

THE RUINS





废墟

RUINS

Re-deconstruction of Li Gang's Ink Style

李 纲 水 墨 方 式 的 再 解 组

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目 录

CONTENTS

前言 p2
Preface

I 提 p35
Picking

II 取 p57
Extracting

III 转 p71
Transforming

IV 换 p91
Exchanging

对话水墨 p108
The Ink Dialogue

艺术家简历 p153
Profiles of Artist



前言



废墟现场

“视觉幻景”的祛魅

——李纲的水墨“废墟”

杭春晓 / 策展人

当李纲走进建筑废墟，他的立场并非凭吊式抒情，而是借助“残砖碎瓦”赋予水墨新的“隐喻”。理解这种“隐喻”，正是解读李纲新作的关键所在。如李格尔所说，建筑残存凝聚了人造物的“时间价值”。虽新建筑废墟看似时间不长，却也具备类似属性。并且，不同于古建残存观光式的怀古视角，它所释放的是祛除视觉幻景的废墟本身。将如此废墟与水墨联系起来，李纲试图传达怎样一种意图？

很显然，水墨对李纲而言不再具备古建式的视觉幻景。什么是“视觉幻景”？正如观光客面对古建残存，他所看到的并非废墟本身，而是被各种话语包裹出的文化想象。于是，视觉显现的不再是视觉本身，而是想象性的文化景观。作为历史遗存的水墨，亦然。它时常成为今天的怀古观光对象——人们面对水墨的立场，通常会被一种文化想象所控制，使之沦为旅游胜地式的假想物。然而，古建残存脱离了它曾经的背景后，一切关乎历史的想象，都是浪漫主义的“幻境”，并非今日之真实。正如圆明园，在看似悲情的历史景观之后，更真实地显现为一种人造物重归自然的平静。亦如水墨，在笔墨、文人等相关词汇的笼罩下，“文化幻景”成为观看时的浪漫主义胶卷，将其作为艺术媒质之一的物性屏蔽，并最终成为陈旧的保留曲目。曾经浸染于此的李纲幡然警觉，试图通过抽象的方式告别“视觉幻景”的生成模式。在长达数十年的“胡闹”（李纲友人戏语）中，他的折叠、拓印与转印，被视作水墨领域中原典意义上的“抽象试验”——即平面与媒介两个方面的推进，并引发关注。固然，这种努力摆脱了人们惯常经验中的水墨想象，

在形式主义的方式中激发了水墨平面媒材的自我表达。但 80 年代以来的“抽象水墨”，其诞生之日便背负了一种责任——在世界范围内的艺术逻辑中证明水墨价值。如果，我们将这种责任视作预设态度，那么“抽象水墨”天然便具有“反对历史文化想象”的另一重想象——告别古建后的摩天大楼的“视觉幻景”。由于这种“反对”的“二元对立”，使它并不能真正地、彻底地摆脱它所反对的文化想象，并因此呈现为古今交织的模糊话语。其结果，仿佛北京中关村的奇幻景观：古典废墟与摩天大楼混杂共存。而“抽象水墨”在学理层面上难以深入，亦因于此。就此而言，抽象水墨之后，实验水墨、行为水墨的提出，都试图从这一“视觉幻景”的笼罩中走出。

走入废墟的李纲，也是这一“走出”逻辑的深入。他将常用的折叠、拓印与转印等手段，转化为一次关于“废墟”的具体方案，并通过实物、视屏等众多媒材构建的展览空间，消除某种确定的意义预设，在水墨、废墟共生的结构中生成“隐喻”：水墨作为文化的废墟，不需要浪漫主义的美学怀古，而是要在祛除各种“视觉幻景”的过程中，发现其被遮蔽的视觉有效性，在重组中激活“废墟”的表意空间。当然，李纲水墨“废墟”的表意，可以从社会学层面获得解释。诸如它背后之中国城市膨胀中的废墟现象，以及与之相关的社会问题。但显然，这并非他的出发点。从作品的自我生成看，我们很容易发现：“废墟”源于此前作品中某些常用手法，如拓印。也即，李纲的水墨“废墟”并非社会话题的工具化运用，而是自身创作逻辑的进一步延展。指出这一点，有助于我们理解李纲的“改变”，其出发点还是水墨作为历史景观的重新审视，而非“现实主义”的水墨材料。



纸砖制作模具

正是基于如此出发点，李纲的水墨“废墟”在表述上分为“提、取、转、换”四个部分。所谓“提”，指李纲进入真实的废墟现场，选择残砖碎块，整个过程以一个固定机位、一个动态机位的录像记录；所谓“取”，是将所选择的废墟砖块，在一张宣纸上，以传统拓印方式取得砖块六个侧面的拓片，整个过程以俯视、固定机位拍摄；所谓“转”，是将具有抽象感的砖块拓片装裱为镜框，与原砖并置；所谓“换”，是将原砖铸模为纸浆雕塑，并一一编号与原砖统一。作品整体以拓印为中心，将水墨、宣纸与物象的关系进行了一次意义的重新编织。曾经与水墨历史相关的“视觉幻景”，在李纲的行为中得到了一次原意的“祛魅”。虽然，李纲的作品仍然围绕水墨材料的特性，甚至拓印等传统历史经验，但结果并没有回到习惯的水墨历史中。相反，多种媒介的共同使用，将作品的视觉表征指向艺术过程中的思维发生，而非行为结果——看似抽象的画框作品。

于是，人们在展厅中再次面对带有抽象因素的纸本作品时，那种习惯化的形式主义审视，被展场的整体意义所压抑。而这，恰是李纲努力希望的结果。从某种角度看，李纲水墨“废墟”的改变，正是将水墨行为从既定的历史框架中释放出来——无论东方的古典幻景，还是西方的现代性幻景。这种释放，表面上是水墨形式的视觉改变，实质却是水墨历史的认知改变，是一种认知通道的改变。通常，我们将注意力集中在水墨作为媒材的表现结果，甚至表现主题，缺乏反观其发生过程的认知态度。显然，后者意义并非作品

拓印现场



最终物化结果所能涵盖，而是行为发生过程的“自我生产”。就此而言，李纲试图改变的，是我们对水墨固定化视觉结果的认知习惯，希望将我们对水墨的关注转向其发生过程，并因此实现媒材在表意问题上的开放性，从而使得水墨不再是审美寄托的材料，也不是形式自觉的说明，而成为其发生过程本身。

故而，李纲的拓印，目的不是为了观者提供拓印的抽象结果，而是要将“拓印行为”开放为直接的意义载体。至于这种开放所带来的意义获知，则取决于观者在展厅中的“自我发现”。当然，这种“发现”作为可能，则取决于“拓印行为”在细节上的被开放。因为，只有开放性才能保证不同意义信息的自我衍生，抑或说是表述。正如，李纲的拓印因废墟砖石与中国的某种现实问题产生交互关系，并衍生出社会学意义。同时，也会因为纸浆雕塑的塑造过程衍生其他意义。须知，意义因发生细节的不同产生语言审视之外的衍生，正是水墨作为传统媒材获得边界拓展的重要基础。对于这种边界的拓展，重要的不是拓展的具体结果，而是拓展的方式、通道。也即，李纲在关乎水墨的实践中，并不在意具体的意义获取，而更重视水墨行为本身成为各种意义生长的起点。这种态度转变，使李纲的水墨“废墟”不再是传统意义上的水墨作品，而成为一种行为化艺术方案——水墨，只是这种行为展现思考轨迹的通道。

将水墨视作思考轨迹的载体，是今天水墨嬗变需要面对的问题。这种转换，会自然消解水墨的历史预设，从而使其从各种宏大逻辑中解脱出来，成为人面对世界的某种认知通道。显然，不同状态下的人，需要不同的知识生产。我们今天面对水墨同样首先需要将我们从各种历史既定的幻景中摆脱出来，并以此为基础重新建立水墨与我们所面对世界的关系。当然，有必要补充说明的是，所谓摆脱历史幻景，不是简单意义上的否定历史。从既定幻景中走出的人，仍然可以调用原有经验中的有效元素，正如李纲对于拓印的使用。因为，这种摆脱的行为，是基于“二元对立”的消解——不再是非此即彼的对立关系，各种视觉与意义结合的因素，都可以被重新激活，并针对人的认知需要而成为新的视觉结构。应该说，这种认知态度下所摆脱的“历史幻景”，是经过悬置而后被重新消化的人的经验。于是，所谓的废墟，便因此获得了重新表意的能力与空间。正如今天的人们重新面对圆明园，关于“废墟”的想象不再受控于“世纪悲情”的感怀后，我们会在“人造物回归自然的现实”与历史的叠合中，重新显现出今天我们所面对的“圆明园”。而这，或许才是李纲水墨“废墟”最为原初的设想，抑或说隐喻。

2013年10月31日于望京

Preface

The Disenchantment of "Visual Illusions"

—“Ruins”, the Ink Work of Li Gang

Text by Hang Chunxiao

When Li Gang walks into architectural ruins, he does not do it as a kind of memorial; rather, he seeks to endow ink with a new “metaphor” through the image of “ruins”. Understanding this kind of “metaphor” is key to deciphering Li’s new works. As Riegl put it, architectural ruins represent the “time value” of manmade objects. While there seems to be limited history to these new architectural ruins, they embody similar attributes as the classical ones. These new ruins also depart from the scenic, nostalgic perspective embodied in classical ruins; they represent ruins that are devoid of visual illusions. What is Li trying to convey by linking ink to such ruins?

Apparently, ink no longer embodies the classical illusions for Li. What are “visual illusions” in this context? When a tourist looks at ancient ruins, they are not only looking at the ruins but also at the cultural imagination that is contained in different languages. Therefore, the visual manifestation is not only of a physical presence, but also of an imagined and cultural scenery. This also applies to ink as a remnant of history. It is often seen as an art form from the past, as the common attitude toward ink is conditioned by a certain cultural imagination. This reduces ink into an imagined entity like a tourist attraction. Once a piece of historical architecture is detached from its background, any imagination of its history is a romantic “mirage” rather than reality as it exists today. Beyond the sad history associated with Yuan Ming Yuan, the complex manifests the kind of peace that is created by a manmade return to nature. Against such vocabulary as ink, brush and the Southern School, “cultural illusions” become a reeling film of Romanticism before the viewers. It obstructs one’s perception of ink as an artistic medium, turning it into an outdated anecdote. A former believer in such illusions, Li woke up to their inherent falsity and sought to depart from this mode of “visual illusions” through abstract expression. Through the decade of “dabbling” (as Li jokingly remarked), he has embarked on an “abstract experimentation” of the definition of ink with such methods as folding, rubbing and printing. His experimentation has brought advances in both the



废墟现场

graphic representation and the medium of ink, drawing considerable attention from the art world. His kind of effort is a marked departure from the common imagination of ink, as it has vitalized the self-expression of ink as an medium through formalism. Since its birth in the 1980s, "abstract ink" has come to carry a peculiar responsibility--it is supposed to prove the value of ink against the logic of arts in today's world. If we accept this assumption of responsibility, "abstract ink" is essentially an imagined opposition against "historical and cultural imagination"--it turns into "visual illusions" of skyscrapers that are born out of the farewell to classical architectures. As such "opposition" is binary, it cannot be a complete departure from the cultural imagination which it opposes. It also blurs the classical and the contemporary in the language of art. The result resembles that of Zhongguancun in Beijing, a fascinating hub of ruins of classical architectures amid skyscrapers. For this reason, "abstract ink" is a difficult subject to decipher on the academic level. After the emergence of abstract ink, the birth of experimental ink and performance ink may be seen as an attempt to depart from such "visual illusions".

Li walks into the ruins in order to find his way out. He frequently employs such methods as folding, rubbing and printing to create new manifestations of "ruins", as he eliminates the assumptions about ink in multi-media exhibitions featuring different objects and video projection. The "metaphor" is born out of the framework where ink and ruins co-exist. Ink becomes cultural ruins that are devoid of any romantic or nostalgic reflection on the past. Through eliminating

the "visual illusions", the experimentation reveals the validity of visuals, and revitalizes the expression of "ruins" through the process of reassembly. Naturally, one can examine Li's depiction of "ruins" from sociological perspectives. It points to the ruins from the urbanization of Chinese cities and the resulting social problems. That is not the artist's starting point. From the birth of these artworks, we can see that Li's new works employ certain methods like rubbing that prevail in his previous works. That is to say, his ink "ruins" are not a rendition of any social problems but an evolution of the logic of his artistic creation. This point is key to our understanding of the change in his work. Such change starts with the examination of ink as a historical view rather than a tool of "realism".

In this context, Li's depiction of ruins may be divided into four acts: "picking", "extracting", "transforming" and "exchanging". "Picking" refers to Li's entering the sites of ruins where he picks up pieces of bricks. The process is captured on a video camera that is placed in a fixed location. "Extracting" refers to his process of rubbing each brick onto a piece of Xuan paper, extracting the images of the six sides of brick onto paper. The process is also captured on a camera that is placed in a fixed location. "Transforming" refers to framing the abstract brick rubbings along with the bricks in a mirror frame. "Exchanging" refers to the re-creation of brick molds into paper pulp sculptures with sequential numbers, and synchronizing them with the original bricks. Traditional rubbing is at the heart of these works, as it redefines the relationship between ink, Xuan paper and objects. Li's performance is an act of "disenchantment" of those "visual illusions" relating to the history of ink. Although Li's works revolve around the attributes of ink and traditional methods like rubbing, the results do not fall back on the history of ink. On the contrary, the use of different mediums sheds light on the birth of thoughts through the artistic creation, as we look at the visual attributes of the artworks. The focus is the results of the performance-the abstract-looking art pieces in a frame.

This creates a change in the audience perception when they look at these paper-based art pieces at the exhibition. Their usual, formalistic aesthetics is suppressed and altered by the meaning presented by the exhibition venue as a whole. This is what Li sets out to achieve. From a certain perspective, the change in Li's ink "ruins" liberates ink from its historical frameworks. Be it classical fantasy in the Oriental culture, or the contemporary mirage in Western arts, it is destroyed by Li's creation. This liberation may appear to a change in the visual manifestations of ink. In fact, the change is in our recognition of the history of ink, and in our mode of recognition. For the most part, we have focused on the result or theme of the expression of ink as a medium, while we overlooked the creative process in the art form. The latter cannot be summarized by the tangible representations of artworks, as it is the "self-



generation" that happens during the process of artistic creation. Li attempts to change our usual recognition of the visual manifestations of ink and to direct our focus to the creative process in the art form. The shift should open up the possible interpretations of ink as a medium. It is no longer a material for aesthetic reflection or a self-conscious depiction of form; it is the process of artistic creation.

Li's rubbing does not seek to create abstract images for the viewers; rather, it affirms the act of rubbing as a direct embodiment of meaning. The meaning of such liberation depends on the "self-discovery" of the audiences at the exhibition. The possibility of such "discovery" lies in the liberation of the finer facets of the act of rubbing. In this sense, only true liberation can bring us to the self-generation of different messages or depictions. Given the relationship between ruins, bricks and certain social problems in today's China, Li's rubbing acquires sociological meanings just as his creation of paper pulp sculptures arrives at its unique significance. A note to ponder: meaning is born out of the different examinations on the finer details of artistic creation. This is the basis for expanding the limits of ink as a traditional medium. Such expansion is not focused on results; it is focused on methods and channels. In his realization of ink, Li does not stress the selection of meaning; rather, he focuses on the act of ink as the starting point for all meanings. Given this change of attitude, Li's ink "ruins" are no longer traditional ink works. They are a performance-based proposal for art--ink as the channel for expressing the artist's trail of thought and his performance.

This is precisely the problem faced by ink work today: the transformation of the art form into the embodiment of the artist's thought. Such transformation will eliminate any historical assumptions about ink and free it from all kinds of grand logic, making it the pathway to a certain kind of knowledge for us. Each of us needs a different kind of knowledge. In examining ink, we must free ourselves from the mirages of history; we must rebuild the relationships between ink and the world as we know it. Another note to ponder: one's liberation from the mirages of history does not mean the denial of history. As we exit the mirages, we can still draw on our experience with the illusions, just as Li employs rubbing in his art. Such liberation represents the elimination of "binary opposition"--one factor does not cross out another, as all visual and conceptual elements may be revitalized in unison. The unison is a new visual framework that speaks to one's recognition. In this context, the liberation from "the mirages of history" is a human experience that stems from the epochs. It allows for the ability and space for one to create new depictions of the meaning of "ruins". When we are freed from the sad history associated with Yuan Ming Yuan and its past ruins, we can truly see today's Yuan Ming Yuan for what it is. This is the original imagination, or metaphor of Li's ink "ruins".



拓印现场







