平排明 Yan Pei-Ming

童年的风景 Landscape of Childhood



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尤伦斯当代艺术中心 一石文化 编

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严培明: 童年的风景

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童年,风景, 面貌及回转无望的命运 严培明于1995年开始创作风景画,他用其一贯的狂野的黑白笔触画出当前世界时事变迁中的空间,对国际政治语境中的环境、境遇及人类共同生存困境,表现出深深忧虑和严肃思考。在其创作的一系列风景绘画作品中,景物始终是艺术家内心的事物景致,他描绘风景中的原野、树林或田园风光,并于这些经典欧洲风景绘画中的元素中,铺陈出没于视线中的朦胧前程,灰暗的主观色调所笼罩的空间中透着一种不易察觉的忧虑和不祥,是中国文化中特有的"胸有沟壑"的意境。这些作品被他称为"国际风景",也称"国际风景,罪恶之地"。他曾经说过:"这是一个国际风景,所以,我们不知道自己身处何地。"艺术家对人类深陷其中的全球化政治环境的关切和忧虑,及对个人在历史中命运的忧思显现其间。

正如展览的标题"童年的风景",在尤伦斯当代艺术中心大展厅中一面巨大的墙面上,严培明为在此举办的个展挥毫画出了巨大尺幅的"国际风景"壁画——此处仍是一个虚幻的、无法定义的风景。艺术家说:"这是世界的风景,也是内心的风景,像童年的风景般不能清晰辨认又真实可认。"童年风景正是我们生命风景的开始之处,混沌如初,天然的壮阔平和,属于与生俱来的恢弘,又有着无法控制的怆然。生命回首,童年的风景是一个迷茫之处,始终带着暧昧的色彩和光晕,隐没于我们生命道路的远处,又始终重现于眼前。从一定的意义上,我们的生命之初,同样的纯净,平等;但个人的命运总是又与历史深处的虚无相呼应,历史的回响盘桓于其中,与命运的召唤应和;童年的风景也如生命的自由与那些遏制它的东西,一如生命从埋没的源头吸收到的东西,一如构成生命的中心和场域的东西;当生命漂流并远离其源头,这正如严培明画中那条笨拙而暧昧的弯路,既是生命的出路也是通往虚无的道路?我们都只于这条路上淡淡地出现和隐没,生命也如无尽头的转弯曲折。

我们在展厅看到这个巨大的"风景",以及这个"风景"映衬下的任意的"童年面孔"——在"出生"与"死亡"之间的个人——我们。个人最终能够被讲述为一个有始有终的生命故事吗?个人既是一个行动者,又是一个讲述者,这成为历史这个无始无终的故事讲述的一部分,但历史犹如这个巨大的"风景"幕布,我们沉思于其中。

"面貌"一词,如果我们仔细考量,它不仅仅是可以作为人这个"事物" 之表面和外观,"它"也是观看者。只有在与"它"面对面时,才可以把 它看做是一个人的面貌。那么,我们是不是一定要追问关于命运中的相 遇?这是通过那些无名孩子的面孔的肖像所传达的隐喻吗?生命存在的 印证在于与"他人"相遇,与不可知命运的相遇——也许那条从童年出发 的路途就是我们要承载的命运。1987年,严培明开始画毛主席像,并 于1991年的"通过他的历史我的故事才开始"展出这组创作: 1994年. 他在罗马完成的规模宏大的"水浒传·108条好汉"组画。他将生活在法 国艺术界的人物以中国传记里的草莽英雄故事, 置于著名的美第奇宫的 所有墙面; 1996年, 严培明在南非最大的黑人城镇索韦托市画了在街 上流浪的21个儿童的肖像,并展出于海克特·皮特森纪念碑下——这是 为了纪念在1976年反对种族隔离斗争的"索韦托惨案"中被枪杀的人 而修建的纪念碑,海克特·皮特森这个12岁小男孩的被枪杀引起了这场 黑人的集体抗争。回到法国后,他又花了几个月的时间与巴黎最穷的社 区圣丹尼斯街上的儿童相处,为他们画像,将这些从小生活在社会边缘 的移民家庭的"混血儿"内心存有的渴望和惧怕,精神和梦想描绘成一 首赞歌,并展出于巴黎的先贤祠。这段时间,他选取的肖像是那些在社 会中一无所有的小人物,那些外来者、残疾人、妓女、流浪儿等等。

众所周知,"赤裸生命"的概念,在20世纪的西方政治思想讨论中受到很多思想家的关注,例如汉娜·阿伦特在她的《极权主义的起源》一书中,剖析了无国籍难民的处境:被剥夺公民权和人权的赤裸状态。意大利哲学家阿甘本更进一步以这个概念为核心,试图重新讨论和界定现代主权国家的政治,以及当代人类所面临的基本生存状态。他以罗马法中"牺牲人"的定义来说明赤裸生命,在通常意义下,赤裸生命是被民族国家所排斥的人,比如失去了国家的难民,或者被民族国家剥夺了权利的罪犯……思考"赤裸生命"的问题,赋予了艺术家的创作以社会批判的气质。

尤伦斯当代艺术中心展览中的"儿童的面貌",图像是由北京的一家私立 医院和一家慈善机构提供的,这些儿童是处于这个社会边缘的儿童,有 被抛弃的病童,也有无家可归被收养的儿童。他们似乎处在一个悖论当 中:一方面,在政治法律形式上,他们享有基本的保护权利,享有法律形式上的公民权利;但另一方面,就其实质而言,他们又享受不到任何实际的权利。甚至有时候,他们被抽象为一个特有的身份和一些廉价的同情,毫无分量地在人们的耳际轻飘流逝——事实上,世界对此已经麻木了,人的命运像是一件自然事实,激不起任何情感和政治上的冲动。

在此,严培明的肖像画应该是一种"精神肖像",这一点尤为明显地反映于展览现场的设计上,严培明在展出时将儿童的肖像描绘于相当于国旗尺幅的旗帜上,这些旗帜倒悬于旗杆下部,整个作品构思成装置效果的"旗帜的列队"——超越日常真实的宏大和异样感,提示着生命的力量和本来意义的善。随着旗帜的猎猎飘扬,不断变换并叠加的面孔成为一些更不确定的"面貌",赋予了这件作品特有的深邃感和震撼力——它超越了艺术家对个体生命的关怀而成为对"赤裸生命"及普遍命运的关怀;旗帜,干百年的历史中被视为"头领"的地位和权力的象征,在从古到今的战争中代表队伍的前进方向;今天,旗帜在此又有另一种含义—代表方向,代表人的追求。于是,旗帜这个特有的威严性和象征性的符号,在严培明的作品中,与每个普通人的抽象放大的命运的起伏一起,印证在我们的记忆中。

艺术家的大写的自我也是大写的虚无,严培明很早就清楚这一点。绘画给了他很好的时机去思考时间、命运和死亡的问题。在绘画中,通过痕迹对生命存在的铭刻,是思考生命死亡的过程。严培明深知绘画对于他的意义,他在绘画创作中带入身体的体验,强调绘画对身心运动过程的掌握和极限表达的可能性,他刻意制造作品和绘画规范之间的张力,颠覆关于架上绘画的感受和体验的知识。他总是以很快的速度完成一张画面,其中无疑凝结着速度和力量的痕迹,以及身体明确、鲜活的情绪。在展厅,当他拉开架势、挥舞大画刷去面对"画布",挥抹大块颜料,专注投入的身体在瞬间迸发的直觉、想像力和对画面空间的比较料,专注投入的身体在瞬间迸发的直觉、想像力和对画面空间的比较料,专注投入的身体在瞬间迸发的直觉、想像力和对画面空间为此刻的存在"形象"。严培明坦承,他是对死亡问题特别敏感的人,他画过父亲之死,教皇之死,领袖之死,也画过想像中的自己之死的作品,"我比较喜欢悲惨故事,黑暗的、悲哀的,并用我的语言去表达更加激烈一点"。尤伦斯艺术中心的展览现场就有一种逼人的命运存在感——严培

明是将自己定位于一个运用油画作为表达媒介的伟大艺术家,而不仅仅 是一个画家。

严培明的作品中有一种夹杂着感伤和温情的对于人的命运的关切,有一种沉默和孤独的情怀。正如在这个展览中,他将这些有着未知的命运的,但并不是那么绝望的,目光中无希望与绝望之分的童年的"面貌"画在一个高处,一个飘动的欲挣脱无名空间束缚的高处,一个脱离地面的地方,置于猎猎旗帜之上。这是将"我们"置于一个可以使人关注的高处,还是由于我们认识到命运的回转无望?

Childhood, Landscapes, Faces and a Reversal of Unexpected Fate

Landscape of Childhood

Yan Pei-Ming began painting landscapes in 1995, and using his consistently untamed brushwork in black and white to render the transitioning spaces of current world affairs, he expresses his profound worries and solemn thoughts on the environment, or positions on the common plight of mankind in the international political context. Examining his series of landscape paintings, it is, in all circumstances, the scenery which affords a view of the artist's inner psychology. The natural plains, forests and country landscapes that he paints, once merged with elements from classic European landscapes, narrate hazy vistas that appear and disappear into our line of vision. The spaces, shrouded by murky primary grey tones, are permeated by an anxiety and an unknown that is difficult to perceive; this is the particularly Chinese frame of mind known as having "an abyss in one's chest." He calls these works "international landscapes," and he also calls them "international landscapes, evil lands." He has said before: "This is an international landscape, and thus we don't know where we're located." Revealed within them is the artist's deep concern for and anxiety over the low political state humanity has sunk into, and his troubled thoughts on the individual's fate in history.

Similar to the headline of the exhibition, Landscape of Childhood, on the occasion of his solo exhibition at the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art, Yan Pei-Ming has wielded his brush on a gallery wall to paint an "international landscape," a mural of enormous dimensions – and it is an illusory scene, always hard to define. The artist said: "This is a view of the world, and a view of the heart, similar to childhood landscapes which we can never clearly discern as being true." Childhood landscapes are where we begin our lives, with their hazy beginning, magnificent natural calm, that all belong to an inherent vastness, and they have an uncontrollable sorrow. When

we recollect our lives, scenes from our childhood become a realm of perplexity containing ambiguous characteristics and a certain radiance; they are concealed amidst the distant places in our lives, yet forever materialize before our eyes. In a certain sense, the beginning of our lives is marked by a kind of purity and equality. But our personal fates are ever working in concert with profound historical depths, the echoes of history linger within us, and respond to the summons of fate. Childhood scenes echo both the freedom of life and its restraints, those things that it absorbed from its submerged fountainhead, and the things that make up the heart of life and its territory. When life drifts away from this source, it becomes like Yan Pei-Ming's clumsy and ambiguous winding road: is it an escape from life, or a road leading to emptiness? And only through the road's disappearance do our lives become like an endless twisting contortion.

What we see contrasting with this enormous landscape in the exhibition hall, and these arbitrary "childhood faces" – individuals between birth and death – are ourselves. Can the story of the individual finally be narrated as a life with both an end and a beginning? The actors are individuals, and they are also the narrators, and this becomes a portion of the ancient story, one with no end and no beginning. But history is like an enormous curtain of "landscape," and within it we become lost amidst our thoughts.

Faces inspired by a portrait of Hector Peterson, faces on flags and the possibilities for concern

The term "faces," if we inspect it carefully, not only act as a surface or the outward appearance of people as "objects," these "faces" are likewise observers. Only when we face "them" do they become the face of a person. Then, shouldn't we examine more closely these fateful encounters? Is this a metaphor that is communicated through the faces of those children in the portraits? The testimony of our own

existence is reflected in encounters with "others," in encounters in which we can't know the outcome - perhaps the burden of our fate began as a childhood journey. In 1987 Yan Pei-Ming started painting chairman Mao, then in 1991 he exhibited the group of portraits in the exhibition Mv Story Began With His History. In Rome, 1994 he completed his large scale series of paintings "Water Margin, The 108 Outlaws," in which he painted figures from the French art world and the legendary Chinese outlaws of the marsh, and covered the walls of the famous Villa Medici. In 1996 Yan Pei-Ming painted the portraits of 21 vagrant children on the streets of South Africa's largest African city, Soweto, and then exhibited them at the memorial of Hector Peterson - a memorial built to remember the people killed in antiapartheid struggles of the 1976 "Soweto Uprising." It was the death of Hector Peterson, a twelve-year-old boy, which incited these riots. After returning to France, he spent several months interacting with the children on the most impoverished street in Paris, St. Dennis Street. He painted their portraits, and depicted the spirit and dreams, desires and fears that lie deep in the hearts of these marginalized children from immigrant families as idols, and then exhibited them in the Pantheon of Paris. During that time, the portraits that he selected were of those insignificant people with nothing to their name: the outsiders, crippled, prostitutes, and wanderers.

As everyone knows, the concept of the "naked human being" received much attention from Western political thinkers in the 20th century. One example is Hannah Arendt's analysis of the condition of nation-less refugees and their state of nakedness while living deprived of citizenship and human rights in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. The Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben took this concept even further, attempting to discuss and redefine the politics of modern sovereign states and the fundamental state of existence that contemporary humans are confronting. He used the Latin term "homo sacer" to explain the "naked" life. In the most general sense, "naked" lives are

those who have been excluded from the nation-state, as in refugees who have no state, or criminals who have been stripped of their rights and privilege. Yan Pei-Ming's reflection on the issue of "naked human beings" gave his creations an air of social criticism.

The images of the "childhood faces" exhibited here at UCCA were provided by a private hospital in Beijing and a charitable organization. These children are marginalized in their own society; they are sick, abandoned orphans and homeless children. They seem to exist in a paradox: in one respect, according to formal laws they should enjoy the right to fundamental protection rights and enjoy formal civil rights, but in fact, they do not enjoy any actual rights. So much so that sometimes, they are abstracted into a certain identity and afforded cheap sympathy, which floats about in their ears without an ounce of significance – but in actuality, the world is numb to this, one's fate seems to be an imminent fact incapable of arousing any emotion or political reaction.

Here, Yan Pei-Ming's portraits ought to be a kind of "spirit portrait." This point is especially reflected in the exhibition design. For their exhibition, Yan Pei-Ming has depicted his children's portraits as national flags, appropriately dimensioned for national flags, which hang from upside down flag poles. The overall installation is composed as a "line of flags" – they surmount the ordinary feeling of grandeur or variety, and hint at the strength of life and the goodness of original intention. With the fluttering of the flags, the infinitely alternating and crinkling faces have an even less indeterminate "appearance," endowing the work with a unique complexity and ability to stir the viewer. It exceeds the artist's concern for the individual and takes shape as a concern for the "naked human being" and universal fate. Flags, over thousands of years of history have symbolized leaders and power; in ancient wars until modern war, they have always represented advancing troops. Today, the flags here are imbued with another

implication – they represent direction; they represent human pursuits. The stately and emblematic symbol of the flag in Yan Pei-Ming's work, together with the abstractly magnified and undulating fate of the common people, is thereby confirmed in our memory.

The artist's "Ego," is in fact "emptiness" with a capital "E." Yan Pei-Ming understood this clearly very early on. Painting provided him with an excellent opportunity to contemplate issues of time, fate and death. In painting, the cycle of life and death is carved into our minds through traces of existence, and Yan Pei-Ming is deeply cognizant of painting's significance to him. He has brought physical experience into his painting production cycle, emphasizing mastery and the possibilities of maximum expression painting has on the driving process of mind and body. This has intentionally created a tension between the artwork and artistic norms, subverting the experience of easel art and any knowledge that comes with experience. He always completes a painting in an incredibly short amount of time, indisputably congealing traces of speed and power within it, as well as a definite body and living emotions. In the exhibition hall, when he opens his posture, wields his brush and confronts his "canvas," he brandishes healthy smears of paints and absorbs his entire person in bursts of creative intuition and in utter domination over the canvas space. This process brings together the fleeting understanding of life and death with anxiety over the realization and contemplation. creating an "image" of existence for the very moment. Yan Pei-Ming honestly admits he is incredibly sensitive towards issues of life and death. He has painted his own father's death, the pope's death, the death of national leaders, and he has painted what he imagines his own death to be. "I rather like tragic, dark and sorrowful stories, I use my own language to convey them more sharply." The exhibition hall of UCCA had precisely such a compelling feeling of existence and destiny. Yan Pei-Ming orients himself not merely as a painter, but as a great artist who works in oil paint as his medium of expression.

Yan Pei-Ming's work mingles a concern for human fate with grievousness and sentimentality, and his oeuvre is colored by a reticent and solitary mood. Just like in this exhibition, where he paints the hopeless and despairing gazes of these childhood "faces" with an uncertain future – although not all hopeless – into a high place. He paints them as a fluttering desire trying to break free from the heights of an anonymous space, a place separated from the ground, placed above the fluttering of flags. Is he similarly placing "us" in a high place that should inspire concern? Or does it become hopeless once we recognize fate?













