint Germain des Prés, all in the distance.

Looking out of his window, Yang Kai saw appealing pictures, which inspired him for his series of 20 paintings, Paris Attics, represented by Quiet Courtyard and Paris in blue. The angle for this series is different from what he had for his Courtyards of Paris. Looking down, Yang, for the first time, depicted views of longitude with his brush.

The structures row upon row in Paris look tranquil and warm through his brush, rich in color and effective in movement. The scenery on his canvas became more plentiful than what he had made due to the expansion of vision—a remarkable pace from a "young wood" to a "big forest."