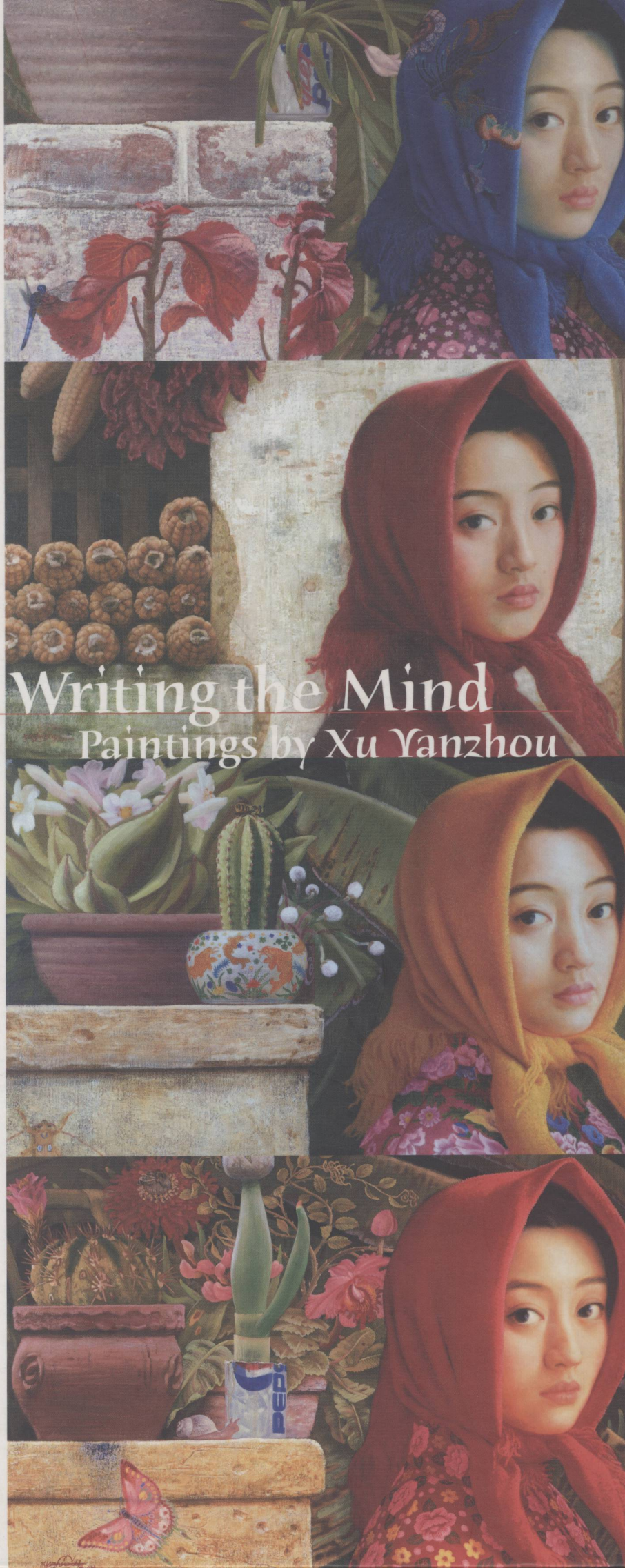


# 寫意空間

徐彥洲繪畫

Writing the Mind  
Paintings by Xu Yanzhou

香港大學美術博物館  
University Museum and Art Gallery  
The University of Hong Kong

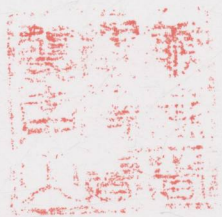




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## Writing the Mind:

## Paintings by Xu Yanzhou

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## 前言

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徐彥州就像其他的油畫家一樣，先從寫實畫的創作開始著手。但他的寫實風格，卻不因循苟且地只繪出如照片般的寫實作品。

他畫的人物以女性為主，絕大部份只畫頭或上半身。她們表情各異，或作天真爛漫，或是內斂含蓄，或作嫣然一笑，或是冷豔嬌媚。總之，她們的臉盡是作品精髓的焦點。

實際上，徐彥州是想充份展現中國女性特有的美態。畫中人常戴極富中國色彩的頭巾，這顯然看出他熱愛中國文化的人文素養。

然而，人物畫的背景，卻又豐富多變；有真實的農莊和花樹；有虛幻的太空和鳳凰；還有虛實相間的鳥籠加兔子，蝴蝶配游魚。這些組合雖不真切，但當中的花鳥動物卻也實實在在地生存著，這無疑體現出他崇尚大自然的某種情懷。

徐彥州的作品既寫實又寫意。他以純熟的技法繪出心之所向，這不盡是抽象的。繪畫聊勝於文字，他以寫實畫來傳達抽象的意念，並不時在作品中提出強者是否恆強？弱者是否恆弱？人能否勝天？徐彥州將這些問題全交給觀眾自行論斷。

我們十分感謝這麼多朋友對這個展覽的支持。徐彥州的畫別具意義，值得大家深思玩味。

香港大學美術博物館

總監 楊春棠

二零零八年七月十一日於山之半館



## Foreword

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At the beginning of his painting career, Xu Yanzhou adopted a realistic approach like other oil painters. Despite the fact that the subject of his works is depicted in a realistic manner, Xu is not content with just making photo-like replicas.

Xu mainly paints portraits of women, usually just their heads or half portraits. He captures their different facial expressions – child-like innocence, subtle expressions, a captivating smile or sophisticated charm. The emotion in these faces is always the centre of attention.

In fact, Xu Yanzhou wants to paint the kind of beauty commonly found only in Chinese women. His subjects often tie their hair up in scarves of typical Chinese designs and colours. This obviously reveals the intensity of his love for Chinese culture.

Nevertheless, the figures in his paintings are set against a variety of backgrounds. There are farms, blossoming trees, the fantasy world of space, the legendary phoenix, a surrealist setting with hares in birds' cages or fishes swimming with butterflies.....Xu juxtaposes creatures from nature in unnatural compositions. This reveals the artist's sentiments towards the beauty of nature.

The works of Xu Yanzhou are realistic and yet also expressionistic. He is a master of different painting techniques. His paintings are not just abstract works; they express more than words are able to do. Xu uses his realistic paintings to convey abstract concepts, often challenging the audience with questions — Will the strong always remain strong? Are the weak destined to be weak forever? Can man go against nature? These are all questions that Xu wishes his viewers to consider.

We are very grateful for the support that so many friends have shown to this exhibition. Xu Yanzhou's paintings have special meanings — worthy of your appreciation and to wonder.

**Yeung Chun-tong**

Director

University Museum and Art Gallery, The University of Hong Kong

11 July 2008



## 徐彥洲眼中的世界

徐彥洲已形成他獨特的寫實風格，這種風格有時還被稱為“超現實的現實主義”。他的畫清新脫俗，極富洞察力。初見他的作品，不僅會心情愉悅，更感受到一種召喚，召喚人們分享他在北美和中國的生活感悟。一旦踏入他的藝術天地，便會對我們週遭的世界有了新的闡評。儘管他畫的是眾所常見的主題，但徐彥洲卻帶著我們超越漠然，去探討現今世界各層面間的關係，展現出他對日常生活抱持的樂觀態度和超俗情懷，引領我們走向充滿希冀的思域。而其他藝術家在相同的文化環境下所慣於刻畫的苦澀傷頹，在此時便會相形漸遠了。

徐彥洲的藝術道路始於中國東岸的海濱城市—美麗的山東青島、省府濟南和首都北京。他從一位年輕的畫家歷練成一位觀察敏銳，資歷深厚的旅美畫家。他早期的作品深受俄、法等歐洲國家寫實流派的影響，但又同時蘊含中國傳統文化的氣息。二十多歲的作品便已經得到中國美術家協會廣泛的認可。爾後，他仍繼續前行不懈，作品更體現出魏晉南北朝壁畫藝術的精妙神韻，同時還融和荷蘭藝術大師梵艾克、布魯蓋爾、維梅爾及荷爾拜因的藝術風格。

在加拿大里賈納的日子開拓了他的視野，許多現代化的思想自此便注入他的作品當中。移居美國後，他在杜蘭大學攻讀碩士，又在紐約和科羅拉多從事創作，繪畫藝術因而得到更進一步的發展。如果說這是他從稚嫩邁向成熟的藝術里程，那絕對是誤導。其實他的才華與老練一早就已經顯現。年僅十九歲時的作品就已經在北京的中國美術館展出，還受到中央電視台的青睞。二十一歲所作的兩幅畫，便從十幾萬件的美術作品中脫穎而出，更入圍第六屆全國美術展，且獲得優秀獎的殊榮，這樣的成績在當時是絕無僅有的。

徐彥洲還是一位極富卓見且思維靈敏的藝術家。他細心觀察身邊的世界，尤專注於人物、空間與實物間的關係，既有客觀現實，又有主觀感悟。他積極樂觀地看待人生。透過他的作品，我們得以分享他洞悉的世情。如果沒有他的引導，甚至還可能錯過他對人生的感悟。他從身邊的環境選出適當的主題來加以描繪，常將狀似超越時空的影像疊在一起，藉此使人明瞭他對事物的看法。現實與幻想、理性和非理性，這些感受全在他的藝術世界裡佔有重要的地位。或許他會給我們展示一幅女子的畫像、新春的花兒、嚴冬的雪景、盛夏的鳥蟲，又或者是金秋豐收的果實。組合手法雖迥然不同，卻異常和諧，充滿詩意。在他的作品中可能會看見冰天雪地裡有一棵夏天的植物，或是一顆懸在鳥籠裡的巨蛋。透過徐彥洲的天賦異稟和自由想像，人們總能找到一種看世界的方法—頓悟之餘又能使人著迷。

徐彥洲對細節的高度關注與敏銳精確終能體現在他的作品當中。他常運用生動有趣的題材、斑斕亮麗的色彩、別開生面的視覺語言、卓越高超的繪畫技巧、豐富多變的幻想能力，以及生命中最真切的感



悟，所有的故事全由他自己娓娓道出，並一一將眼中所見的真實世界描繪出來。他刻劃的形象彷彿從畫布上踱蹠出來，召喚我們去發掘新的體驗，同時也挑戰我們的思維極限。

徐彥洲是一位天才畫家，他集思廣益，開拓創新，獨樹一幟。他高素質的藝術作品早已得到公認，他的畫遍佈世界重要的博物館和畫廊。無疑地，那些能座擁他畫作的人，確是人生一大幸事。

前加拿大里賈納大學校長和榮譽校長

前蒙特艾立森大學校長

唐納德·韋爾斯



## The World as Seen through the Eyes of Xu Yanzhou

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Xu Yanzhou has developed his own style of realism, sometimes referred to as “surreal-realism”. His paintings are fresh and insightfully challenging. The viewer’s first impressions are pleasant and inviting. The invitation is to share Xu’s impressions of everyday sights, whether in China or in North America. Once one accepts that invitation and enters the world of his art, there are always important comments and interpretations of our modern existence there for our serious reflection. His subject matter can be seen by all, but Xu takes us beyond our casual observations to inspect interactions of different aspects of the modern world. He presents an optimistic perspective on everyday encounters, leading us into an area of hope and excitement about the future and away from the hardships of life so often seen in the work of other artists representing the same cultural milieu.

From Xu’s beginnings in Shandong Province on the eastern coast of north-central China comes a cultural perspective which he has maintained as he has developed from a young painter in the beautiful coastal city of Qingdao and the cities of Ji’nan and Beijing to an experienced and perceptive artist living and painting in North America. Xu’s early work was greatly influenced by French, Russian and other European realists, with a touch of traditional Chinese traditionalism. At the tender age of 21, his work brought him acclaim as he earned broad recognition within the prestigious Chinese Artists’ Association in Beijing. As he then continued his evolving journey as a master artist, his work began to reflect the more exquisite techniques of the ancient Chinese mural paintings of the Jin Northern Dynasties of the third through the fifth centuries, also being influenced by the Dutch masters Van Eyck, Bruegel, Vermeer and Holbein.

His years in Regina, Canada provided an opportunity to broaden his scope, and to incorporate many modern ideas into his work. Moving to the United States, studying for his MFA at Tulane University and painting in Colorado and New York have provided him with the opportunity to expand his work even further. But to say that he has developed as an artist in the sense of youth developing into adults would be totally misleading, for his work has shown maturity and insight from his early emergence as an artist. When Xu was just 19, his paintings were exhibited in the National Art Museum of China in Beijing and appeared on Chinese Central Television. At 21, he was the only artist in China to have two oil paintings selected from tens of thousands for the prestigious Sixth National Art Exhibition, at which he won the excellence award.

Xu Yanzhou is a very perceptive and sensitive artist. He carefully observes the world around him, paying special attention to the relationships between people, places and items, both real and perceived. He has a positive and optimistic outlook on life. In his work, he allows us to share in his observations and introduces us to interpretations that we might have missed without his help. Xu paints beautiful subjects and themes in their



own environment, often superimposing images that seem to be out of place or time, but which provide us with his view of the relationships that are so important in his world. He might provide us with views of a woman's portrait, spring flowers, snowy winter landscapes, birds and insects of summer, or the fruits harvested in autumn united in disparate ways, yet it all fits and makes sense. One might see in the background of his paintings a summer plant growing in a snowy landscape, or a large egg in a birdcage suspended in mid air. Through Xu's intellect, talent and imagination one can always find a perceptive way of viewing the world that is both enlightening and intriguing.

Xu constantly displays sensitivity, accuracy and an amazing attention to detail in his work. His often use of brilliant color and interesting subjects provides him with important tools to tell his story, to describe the reality of what he sees around him. His subjects seem to step right off the canvas, inviting us to join in new experiences and challenging our own intellects.

Xu is a talented artist who is not afraid to adopt a different and fresh approach. He has received wide recognition for the quality of his work, and his paintings can be found in many important art museums and galleries around the world. Those who have his paintings in their private collections are very fortunate indeed.

**Donald O. Wells**

President Emeritus, University of Regina

Former President, Mount Allison University



## 引言

當抽象藝術和概念化的前衛藝術充斥著藝術界，仍有藝術家堅持以寫實的方式來進行創作。當古典寫實的風格與“陳腔濫調”和“陳舊”的觀念被標籤在一起時，寫實主義畫家並不單只注意寫真，而缺乏創新，他們同樣擁有現代主義畫家的思維。寫實只不過是他們表達的語言。中國的寫實畫已經歷過若干階段，而在社會功能的討論上，尤見如此。徐彥洲不斷在尋找一種能繪出他所見所聞的風格。他的技法寫實，但他所要表達的意念，無論是作品的構圖、顏色，都很複雜，甚至是超現實的。“寫意”是中國傳統藝術中感動人的精髓。徐彥洲並不因西方的藝術媒體和創作技術，而改變他認為藝術該走向寫意的看法。相反地，他將中西藝術的長處合而為一。

寫實主義源自西方，二十世紀初才開始在中國畫壇興起。那是一段新舊交替的過渡期，封建主義正重新受到中國傳統社會的批判。一九一九年的五四運動，進一步推動中國的文學和藝術走向革命，西方當代藝術初入中國，遂成為中國藝術發展的新指標。在二、三十年代，很多中國留學生把學到的新知識和新意念從海外帶回中國，希望能改變中國藝術傳統的風格語言。中國當時的藝術家正受到西方寫實主義和現代主義的衝擊，雙方各有擁戴和支持的言論。儘管西方正流行著現代主義，社會政治的因素，卻使寫實主義成為中國的主流。中國單調的文人畫被視為與現實生活脫節。人們相信寫實主義能產生啟蒙的作用。而它之所以在中國大肆流行，實與中國藝術學院跟隨蘇聯的教育制度有關。那裡的藝術系學生潛心鑽研寫實技巧。文化大革命期間，寫實主義又成了政治宣傳的工具，是政府官方的風格語言。由此可見，中國的寫實畫並不單只是從美學的角度來看，它還會因為政治和社會的需要而存在。種種原因對後來，甚至是現今的藝術家都有一定的影響。

徐彥洲不斷在生活中尋找創作主題，主題可以是人生的哲理，畫題和畫風會隨著生命中不同的經歷而改變。中學時期的徐彥洲，畫風較接近印象派，輕鬆生動的筆觸和強烈對比的顏色，好像預言著徐彥洲未來的雄心和實力。七、八十年代的中國，藝術風格受到政治環境的影響而受到壓抑，這情況同樣發生在徐彥洲身上。約一九八四年，徐彥洲的畫風逐漸由印象派演變成寫實派，這也標誌著徐彥洲是一個寫實畫家。一九七九至一九八三年間，徐彥洲就讀山東藝術學院，繼而在畢業後於母校授課。當時的藝術學院訓練學生西方傳統繪畫的寫實技巧，徐彥洲也不例外。而他在風格上的轉變，除了受到社會的約束，還受到西方寫實畫家的薰陶，尤其是法國和俄羅斯的油畫大師。

《蒙山絮言》是徐彥洲在一九八四年前的典型作品。他對村民在日常生活中與大自然的連繫深感興趣。他不僅要呈現村民在辛勞過後暢所欲言的情景，還想表現村民務農維生的美德。田園寫實畫在文革後的八十年代成為一種時尚，村民的精神和物質生活吸引著畫家。他們認為繪畫應該反映現實生活，卻不應淪為政治宣傳的道具。無疑地，徐彥洲深受法國寫實大師庫爾貝(1819–1877)的影響，他描繪農民艱苦的生活，並利用自己的觀察來描寫大自然。此外，徐彥洲也同時受到法國寫實畫家巴斯蒂安·勒帕熱(1848–1884)與俄羅斯寫實畫家謝羅夫(1865–1911)和普拉歇托夫(1893–1972)的



影響。作品表現人們內心的情感，忘記社會上的分歧。他這時的作品筆觸粗獷，色調溫和，呈黃褐色。從勾繪人物模糊的線條看來，還可見他受印象派影響的影子。

在一九八五年前後，即徐彥洲在山東藝術學院任教後的那一陣子，他的風格出現明顯的改變。他更進一步地走向古典寫實主義的道路，《小山村》便是個很好的例子。由門上的木紋到女孩的衣紋，都可見到他精緻細膩的技巧，筆觸不似以往般粗豪，至於運用室外光源的效果，則是受荷蘭的維梅爾(1632-1675)所啟發。維梅爾擅長於室內家居的描繪，他詮釋光影的手法吸引了徐彥洲。徐彥洲繪畫的題材雖還圍繞著田園生活，卻將情感描繪得更個人化。女孩的眼波捕捉了賞畫者的目光，賞畫者同時投射的眼神，也似乎讓她目不轉睛。女孩捲起褲腳，看似毫不在意，卻原是畫家精心巧妙的安排。這在徐彥洲其他的兒童繪畫裡都能看見。

徐彥洲後來還將中國的二十四個節氣融入作品中，這標誌著他除了描繪人物形態外，也開始以“意”寫畫。中國古時的二十四個節氣，反映了天文氣象的變化，以作為農耕時令的參考。即使是大自然中微乎其微，毫不起眼的變化，徐彥洲都甚感興趣。時間的流逝、生命的循環，都觸動他去創作，也是他近年作品的主要題材。《驚蟄系列一至六》的雪景，傳統的中國農業文化相信“驚蟄”的那天，春雷的震響會驚醒蟄伏在土中冬眠的昆蟲，天氣逐漸回暖。雪白的大地與褐黃的茅屋，加上枯枝嫩葉，使畫面倍增質感，對比更為強烈，顯見寒冬過後，大地又充滿了生氣。

一九九一年，徐彥洲初抵北美，當時他擔任加拿大里賈納大學路德學院的客席教授。北美之旅是徐彥洲生命和藝術的里程碑，西方的生活體驗啟發他不少風格和題材上的靈感，但這並不代表徐彥洲放棄了田園畫，靈感依然來自一九八七年的中國。相對之前的作品，他的畫顯得更鮮明生動，顏色不似以往般單調，構圖也有改變。他著重女子的面部表情。人物特寫則脫離上半身特寫的傳統，只表現人物肩部以上的頭像。畫面背景是一般農舍的佈置，有些還是虛構出來的。女子身穿碎花布衣，頭纏彩色包巾，這些特徵成了徐彥洲這一期的風格記號。服裝設計雖然是傳統，但畫面上卻有很多充滿現代感的元素：手錶，戒指，可樂罐。全球化和現代化是徐彥洲到北美後感興趣的題目，在鄉郊地區出現現代化的東西，足見中國正透過消費主義走向全球化，也意味著畫家面對這種文化趨勢所受的衝擊。徐彥洲一方面想藉著繪畫表達他崇農尚簡，愛好自然的主張；另一方面，他嘗試表達他在人類面對全球化、現代化和環保意識等問題上的關注。

除了畫布上同時出現新舊元素，徐彥洲也開始運用象徵手法和物件移位。性愛是徐彥洲在這時期的另一題材，許多帶有性意識的東西，如花鳥、甲蟲、馬牛等動物、以及蛋和玉米一類的食物，均出現在描繪女性和小孩的作品中。他善用明喻和隱喻來表達多個題材。《夏天裡的冬夢》繪有冬天在雪地裡生長的棕櫚樹，暗示不協調的時空和現今世界違反自然定律的情況。金髮男孩蜷著身體躺在一條繡有



雙喜大字和花卉圖案的紅毯上。他在生活中親眼目睹了漸趨模糊的文化界線，便在畫裡放進寓示不同文化的東西。

此外，徐彥洲將不相干的元素放進同一個空間，畫面看來是既奇怪又不真實。他其實是想表達科技能將不可能的都變成可能的。充滿幻想的《冬與夏》是近乎科幻，魚跟人、植物跟兔子，既不是在水裡，又不是在陸上，環境神秘，顏色奇特。畫題已傳遞給觀眾一個矛盾的印象，究竟畫的是哪一個季節，在這個充斥著科技及虛擬資訊的世界裡，什麼是“真實”？什麼是“自然”？人類再也沒法分辨身邊的“大自然”是“神”還是“人”所創造的。徐彥洲認為藝術是藉著形式和符號去表現“事實”的媒體。他在畫中反映出世界正在發生的事，當人們的思維和生活方式受到藝術的影響，且對藝術予以贊同時，藝術便達到它的目的了。

在徐彥洲近期的肖像畫，背景顯得更超現實。乍看之下，人物和背景似無關係，但背景其實暗示了畫中人的心境。《新世紀一大中華》是其中一系列以外太空為背景的女子油畫。儘管觀眾不知道帶著微笑的女子到底在笑什麼，而背景卻暗示她可能在想些美好的事物，或是常人意想不到的事。

徐彥洲到北美生活後，創作了一批關於生死和探討人與自然關係的大型的油畫。《無辜》繪有一截樹樁，上面躺了一隻垂死的鳥兒，藉此表達出人類為了自己的利益，不僅破壞了大自然，也同時破壞了萬物的家園。徐彥洲無論身在何處，往往能被自己的所見所聞而感動，從而啟發他作畫的靈感。《盛宴》裡的兩頭獅子、禿鷹及被吃的鹿，是弱肉強食的世界裡常見的現象，人類正如獅子般橫行無忌地對付其他的動物。獅子傲慢地望著獵物，整個畫面的氣氛暗沉凝重，跟徐彥洲其他的肖像畫有著強烈的對比。他筆下的動物都像人似的，至於牠們是被擬人化還是人類就像野獸一樣，便要由賞畫者自行判斷了。

徐彥洲當了畫家後，便不時提出與生命和社會相關的問題，再透過自己的作品來表達他對這些議題的看法。儘管他以西方傳統的寫實藝術去創作，卻不因而停留在純寫實的階段，反而還去探究更多的意念。他不只應用寫實，而且還將寫實主義和某些大師的風格進一步轉化成他個人的風格，從中表達概念化的思想，甚至是超現實的主張。寫實畫雖然是當時的學院用來反對文人畫的“避世主義”，徐彥洲卻沒有忘記“寫意”是中國傳統繪畫對美學的追求。“意”可以是意境、意象、意思、意念或意願，這些解釋正是他想在畫布上表現出來的。他揉合了中西藝術的哲理，以超現實的寫實技巧，來反映新世代的精神面貌。

助理館長  
梁之之



# Introduction

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In an art world dominated by abstract or conceptual avant-garde art, there are still artists for whom realism is their main means of expression. While classical realism is often labeled and misunderstood as being “cliché” or “antique”, there is nevertheless innovation among realist painters, not simply the pure depiction of objects. Realist painters are also modernist painters; realism is just the language that they choose. Realist paintings in China have undergone many developments, especially regarding its social functions. Xu Yanzhou has been searching for a style with which he can express his perception of the world. The technique he uses is realist, but the ideas conveyed, the composition, structure and colour in his paintings are complex and close to being surrealist in nature. Although he works in western media and techniques, Xu believes that the ultimate beauty in art lies in *xieyi*, literally, “drawing meaning”, which is the essence of traditional Chinese painting. In contrast, Xu, therefore, brings together the features of Western and Chinese art.

Western realism appears in modern Chinese paintings at the beginning of the 20th century. This was a radical and transitional period when there was a re-evaluation of traditional feudal ideas in Chinese society and culture, and new ideas replaced the old. The May Fourth movement of 1919 furthered the revolution in Chinese literature and art. The introduction of Western art indicated the direction in which Chinese art should go. At the same time, Chinese students who had travelled abroad to study art in the 1920s and 1930s, were returning with new knowledge and ideas with which they hoped to transform the existing traditional language of classical Chinese art. Both realism and modernism movements in Western art influenced Chinese artists, and they each had their own supporters. A debate regarding which of the two styles should be advocated in China ensued. Due to the social and political conditions in China, realism became the main trend, although ironically modernism was widely adopted in the West. Dissatisfied with the apparent detachment from real life of Chinese literati paintings, it was believed that realism could enlighten people. Another factor is the rise of realism in China is that art teaching followed the example of the Soviet Union in which realism was widely practiced. During the Cultural Revolution, realism was used as a tool of political propaganda and became an official language of the government. From its beginnings in China, realism has never had a solely aesthetic value; it has always embodied political or social needs.

Xu Yanzhou has always sought themes which may be related questions about the meaning of life, through which to paint his life experiences. As he has experienced different changes, his choice of topics and even styles has also changed. When Xu was in high school, he painted in an impressionistic style. Vivid brushstrokes and complementary hues tell of Xu’s ambition to be an artist of the future. In China, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, stylistic freedom was restricted due to contextual and institutional factors. Xu could not escape theme influences and his style gradually shifted from an impressionistic one to a more realistic one around



1984, which also marks the beginning of his career as a realist artist. Xu began to study at the Shandong Academy of Arts in 1979, and after graduating in 1983, remained there to teach. It was a time when realism and traditional Western art techniques were widely taught at academic art schools, following the Soviet system. Xu's change in style was partly due to the social and political constraints on the artist at that moment, and the artists' great admiration for some Western realist artists, especially the French and of course, Russian masters.

"Chatting among the Yimeng Villagers" is typical of Xu Yanzhou's paintings before 1984. Xu was interested in the everyday life of rural residents and their relationship to nature. More than a mere static image of villagers chatting after a day of work, Xu wants to show the beauty of rural villagers who earn their living by physical labour. Following the Cultural Revolution, scenes of rural realism became popular in China in the 1980s. Artists were drawn to the simplicity of peasant life instead of politics; paintings as pure representation of reality instead of as a tool of politicians. The French master of realism Gustave Courbet (1819–1877), was no doubt an influence on Xu at this time. Courbet painted the harsh life of peasants and depicted nature from direct observation including all its flaws. Another realist French painter, Jules Bastien-Lepage (1848–1884) and Russian social realist painters such as Valentin Serov (1865–1911) and Arkady Plastov (1893–1972) were also important influences on Xu. He wished to depict pure human emotions, without social contradiction or disharmonies. During this period Xu painted with raw brushstrokes and an earthy toned palette. The figures have a blurry contour suggesting the influence of Impressionism.

After Xu Yanzhou began teaching at the Shandong Academy of Arts, his style had begun to evolve from an impressionistic one to a classical and realist one. "The Small Mountain Village" shows evidently this shift. The detailed depiction of the wood grain of the door to the wrinkles on the little girl's clothes shows a more refined and delicate technique. Brushstrokes are no longer as coarse as before. The depiction of light from the exterior shows the influence of the Flemish artist Jan Vermeer (1632–1675) on Xu. Vermeer painted mostly interior domestic scenes of daily life. Xu is fascinated with Vermeer's use of light in interior settings and the reflection of light from objects. The single unchanging element in Xu's paintings is his subject, which remains rural China but which now contains more personal and individual depictions of emotion. The audience is captivated by the gaze of the little girl, who is simultaneously attracted by our gaze. Her trouser legs are casually folded showing an indifference to the way that she dresses, but this is actually the intelligently arranged composition and intention of the artist and it can be seen in a number of his drawings of children.

This marks the beginning of Xu painting the "yi" or "meaning" of the composition, instead of simply depicting figures and landscapes when he incorporated the twenty-four terms of the Chinese solar calendar into his