

YAN XING / STUDIO

A Conversation between Maurizio Cattelan and Yan Xing

by Maurizio Cattelan, Yan Xing

Maurizio Cattelan: This coffee is too sweet.

Yan Xing: You mean I'm too sweet or the coffee?

MC: Both. Remember we met here several months ago? You were drunk that day.

YX: Hmm ... this time I am only planning to stay in Hong Kong for one day. I already had some coffee on the plane to prepare for this interview. Where shall we start?

MC: You look so busy. What have you been busy with recently?

YX: I've been busy practicing how to be arty, how to live my life artily, how to live my life artily to the maximum. I guess you are not interested at all in my recent plans, eh?

MC: Why not?

YX: Didn't you make an announcement saying that you're gonna quit the art scene? Although I do not believe it ... hmmm, actually I do not believe it ... mainly because I am not interested in knowing whether you are quitting or not. It's always hard for me to be really involved in any individual artist's behavior. I am just afraid I am here talking about a lot of exciting things happening in my lovable profession, which you have already decided to quit. If this is so, aren't we attacking each other?

MC: Do you believe in artists?

YX: Do you want to ask if I believe in you?

MC: I am asking whether you believe in artists in general.

YX: Do you believe in politicians?

MC: Hey, sir! Shall we talk about the collaboration in detail first?

YX: I am a young man and quite vulgar. I am only interested in the work in detail.

MC: I would like to invite you to join the photo-shoot of "Toilet Paper."

YX: Why aren't you inviting me to join your "Family Business"?

MC: You are such a sweet boy, eh?

YX: To be honest, before coming here to Hong Kong to see you, I did quite a bit of research about your current projects including "Toilet Paper," "Family Business" and previously interviewing a variety of artists for "Flash Art."

MC: Have you read "Toilet Paper"?

YX: Yes. It really looks like toilet paper, just a bit thicker. I am the kind of person who rarely reads magazines, and I am an artist who does not know how to deal with "contemporariness." I have never really gained an understanding of the difference between "popularity," "momentum," "consumption," "entertainment," and so on. I don't know if you can understand what I am saying. As a matter of fact, the education I have received does not allow me to appreciate "art pieces" such as "Toilet Paper." Obviously, you might say that this is not a piece of art at all.

YAN XING / STUDIO

MC: I cannot fully understand your meaning. The exhibition at the Guggenheim is my first stop, and at the same time my last retrospective. After that, I will not participate in any more exhibition projects. As a person of my age, I know I need for more things to be happening, but I'm not sure what should be happening. I regard this retrospective as a chance for me to stop and rethink my art works. I rather see my "quitting" as a means of self-improvement, although I don't know how to do it in detail. Do you have any suggestions?

YX: Aside from that last sentence - which sounds funny - I didn't expect you to be so serious when treating art. This is completely different from the "you" in my mind.

MC: This depends more on whether you prefer to believe in art or artists. Both are shortcuts, depending on how you would like to go. I had some impression of you when someone introduced me to you for the first time, and now that I really see you, I think I rather believe some of those gut feelings.

YX: I believe that artists like you must experience a lot of misinterpretations, or that you have been correcting others' opinions thousands of times – this is just my guess.

MC: I have rarely had to do any corrections after finishing a job. More often, I have hesitated in my preparation phase for several months.

YX: You are typical of a certain kind of contemporary artist. This is like mining, someone working continuously at their job very hard, but never getting any diamonds. You are of the other kind.

MC: I have been digging really hard as well, while, after the retrospective at the Guggenheim, I have been thinking that I have to rethink my creations. The only thing I want to guarantee is that this exhibition runs parallel to my 130 artworks. I will become the background to this exhibition.

YX: The works become your decoration?

MC: Today I thought I would be your decoration, but why did it end up with you being mine?

YX: How come I felt just as I was boarding that I would become your decoration?

MC: Then why did you still come to the interview? Was it Urs Meile who found you?

YX: Actually the first people I met in the art scene were Liu Ding and Carol Yinghua Lu. They offered me a springboard to break into art circles. Urs Meile was the first person to collaborate with me.

MC: Do you think you will go on working in the art scene?

YX: Yes, but not always as famously as I do now. Fame always fades away, and we constantly witness someone being famous and then passing out of fashion in contemporary art. It's all about experience.

MC: Let's go out and take a walk.

YX: The first time I met you was when I was still with my ex-boyfriend. We were staying at the hotel where we just had coffee.

MC: I just saw your image in your own work. How do you think of yourself today?

YX: Why do you want to reach a conclusion now?

MC: Just to express my care for you. Why are you so sensitive?

YAN XING / STUDIO

YX: There was a moment just now when I was feeling like our surroundings were really like Ferrara. Yes, the town of Ferrara, where the man and the woman met each other in the film “Beyond the Clouds” by Michelangelo Antonioni, and you interrupted me!

MC: Ferrara in Italy?

YX: Let’s put it this way: Why do you want me to have such a conversation with you here?

MC: I heard that you were working with Urs Meile. He rarely collaborates with young artists, which is, of course, not my main point in seeing you. I have also heard of your influential power among young guys. You are the same as me; we have endless energy.

YX: Let’s go in and have a drink.

MC: I think you must know Terence Koh.

YX: Yes, we know each other. I participated in his performance last year. Why would you connect me with him? I would’ve thought you’d have thought of Robert Mapplethorpe.

MC: I have seen your works about him. Do you think you are a certain kind of artist?

YX: Definitely, and one easy to be categorized, easy to be remembered, very true to form. Most artists are seeking so-called “uncertainty,” and I hate this. I have been trying to look for precision of expression, even for each description of images. I believe in a certain value system, and it is incorrect to run counter to this, even if most people can hardly find it out.

MC: I know what you mean. Do you believe that your judgment of art is correct?

YX: Of course, but not of men.

MC: Me neither.

YX: But you are good at judging audiences. You know how much an audience gets your works, don’t you think so?

MC: Aren’t you the same? Are you a control freak?

YX: I don’t think so, but people around me always say I am.

MC: Where you are going next month?

YX: Ukraine, and also I want to go to Georgia.

MC: To travel?

YX: Yes, like today, following art to travel.

MC: But there would be no gentleman like me to chat with you.

YX: You should say “Everywhere there is a seductive little fox just like you!”