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XU BING PRINTS

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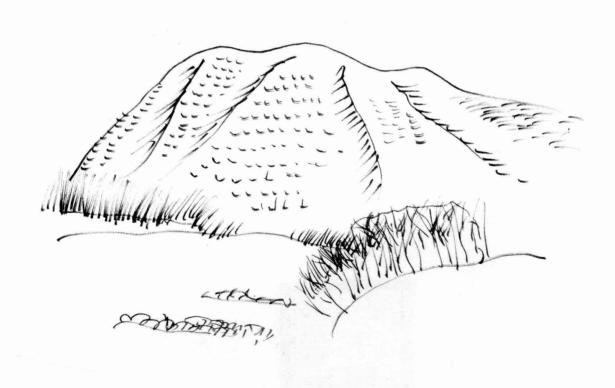
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徐冰

收入此书的作品,仅限于过去的版画。这些旧作现在看来真的是很"土"的,不管是观念上,还是技法上,都比不上今天的许多刻木刻的学生。但好在它们是老老实实的,反映了一个人在一个时段内所做的事情。近些年,国际上一些艺术机构开始对我过去的版画发生兴趣。我想,他们是希望从过去痕迹中,找到后来作品的来源和脉络,这也是此书的目的。为此,书中又附有两篇文字,它们并不是直接谈这些版画的,但对这些旧作能起到"注释"的作用。而此书,又可作为对我后来作品的注释。

我在其中一篇文章中谈到,我学版画几乎是命中注定的。"属于你本应走的路,想逃是逃不掉的"。现在看来,对待任何事情,顺应并和谐相处,差不多是最佳选择。这种态度,是与"自然"的韵律合拍,就容易把事情做好。"不较劲"是我们祖先的经验,里面的道理可深了。

我本不想学版画,可事实上,我从一开始就受到最纯正的"社会主义版画"的熏陶。从小,父亲对我管教严厉得像一块木刻板,少有褒奖之处。唯一让他满意的地方,就是我爱画画;有可能圆他想当画家的梦(父亲解放前是上海美专的学生,由于参与上海地下党的工作,险些被捕而肄学)。为此,他能为我做的就是:学校一清理办公室,他就从各类回收的报刊上收集美术作品之页,带回来,由我剪贴成册。另外,在他自己的藏书中,最成规模的就是《红旗》杂志,从创刊号起全套合订本。这是我当时最爱翻的书,因为每期的封二、封

三或封底都发有一至二帧美术作品,大多都是版画,或黑白或套色的。因为版画简洁的效果,最能与铅字匹配并适于那时的印刷条件。共产党重视版画的习惯,从延安时期就开始了;解放区版画家的木刻原版,刻完直接就装到机器上,作为报刊插图印出来。中国新兴版画早年的功用性,使它一开始就准确地找到了自己的定位。由于它与社会变革之间合适的关系,导致了一种新的、有效的艺术样式的形成。这一点我在书后《懂得古元》一文中有所阐述。这类"中国流派"中的优秀作品,被编辑精选出来与人民大众见面;经我剪贴成的"画册",自然也就成了"社会主义时期版画作品精选集"。加上"文革"中因祸得福,获得赵宝煦先生送的《北方木刻》等旧画册;那时没太多东西可看,我就是翻看这些东西成长的。

中国新兴木刻的风格,对我的影响不言而喻。这风格就是:一板一眼的;带有中国装饰风的;有制作感和完整性的;与"报头尾花"有着某种关系的;宣传图解性的,这些独特趣味和图式效果的有效性,被"文革"木刻宣传画利用,并被进一步证实。我自己又在"文革"后期为学校、公社搞宣传、出板报的实践中反复体会,并在审美经验中被固定下来。所以,上美院版画系后,我可以自如掌握这套传统,是因为我有这套美学的"童子功"。

上述之外,我与版画的缘分也有性格方面的原因。比如说,版画由于印刷带来的完整感, 正好满足我这类人习性求"完美"的癖好,这癖好不知道是与版画品味的巧合,还是学了 版画被培养出来的。

有时,艺术的成熟度取决于"完整性"。而版画特别是木刻这种形式,总能给作品补充一种天然的完成感,这是由边界整齐的"规定性印痕"所致。我在《对复数性绘画的新探索与再认识》一文中曾谈到:"任何绘画艺术均以痕迹的形式留于画面,但版画的痕迹与一般性绘画笔触的痕迹有所不同,一般性绘画以运动中的笔迹形诸画面,是流动的痕迹,带有不定性,具有即兴、生动、弹性的美。这构成直接性绘画特有的审美价值。版画则是范围明确、被规定的印痕。它有两个极端的痕迹效果:A由印刷转于画面的墨色,能达到极度的平、薄、均匀、透明,因此产生一种整齐、干净、清晰的美;B由印刷压力使媒材的物理起伏显现于画面产生的强烈凹凸感,其坚实、明确、深刻,有可触摸的美感。规定性印痕之美,是被固定了的流动情感痕迹的再现。"明确肯定的"形",是木刻家在黑与白之间的判断与决定。它要求这门艺术必须与自然物象拉开距离,有点像传统戏剧的"程式"与生活之间,既高度提炼又并行的关系。艺术形式与自然生活截然不同,但在各自系统里又高度完整。版画,一旦印出来,就成为最终结果,自带其完整性。这是其一。

其二,我对版画的兴趣,是以对字体的兴趣作为链接的。"创作版画"是西洋画种,是西方知识分子的艺术,西方的文人画。其起源和生长是与宗教、史诗、铅字、插图这些与书有关的事情弄在一起发展出来的,类似中国文人画是与诗文、书法同生的关系。铅字与版画印在讲究的纸材上,真是人间绝配。这"配"出现的美,让多少人一但沾上书,就再也离不开。而我从小受母亲工作单位各类印刷史、书籍史、字体研究等书籍的影响所引发的兴趣,在日后版画、印刷领域找到了出口。

其三,做版画是需要劳动和耐心的,这劳动大部分是技工式的,看起来与"艺术"无关。这一点对我这种有手工嗜好的人,是可从中获得满足的。把一块新鲜的木板打磨平整得不能再平整;把油墨调匀,滚到精心刻制的板子上;手和耳朵警觉着油墨的厚度(油墨量是否合适,不是靠量,也不是靠看,是靠手感和耳朵听出来的)。每一道工序按规定的程序走完,等待着最后掀开画面时的惊喜。写到这儿,我想起一件事。1991年在南德科达州维米廉小镇学习版画、造纸和手制书时,工作室请来一位访问艺术家,作为学生的我们为她打下手。当我用调墨刀在墨台上刚比划了两下,这位艺术家惊讶地叫起来,吓了我一跳:"冰!你是不是调过很多油墨!"可能是我调墨的架势把她给震了。我那时英语"张不开嘴",很少说话。心说了:我调过的油墨、做过的版画,比你不知道多多少呢。

其四,我喜欢版画还有重要的一点,就是:版画的"间接性"——表达需要通过许多次中间过程才被看到——作者是藏起来的。这最吻合我的性格,就像我和动物一起完成的那些表演性的作品;冲到前台去,对于我是比登天还难的事。只能请生灵们做"替身",我躲在后面。这种"不直接"和"有余地"是适合我的。

上面谈了我与版画的缘分。下面再谈版画作为一条隐性线索与我后来那些被称为"现代艺术"的关系。敏感的人,很容易看到这种关系。

我最早对艺术界有影响的作品是那些掌心大的木刻小品,有一百多幅,统称《碎玉集》。 之后,再次有影响的作品就是《天书》了。《天书》出来后,人们都去关注它,没人再注意木刻小品之后、《天书》之前这期间的创作,所以,不少人找不到我早期木刻与《天书》的联系。

上世纪80年代中期,我开始对我过去的创作产生疑问,这是从有一次看了"北朝鲜美术展"开始的。这展览上大部分画面是朝鲜的工农兵围着金日成笑。这个展览给了我一个机会,让自己的眼睛暂时变得好了点,看到了比我们的艺术更有问题的艺术,像看镜子,看到了我们这类艺术致命的部分。我决心从这种艺术中出来,做一种新的艺术,但新的艺

术应该怎样又不清楚。当时读杂书多、想的多,但这画该怎么画,实在是不知道。坐在画案前,心里念念不忘创作"重要"作品,但提起笔只能是糊涂乱抹一阵。当时国内对现代艺术的了解非常有限,对国际当代视觉文化的信息极为"饥渴"。文化的"胃"之吸收及消化能力极强,只要嗅到一点新鲜养料,我会先吃下去再说。日后反复咀嚼、慢慢消化,一点都不浪费。有一天我在《世界美术》上看到一幅安迪·沃霍尔重复形式的丝网画黑白发表物,只有"豆腐块儿"大小。我便开始对"复数性"概念发生了兴趣,一琢磨就琢磨了好几年。后来索性成了我硕士课程的研究题目。

我把版画"复数"这一特性,引申到"当代与古代分野核心特征"的高度。在一篇论文中我举了一些例子,大意是:古代是以"个人性"为特征的,人们根据个体的身高定制"这一把"椅子。当代是"去个性"的,不管你个子高矮都使用标准尺寸的椅子。当代生活的标准化使"复数"以鲜明的特征强迫性进入人类生活及意识中,标准间、一次性用具、视频等等。这是二十多年前的想法,今天回看,确实,当代是按"复数现象"日趋强化的方向发展的——重复的个人电脑界面比起电视屏幕,更自由地出现在世界的任何角落;数字复制让"原作"的概念在消失;生物复制技术也在上世纪末出现了。这些只是二十年间的改变,却给传统法律、道德、价值观、商业秩序提出了难题,左右着人类的生活。比起二十年前那篇论文中列举的"标准化的椅子"这类工业的"复数现象",今天的现象更具有"复数性质"。真不知道人类在下一个二十年,又会是怎样的"复数性生活"。

版画在艺术中是最早具有这一意识的画种,这使它天生携有"当代"基因。时代的前沿部分,如:网络传媒、广告、标识的核心能量都源于"将一块刻版不断翻印"这一概念。我那时谈版画艺术常说的一句话是:"《人民日报》有多大力量,版画就可以有多大力量。"这在逻辑上是说的通的,就像智叟面对愚公的"子子孙孙是没有穷尽的"回答无言以对一样。今天我们说到"复数的力量",而将来,人类一定会面对"生物复制"的可怕。上述,是我认识"当代"的渠道;这不是读书人的渠道,而是动手的人在工作室中悟到的。这有点像北宗禅的修行方式;从手头做的事、从与材料(自然)的接触中,了解世界是怎么回事。

版画家在对材料翻来覆去的处理中了解了材料作为艺术语汇的性能。这与当代艺术的手法有某种衔接关系,这是版画从业者的得天独厚之处。这也是为什么学版画的人,表现出更能在"学院训练"与"现代"手法之间转换自如的原因。

"复数性"这一概念被我"实用主义"地用在了我"转换期"的创作中。这期间我做了两组实验:"印痕"试验的《石系列》和"复数"试验的《复数系列》。特别是后者,可以作为我过去的版画与后来的所谓"现代艺术"相连接的部分。当时与复数相关的思维异常活跃,这组画,我像做游戏般地找出各种重复印刷的可能,这些为以后的《天书》装置做了观念和技术的准备。四千多个字模源源不断地重组印刷,向人们证实着这些"字"的存在。这效果可是其他画种无法达到的。

还有一点值得提及的是,从这组木刻起我可以说:我会刻木刻了!木刻界从鲁迅时代就强调"以刀代笔,直刀向木",但有了行刀的新体会后,才敢怀疑:我和大部分中国木刻家,过去基本上是用刀抠出设计好了的黑白画稿。"讲究"的刀法是经过精心设定,再按设定执行的结果。创作以外,少有像国画家弄笔戏墨的境界。我当时直刀"乱"刻,像是找到了一点"戏刀"的感觉,这与前段"只能糊涂乱抹"的状况有关。艺术上某种新技法的获得,经常是无路可走或无心插柳的结果。

刻这组木刻时,王华祥常来工作室,他后来常提到这组木刻对他的影响。他现在已经 是非常出色的木刻家了,我却从那之后停止了木刻。我当时觉得:尝到了什么是"木刻", 就可以先放一放了。

1990年,我在城里呆得没意思,《天书》也受到一些人的批判。我知道我马上要出国了,那时一走就不知到何时才回来。我决定把很久以来"拓印一个巨大自然物"的想法实现了再走。我那时有个理念:任何有高低起伏的东西,都可以转印到二维平面上,成为版画。我做了多方准备后,五月,我和一些朋友、学生、当地农民,在金山岭长城上干了小一个月,拓印了一个烽火台的三面和一段城墙,这就是后来的《鬼打墙》。有人说:这是一幅世界上最大的手工版画。那时年轻,野心大,做东西就大。

同年七月,我带着《天书》《鬼打墙》的资料和几卷《复数系列》来到美国威斯康辛·麦迪逊大学。麦迪逊在美国中部,中部版画发达。一天,版画系 Raymond Gloeckler 教授来看我的作品,看后他说:"你应该让美国了解你的艺术。"从我当时对外来艺术家境遇的理解,我脱口而出:"不可能,美国有种族歧视。"他说:"明天我就和你去见艾维翰美术馆馆长。"第二天,我拿了一些没整理过的材料去见 Russell Panczenko 馆长,他看了东西,当时就决定在主大厅展《鬼打墙》。我希望能展《天书》,他说:"我可以把另一个厅给你展《天书》。"而 Gloeckler 教授喜欢《复数系列》,馆长说:"我再给一个厅展这组东西。"

晚上我和教授通了电话,他兴奋地说:"你应该能看到,他是多么喜欢你的艺术!" 凭我日后对西方大美术馆的了解,馆长当即拍板决定,确实是非常少见的。

经过一年的准备,题为"徐冰的三个装置"展开幕了,反响强烈。其实,这三件作品的核心想法是属于版画的。作为版画,它们比起当时美国艺术界对版画概念和可能的延展,走得要远。这使我相信:只要你做的东西能提示他们的思维所不及的部分,并具有启示性、又成系统,他们就一定敬重你的工作。这与种族、文化差异,没什么关系。

这是我在美国的第一个个展。在以后的十八年里,我基本上是在世界各地的创作、展览中度过的。生活、参与、跟随着纽约东村、Soho、切尔西,到现在的住宅和工作室所在地布鲁克林的威廉斯堡,这些当时最具实验性的艺术圈的迁移。我和来自美国及世界各地的艺术家一样,带着各自独有的背景成分,掺合在其中,试验、寻找着装置的、观念的、互动的、科技的、行为的,甚至活的生物的这些最极端的手段。收在此书中的这类旧版画,一直压在库房里,再也没有拿出来过。偶尔收拾东西看到它们,像是看另一个人的作品,倒也会被其单纯触动。版画离我越来越远,好像我从一开始就是一个极"前卫"的艺术家。可 2007 年我却收到全美版画家协会主席 April Katz 先生的信,信上说:"我非常荣幸能够正式通知您,我们将于 2007 年 3 月 21 日,授予您版画艺术终身成就奖。我们都非常期待您接受这个奖项。您的装置作品将我们的视角引到文化交流等问题上。您对于文字、语言和书籍的运用,对版画语言乃至现代艺术,都产生了巨大的影响。"我这才回头审视自己后来的这些综合材料的创作,与"复数"和"印痕"这些版画的核心概念之间,是否有一些关系。在行人一定会说不但有,还很强。这是我的那些不好归类的艺术中的一条内在的线索,也成为我的艺术语言得以延展的依据。

感谢今日美术馆张子康先生的美意,为我制作了这本精美的画册。

二〇〇九年六月

Xu Bing Foreword: The Path of Repetition and the Imprint

The works included in this book are limited to prints from my past, works that now seem quite naïve. Whether it is in terms of concept or technique, they can't really compare to the work of many of today's woodblock students. But at least they are honest in the way that they reflect the circumstances of one person, during one period in time.

In recent years, there has been a growing institutional interest in these older prints. It is, I feel, their attempt to find amongst these traces the source of my more recent work. This book has been published with a similar goal in mind, and for that reason, two essays have been added as an appendix. They do not specifically deal with the prints, but can still function as a gloss of these early prints and also provide commentary on the works that followed.

In one of these essays I describe my path to the study of printmaking as "predestined." And given that you can't "outrun" fate, adaptation is more or less the best approach to confronting any situation. Such an attitude, in step with the rhythms of nature, makes it easy to do things well. Not to "push back" against circumstance is the tradition of our ancestors, a principle with definite philosophical depth.

Although I never thought I wanted to study printmaking, I was in fact raised on the purest of "Socialist Printmaking" traditions. Beginning in childhood, my father's¹ instruction was as rigid as a block of wood, his praise rare. But the one thing that gave him satisfaction was my love for art: the thought that I might fulfill his dream of becoming a painter. (Before 1949, my father was a student at the Shanghai Art School, but he was nearly arrested and had to leave his studies due to his underground party work.)

This is what he would do for me: when the classrooms at Beida² were being cleaned, he would collect the illustrated sections of discarded periodicals so that I could cut and paste them into albums.

- 1 Xu Huamin (1925-1989), an administrator in the history department at Peking University both before and after the Cultural Revolution (1965-1976).
- 2 A standard abbreviation of Peking University, established in 1898.

Among his own collection of books, the most weighty was a complete bound set of *Hongqi* magazine, starting with the first issue.³ It was my favorite thing to read because the inside or back cover would always include one or two artworks, the majority of which were prints, either black and white or in color.

Due to its clarity and simplicity, the print was best adapted to the letterpress technology of that period. The Communist Party practice of advocating the use of the print first began during Yan'an,⁴ when a printmaker working in the liberated areas⁵ would have his block fitted on the press to be printed in a magazine or newspaper the moment he had finished carving it.

The early utility of the new Chinese printmaking movement⁶ was to quickly and definitively establish its own identity as a style. A transformation in the relationship between art and society taking place at the time thus led to the formation of a new and effective artistic style. (I discuss this point in greater detail in the accompanying essay "Understanding Gu Yuan.") The best works of this "Chinese School" of printmaking were chosen for publication and thereby sent among the people. Through my cutting and pasting, the albums that I created as a youth naturally came to form a definitive *Anthology of Socialist-era Chinese Printmaking*.

One small benefit of the misfortune of the Cultural Revolution was that I received a gift from Mr. Zhao Baoxu⁷ of woodcutting tools, French ink and catalogues like *Northern Woodcuts*. We didn't have much to read then, so I was raised on that stuff.

New Chinese printmaking undoubtedly had an influence on me. As a style, it is meticulous and methodical. It possesses something of the Chinese decorative style: a sense of craft and of completeness. In some ways reminiscent of newspaper masthead illustrations, it has an explanatory quality. Its singular visual effectiveness was redeployed in Cultural Revolution woodblock propaganda prints, further solidifying its place as a distinct style.

During the later period of the Cultural Revolution, in the work that I did for my school and in the propaganda work that I did for the commune bulletin board newspaper, I was in constant contact with this style; its place within my aesthetic experience was secured. So when I began my studies in the printmaking department of The Central Academy of Fine Arts, I could easily grasp this set of traditions because I was the "child" of its methods.

In addition to the factors I describe above, my fate with prints was also a question of personality. The aspect of completeness in the printing process, for instance, well satisfies the perfectionist tendencies of my personality type, tendencies which may be coincidental to my interest in printmaking or which may have been bred into me through its study.

- 3 Hongqi (Redflag) was the flagship magazine of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) from 1958 to 1988. In 1988, it was renamed Qiushi.
- 4 Yan'an City, located in the Shanbei region of Shaanxi Province, functioned as the base of power for the CCP from 1937 to 1948.
- 5 Liberated areas = jiefangqu were those areas under CCP control during the Chinese Civil War.
- 6 The new Chinese print movement = xinxing banhua yundong began in the early 1930s under the guidance and encouragement of author and scholar Lu Xun (1881-1936).
- 7 (1922-) currently Senior Professor of international relations at Peking University. The title "Mr." is used here, later in this essay and at other points in this publication as an honorific title.
- 8 Northern Woodcuts = Beifang Muke, published by Gaoyuan Bookstore (Shanghai) in 1947.

Sometimes the maturity of a work of art is a matter of its sense of "completeness." What printmaking—and especially woodblock printmaking—brings to a work is an organic sense of completeness, a quality that derives from the neat edges created by the "prescribed" imprint.

In the essay A New Exploration and Reconsideration of Pictorial Repetition, 9 I wrote that,

Any two dimensional artwork takes the form of a mark left on the surface of a canvas. But the mark of the print, which derives from the prescribed processes of plate-making and impression, is distinct from that of the brush (as in other art forms), wherein the mark takes shape amidst the movement of the brush. Therefore, what may be called a fluid mark has an uncertain quality, a rich, multifaceted, animated, elastic beauty, which also constitutes an aesthetic value unique to painting and drawing, whereas the mark of the print is comparatively defined and fixed.

Such a mark can assume two divergent forms:

9 "A New Exploration and

Reconsideration of Pictorial Repetition" = Dui Fushuxing

Huihua de Xin Tansuo yu Zai Renshi is an excerpt from

Xu Bing's MFA thesis. It was

first published under this title in the October 1986 number

of Art = Meishu, the official

journal of the China Artists

Association.

A) flatness: because ink or pigment is transferred onto the page through a press, printmaking can achieve an extreme degree of flatness, thinness, uniformity and clarity that all produce a beauty ordered, clean and sharp;

B) intense texture: the effects of pressure in the printing process bring the physical qualities of the medium into stark relief on the surface of the print. In these deep, solid and defined visual qualities there exists a forceful and almost tangible beauty. This, the beauty of the prescriptive imprint, is the fixed rendering of a mark of transient emotion.

"Specificity" as to "form" is a decision, a judgment made by the printmaker as he determines the relationship between black and white in the final image. This means that the print must distance itself from the natural appearance of things. It is a relationship a bit like the discrepancy that exists between the stylized gestures of traditional opera and real life, the former a highly crystallized version of the later. Artistic forms and the natural world are distinct; however, each possesses a sense of completeness in its own right. As soon as it comes off the press, a print has already taken its final form and possesses just that sense of completeness. This is my first point.

Secondly, my interest in printmaking relates directly to my interest in typography. The "creative print" is a Western genre. It is the art of the Western intellectual, a sort of