

Ju Ting : Correspondences

Test / Sun Dongdong

Objects have spread throughout contemporary art like Gospels, and the artists that have heard the Word have brought their works out from the domain of the image in an attempt to salvage their works' power. Martin Heidegger said "the fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture", and today's current visual culture verifies Heidegger's insight. However, as a part of today's contemporary culture, the "image" does not, as in Heidegger's descriptions, simply reflect the world from the perspective of metaphysical criticism. Similarly, Charles Baudelaire's famous description of modernity as ephemeral, momentary, and random describes only one half of art. The other half is eternal and unchanging. As for now, whether in art or general image production, brevity, transitions, and randomness are almost a kind of normalcy for contemporary images. This expresses a shift toward the eternal and the unchanging in consumer logic.

The relationship between advertising and merchandise has reshaped the value of the image in the media age: The value of exchange masquerades as the value of use, as people must first consume images before they consume merchandise. It could be said that the entirety of contemporary capitalism's production system is based around the management and domination of the eyes. The image functions as a guide, and material consumption follows. This conversion of the real world into images can be seen clearly through the platform of the internet. People are faced with a multitude of dazzling screens and an entire simulated body system causes them to project themselves outward in a fantasy of subjectivity. In the present, the internet has taken on Heidegger's description of the "World Picture", but only as a landscape obscuring the will of capital globalization behind it. In contrast, as a cultural industry system, the art market appears to have evolved beyond the manufacture of images but in reality has never actually abandoned the image. Even though the image is no longer art's only medium, it is still an effective medium of communication. Therefore, very few artists will admit that they are producing images. However, at the level of dissemination, their art is necessarily caught up in a visual competition over pictorialization, and that is not even taking into consideration the competition over image production that occurs outside of the art industry itself.

Paradoxically, one part of the art industry emphasizes artistic presentation's meaning when seeing it, while the other part continues to emphasize distance from the time of image manufacturing. This kind of schizophrenia in the art industry is not unrelated to the industry's financialization. To emphasize art's presentation is to more or less revisit classic comments made by Michael Fried on American minimalist art from his 'Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews' (1967) in which he said that presence is a kind of theatricalization of the senses. A connection with the observer built through objects is a kind of inexhaustible experience, but also a kind of hollowness. In this way, he is actually pointing to the crisis of Clement Greenberg's idea of modern art encountered as it reached the end of formalism's logic. As time has passed, increasingly strong requirements have been placed on presentation as well as physical materials, but this is no longer a subject of modernist form. Rather, it's a kind of call to the "aura", for the entirety of the visual elements must be recognized as part of the concrete, self-contained piece of art.

Moreover, Fred's article from 40 years ago also roughly sketched out an artistic concept of conceptual presentation in which we can learn that the artistic practices artists were referring to consisted of traditional forms like painting and sculpture--media legacies far too important to be ignored. So when Ju Ting decided to use a plane of knife-scored acrylic paint, she faced a certain similar situation to those minimalist painters from decades prior. Academic institutions of traditional media have always been unable to offset the career anxiety that the art industry projects onto artists, so artists have always had to formulate their own direction of individual practice in accordance with the current presentation environments. The problem is that the strategy that any given artist adopts is a response to their own media education. Clearly, Ju Ting's strategy is not radical. Her execution clearly lays bare her printmaking studies: aside from the very obvious knife marks, the incisions reveal many layers of

pigment that show her print-making experience, but her print material in this case is acrylic paint which attaches to the tradition of print-making a conscious exploration of engraving through different layers of color. However, these are the results of Ju Ting's decisions. As with the characteristics listed above, this can also be summarized within the context of material. That is to say, Ju Ting has removed the relational aesthetics between "print-setting" and "painting", directly emphasizing "print-setting" as artistic independence. By using material in place of representation, she has thusly bypassed the copy.

Despite avoiding representation and ignoring the process of copying, she is by no means refusing awareness of the graphical print. Permeating the depths of the acrylic planes, a kind of visualization is created that offers a paradoxical relationship between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional. Seeing it gives way to a kind of premeditated dynamic form. From the optical illusion of the plane, the shape of the material moves step by step with the actual layers and textures towards a tactile visual synesthesia. While working, Ju Ting is like a traditional oil painter, repeatedly looking back at her work before returning and continuing to engrave. In this way, her process has inherited the manual labor of the traditional artist. Here, the process of manual labor sustains the natural relationship between the artist's hand, heart, and thoughts. The knife marks, for Ju Ting, are a characterization of subjectivity communicated through her own body. One aspect is the technical level of control. Another is related to emotional, sensory, and intuitive talents. For example, when naming the works in her "+-" series, Ju Ting marked each piece with a number following the name of the series. This number marks the day the piece left the studio like the memorialization of a farewell. It also carries the faint awareness of a certain motherly instinct. So, from the point of nature, we realize that even if Ju Ting's practice has avoided modes of reproduction, she still hopes to retain the color of her material pigments as a response and allusion to the charm of the natural world. It can be said that Ju Ting has revisited the tradition of Humanism, and that she basks in the historical concept of the beauty of creation.

It is worth noting that Ju Ting's layers of colors are made from acrylic paint, a product of the modern industrialized art industry. To Thierry de Duve, the invention of the oil paint tube in the 19th century illustrates how the invasion of industrialization has turned all painting into a kind of quasi-readymade. Thierry de Duve's example shows how western modernism stretched through to contemporary art's "human liberation" utopian leanings. At least to de Duve, this means that the plan of modernity to place art within the context of social practice has failed. However, this doesn't refer to all of mankind. For people such as us, living in developed modernized countries, why should the concept of "modernity" always make us think of Claude Baudelaire, the 19th century poet wandering the streets of Paris? Because much of the time, Baudelaire is a prophet in our eyes. Momentary, ephemeral, fleeting: these words so correspond to our last 30 years of experience in China that we often ignore Baudelaire's mention of "the eternal and unchanging". Historically, Baudelaire was a spiritualist and his use "the eternal and unchanging" referred to the transcendental world the cosmos imparts upon man. So, in his poem "Correspondences", we read his poetic description of the invisible world. Symbolically, synesthesia becomes the path to implement spiritual emotions, tying a knot between nature and man. As we know, material is silent, and experience, with respect to transcendentalism, is specific. The formed material that Ju Ting has produced is both man-made and hand-made. When it is placed between us and we stare at it, it reflects our own experience and soul.

Translation / Michael Robert Winkler