

鄢醒

贼

Yan Xing

Thief

GALERIEURSMEILE 麦勒画廊

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鄢醒的  
问题

田霏宇

The Question  
of Yan Xing

by Philip Tinari

莫瑞吉奥·卡特兰 (Maurizio Cattelan): 你看起来挺忙啊。最近都在忙些什么?

鄢醒: 我忙着练习如何艺术, 如何艺术地生活, 如何在最大程度上艺术地生活。<sup>1</sup>

1980年, 重庆四川美术学院32岁的油画家罗中立第一次参加于北京举办的“第二届全国青年美展”, 他提交的作品名为《我的父亲》, 是一张215×150厘米的巨幅油画。艺术家用超级写实主义的色彩近距离刻画了一位中年老农满脸的皱纹和污渍, 画中农民手捧粗碗, 耳朵后面还夹着一支笔。模特的原型是罗中立下乡插队(1968—78)期间看到的一位守粪人。为了防止邻村生产队的人来自己队上偷粪, 这位中年农民在大年三十晚上都不得不守在本村的厕所边。《我的父亲》一经发表就在全国范围内引发了巨大反响, 几个月后罗中立在写给《美术》(当时的先驱主流杂志)杂志的文章中回想道: “这就是生育、养育我的父亲, 站在这样一位如此醇厚、善良、辛苦的父亲面前, 谁又能无动于衷呢?……又是哪些人不了解, 不热爱这样的父亲呢?”<sup>2</sup>

《父亲》(作品后来的通称)的故事已然成为中国当代艺术的创始神话之一。这件作品激发的强烈反响大部分来自返城的“知识青年”, 他们都迫切需要反思并接受“文化大革命”后自身经历的历史。《父亲》的成功在于放大与特写——之前从来没人用这么大的画面画过普通人——同时也在于细节的大量使用, 过去几十年主导中国工具化艺术创作的“现实主义”体系(社会主义性质的也好, 革命性质的也好, 其他性质的也好)在艺术家笔下被重新组织。“技巧我没有想到, 我只是想尽量细, 愈细愈好。”<sup>3</sup>罗中立承认他“以前看过一位美国照相现实主义画家的一些肖像画”, 后经证实这位画家是查克·克洛斯(Chuck Close), 而且“这个印象实际就决定了我这幅画的形式, 因为我感到这种形式最利于强有力地传达我的全部感情和思想。”除去影响的焦虑以外, 这件作品为一段尚未被宏大叙事绑定的历史提供了一个较早的例证: 有选择地采用既成的形式语言, 同时深入探究某个具有在地普遍性意义的具体对象——这种做法在八十年代初也是一个前进的方向。

几乎整整三十年之后, 在罗中立已经担任院长多年的四川美术学院油画系, 另一位重庆出生的年轻毕业生鄢醒第一次在北京公开登场。2011年冬天的一个下午, 鄢醒出现在草场地的一家画廊空间里, 他面对着一面典型艾未未设计的白色砖墙, 背后是碰巧来到开幕现场的所有观众。他开始向自己不在场的“父亲”诉说身世, 这段坦白的故事里有磨难, 有失败, 有未能实现的期待, 也有遭受挫折的欲望。和罗中立的《父亲》一样, 鄢醒的《DADDY项目》(2011)也是一种合成, 一种投射, 一种想象——它来源并扎根于生活经验, 但凸显的却是一个其阴影同样可能笼罩一代人的人物

形象。在度过十年与粪便相伴的艰苦生活之后, 八十年代的年轻画家可以用哀悯的笔触去刻画饱经风霜的农民形象, 并感动于农民身上超自然的简单和淳朴。在改革开放已经进行三十多年的今天, 当初真挚的热望早已不见, 取而代之的是鄙醒故事里讲述的那种人物: 他逃避责任, 贪图便宜, 遇事妥协, 负债累累, 甚至还使用家庭暴力, 完全迷失了人生方向。“现实主义”, 具体来说应该是某种利用叙事逼真度来唤起观众情感反应的做法, 再度成为关键。正如艺术家所言, “这一些与‘真实’看起来貌合神离的不平常身世, 都与现场的观众并存, 与之相关的每个人都在经历一次‘误入歧途的暴力’。”<sup>4</sup>

《DADDY项目》虽然不是鄙醒进入成熟创作期之后的第一件作品, 但它标志着一个出发点, 同时也向具备全球视野的观察者提出了两个与鄙醒此后创作密切相关的重要问题: 第一, 这位艺术家的姿态与介入放到他工作所处的时间与空间双重背景下可能有哪些定位? 第二, 放到一个更大的语境下, 也就是对照正在我们眼前同步展开的当代艺术全球历史以及对话网络, 他的实践又有哪些可能的解读? 从本质上讲, 针对自罗中立油画问世那段时期逐渐起步的中国当代艺术, 我们不断追问的也是这两个基本问题: 一件作品关于中国说了什么; 它对当代艺术的“全球艺术叙事”(借用收藏家乌利·希克(Uli Sigg)的说法<sup>5</sup>)又做出了怎样的贡献? 鄙醒不仅和其他艺术家一样, 为上述问题提供了新的回答, 更提出了思考这些问题及其背后假设的一种全新的方式。

对具有世界眼光的中国艺术界观察者而言, 鄙醒的作品令人信服地坐落于两个互相交叉的坐标轴上。其一是在许多同辈艺术家身上也有体现的自反式表演性转向。同处这一转向中的艺术家里既有鄙醒过去的合作者——比如曾经跟他于2008年成立“公司”小组的李明和李然; 也有包括胡向前、马秋莎、方璐在内, 通过共同的观念和形式关注点联系在一起的创作者。在孙冬和鲍栋2013年于北京尤伦斯当代艺术中心联合策划的同名展览中被称为“ON | OFF一代”的这批艺术家最显著的特点也许就是他们对个体身份的持续追问, 而这种追问产生的社会与历史处境既紧迫, 又无处不在, 却很少被拿出来讨论。集体象征和共同记忆的美学光环对这批艺术家来说已经没有任何吸引力, 但我们也不要像很多西方批评家那样匆忙下结论说他们是被中国独生子女政策和几十年快速增长经济增长宠坏的产物。如果非要说这些艺术家及其作品之间存在共通的线索, 可能就是他们都会反复援引某些想象中的人物或物品: 鄙醒的“Daddy”, 胡向前的“美术馆”, 李然在摄影棚里的“原始部落”探险, 李明和双飞小组的“抢银行”行为, 甚至还包括刘窗一次次对流动人口任一成员身上所有东西的“收购”。我们只消回想一下张洵、马六

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

Yan Xing: I've been busy practicing how to be arty, how to live my life artily, how to live my life artily to the maximum.<sup>1</sup>

In 1980 Luo Zhongli, a thirty-two year-old oil painter from the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute in Chongqing, made his debut at the Second National Youth Painting Exhibition in Beijing, showing a massive canvas initially entitled *My Father*. Measuring 215 × 150 cm, its hyperrealist colors portray in intense facial close-up the wrinkles and blemishes of a peasant in late middle age, bowl in hand, pen behind ear. The choice of sitter was inspired by a farmer whom Luo met during his decade of rural service (1968–78), a villager assigned to spend the Lunar New Year's Eve standing guard over the local cesspool to protect its life-giving waste from being stolen by residents of neighboring villages. As Luo would go on to write a few months later in *Meisbu*, the leading magazine of the day, after the painting had sparked national introspection: “This is indeed the father who birthed and nurtured me. Standing in front of such a humble, kind, and hardworking father, who cannot but be moved?... And who are those people who do not understand or love this kind of father?”<sup>2</sup>

The story of *Father* (as the title was later standardized) is one of the founding myths of contemporary art in China. For one thing, it elicited a flood of reactions, many from the “educated youth” returning to the metropolis and coming to terms with their own recent histories after the Cultural Revolution. Luo's work succeeded by blowing up and zooming in—no one had seen an ordinary man depicted in such grandiose terms—but also by doubling down on detail, in a kind of retooling of the entire apparatus of “realism”—socialist, revolutionary, and otherwise—that had undergirded instrumentalized artistic creation in China for the preceding decades. “I didn't think about technique. I just wanted to be as detailed as possible the more detailed the better.”<sup>3</sup> Luo admits that he “once saw some portraits by an American photorealist painter,” later determined to be Chuck Close, and that “this impression in fact decided the form of this painting of mine because I felt that this form was best suited to conveying my entire feeling and thought.” Anxieties about influence aside, the piece

conveys an early lesson in a history not yet bound to meta-narrative: selective recourse to an established formal vocabulary, combined with deep exploration of a specific subject of locally universal import, was, in the early 1980s, one way forward.

Almost exactly three decades later, Yan Xing, another young, Chongqing-born graduate of the Oil Painting Department of the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute—the school by now under Luo Zhongli's presidency—made his Beijing debut. On a winter afternoon in 2011, he appeared in a Caochangdi gallery, face-to-face with a whitewashed brick wall of signature Ai Weiwei design, his back to the audience of all those who had happened to show up for the opening. There he uttered a string of exhortations to his own absent “father,” a confessional litany of hardships, failures, unrealized expectations, and thwarted desires. Like Luo Zhongli's *Father*, Yan Xing's *DADDY Project* (2011) was a conflation, a projection, an imagination—inspired by and rooted in lived experience, but focused on a character who might also loom larger, above an entire generation. Gone were the earnest yearnings of the early 1980s, when a young painter, tempered by a decade literally in the shit, could elegize a beleaguered peasant for his preternaturally loyal simplicity. In their place, thirty years into Chinese reform and opening, were characters like the one Yan Xing addressed: men who had shirked responsibilities, cut corners, made compromises, thrown punches, missed payments, lost their way. Again, a kind of “realism,” or more specifically, a way of leveraging narrative verisimilitude to elicit feelings from an audience, was key. As the artist himself explains, “The unusual story, which seems at once united with ‘reality’ while divided from it at heart, co-exists with the audience and everyone associated with the experience of ‘misdirected violence.’”<sup>4</sup>

While not the first piece in Yan Xing's mature output, *DADDY Project* marked a starting point, and one that raises—for a globally minded observer—two questions that recur in relation to his work from that point onward: First, how might we position this artist's gestures and interventions against the dual backgrounds of the time and place in which he works? And second, what should we make of them in the context of a larger global history of contemporary art and conversation around it, unfolding now in synchronicity before our very eyes? In essence, these are the same two questions that have been

明等“东村”行为艺术家对自己作品那种郑重其事的态度，甚至新刻度小组或汪建伟等艺术家九十年代创作中的科学主义倾向，就能发现一种新的认识和批判的感知力已在产生作用。简言之，北京奥运会前后，讽刺开始降临到中国艺术圈。然而，即便是与上述同时代前沿实践的狭窄截面相比，酈醒的作品也会显得格外突出。

这就把我们带到第二个坐标轴，即某个特定（中国）艺术家的作品在全球语境中的位置，无论其具体表述为何。当然，约2010年左右，也就是酈醒成熟实践开始的时候起，使得这种表述成立并生效的传播机制便已发生了巨大变化——有关当代艺术的中文数字媒体突然繁荣，种类上也覆盖了从上至下和点对点多种结构类型。纸媒上一篇文章的发表（如1994年《黑皮书》上的谢德庆采访）或北京一个国际展览的开幕（如1993年吉尔伯特和乔治（Gilbert & George）在中国美术馆的展览）就足以对事态走向产生决定性影响的时代已经一去不复返。取而代之的是各种声音与网络交汇的多重奏，而像酈醒这样的年轻艺术家在其中一方面可以向稍许年长的实践者——比如陈佩之（Paul Chan）、许汉威（Terence Koh）、黄汉明（Ming Wong）、藤原赛门（Simon Fujiwara）等——寻求风格上的参照，另一方面可以进入类似平丘克艺术中心“未来世代艺术奖”（酈醒于2012年入围）所建立起来的网络，从中获得跨越国界的知识滋养。上述事实要说的并不是网络在酈醒作品的制作、甚至是流通中起到的作用本身，而是一种正在慢慢成形的社会环境，该环境提供了理解艺术家创作的可能性。酈醒（及其同辈）与1919年“五四运动”以来的中国现代艺术家之间最大的区别也正在于此：酈醒的艺术提出的不是一个想象中的民族国家主体，而是一个没有肉身的全球化主体。性——尤其是男同性恋情色占据了艺术家创作主题的很大一部分——只是上述转换的标志，而非动力。“唤醒中国”不在他们的议事日程上；反过来，我们看到的是一种共同努力，其目标则是摆脱长期以来“中国当代艺术”话语领域充满问题的概括式论述。

但这一切对酈醒的实际艺术创作又意味着什么？就形式而言，我们也许可以说，他在作品中反复使用的手法之一是物品组合，类似某种带有高度寓言色彩，没有人的“活人画”。他在麦勒画廊上一个展览展出的《列宁在1918》（2013）以及此次展览展出的《反抗美学》（2015）都是从并置摆放的物品组合中提取其叙事与视觉力量。仔细观察后一件作品——一张散放着革命专著、玻璃镇纸、古典雕塑明信片 and 安眠药（三唑仑片）的桌子——你会发现自己被引入到某个故事情境当中，所有组成要素及其符号关系共同构建出一片可能性解读的场域。这些物品彼此配合，但又保留着各

自单独的力量。桌子后面的墙上挂着前卫艺术运动的海报，当然是艺术家的重新想象，但在情节设定上它们应该出自这张不幸的桌子的主人之手，部分墙面上的涂料被刮掉了几层，以便脱离（尽管并不彻底）白立方空间的束缚。在这一特殊的摹仿语境里，我们看到的不仅仅是人物形象，还能通过海报看到他的创作成果。酈醒的作品让人联想到Elmgreen & Dragset精心制作的人造环境（他们2013年在维多利亚和阿尔伯特博物馆（Victoria and Albert Museum）的展览“明天”就再现了一个虚构的失败建筑师的家庭空间），也让人想到威廉·肯特里奇（William Kentridge）等艺术家对早期共产主义运动中乌托邦图像的迷恋，或者像佩德罗·雷耶斯（Pedro Reyes）那样对同类图像的游戏援引。酈醒对二十世纪初期想象的怀念也许不如前辈艺术家来得深刻，但绝对更加强烈，因为经过美学的通约，它表现得如此直接和明显。从类型上说，雕塑式场景设置这一特殊的视觉手段也许还刚好吻合了当下我们的兴趣所在，即：寻找物体（而不是可以无限还原和传播的图像）在空间中的具体力量。政治的乌托邦主义被错置、变形为对作为象征意义载体的物的乌托邦式信仰。

酈醒作品的另一条重要线索涉及到如今行为表演里的一大类型：情境建构。这条线索最早出现在他2010年的作品《他们不在这里》中：七个面无表情的年轻人——类似某种跟杨福东高度抒情的《竹林七贤》（2003—2007）完全相反的叙事——被锁在酒店房间里，扮演他们事先分配好的角色。虽然不像提诺·赛格尔（Tino Sehgal）或李明维（Lee Mingwei）的作品那么倚重诱导（有时是毫不知情的）观众参与，酈醒建构的情境仍然留给演员了一定的自由度，例如在2011年的作品《现实主义》里，演员们三三两两地分散到开幕观众中间，一边朗诵安德烈·布勒东（André Breton, 1896—1966）的文本，一边就布勒东的《超现实主义宣言》向观众提问，他们的介入行为像切分音一样穿插点缀在艺术家本人有关展厅中央裸体男性雕像的一系列评论中。接下来的两次行为表演——在《性喜剧》（2013）里，基辅的几个演员围坐在桌边，讨论他们眼前若干类似男根的物品的意义；在《甜蜜电影》（2013）中，威尼斯的一个摄制组为拍摄色情电影不断做着各种准备和调整，但正式拍摄始终都没有开始——艺术家躲在幕后，操控现场的所有互动，而这些互动在某种程度上都超越了它们所发生的空间及空间内的物品。对话者们，尤其是那些与艺术家没有个人接触的男演员，只能自己猜测某个具体互动究竟包含着何种意味。

正是在这里，“现实主义”的概念重新浮出水面——这一问题重重的论述对于酈醒，也对于现代中国以及其他地区的很多艺术家而言，都意味着某种不确定的希

asked of contemporary art in China since its onset around the time of Luo Zhongli's painting: What does a given work have to say about China, and what does it have to contribute, as collector Uli Sigg said, to the “global discourse” on contemporary art?<sup>5</sup> Yan Xing, however, offers not only new answers to these questions—as every individual artist does—but new ways of thinking about them and the assumptions on which they are based.

For the cosmopolitan observer of the Chinese scene, Yan Xing's work fits convincingly along two intersecting vectors. It belongs to a larger turn toward reflexive performativity similarly exemplified by a number of peers. Indeed, some of them are former collaborators—such as Li Ming and Li Ran, with whom he formed a loose collective, COMPANY, in 2008; others such as Hu Xiangqian, Ma Qiusha, and Fang Lu are aligned mainly through shared conceptual and formal concerns. This generation of artists, postulated as the “ON | OFF generation” in an eponymous exhibition curated by Sun Dongdong and Bao Dong at UCCA in 2013, may be best known for its relentless questioning of individual identity against an urgent social and historical condition that is omnipresent, albeit rarely discussed. These are artists for whom the aesthetic lure of collective symbols and shared memories never held any appeal, and yet one would hesitate to engage with another strand of interpretation often proffered by Western critics, which sees them as the coddled products of the one-child policy and decades of a bullish economy. If one thing unites these artists and their works it a steadily invoked recourse to imaginary figures and objects: Yan Xing's “Daddy,” Hu Xiangqian's imaginary “museum,” Li Ran's green-screened explorations of “native peoples,” Li Ming's “bank robbing” exploits with the Double Fly Collective, or even Liu Chuang's repeated action of “buying everything on” one or another member of the floating population. We need only think back to the self-seriousness of “East Village” performance artists such as Zhang Huan and Ma Liuming, or even the scientific tendency of longer interventions by artists like the New Analysis Group or Wang Jianwei in the 1990s, to understand that a newly cognizant and critical sensibility is in play. In short, somewhere around the Beijing Olympics, irony arrived on the Chinese art scene. And yet even in comparison to this narrow cross-section of contemporaneous advanced practices, Yan Xing's work stands out.

This brings us to the second vector, the way a particular (Chinese) artist's work sits inside a global context, however articulated. The mechanics of transmission that underlay and empower such an articulation have of course changed drastically in the years around 2010—the precise moment at which Yan Xing's mature practice begins—given a sudden proliferation of Chinese-language digital media for contemporary art, of both the top-down and peer-to-peer varieties. Gone are the days when the inclusion of a single text in a single printed volume (pace Tehching Hsieh's interview in the *Black Cover Book*, 1994) or a single exhibition that happened to make its way across the border and into Beijing (pace Gilbert and George at the National Art Museum of China, 1993) could clock a definitive influence on the course of events. In its place, a polyphony of voices and networks, in which a young artist like Yan Xing was able to first find stylistic references in the work of slightly older practitioners—Paul Chan, Terence Koh, Ming Wong, and Simon Fujiwara to name just a few—and then to find transnational intellectual nourishment in a network like that which has formed around the Pinchuk Art Center's Future Generation Art Prize, for which he was a finalist in 2012. None of this is about the role of the web in the making or even really the circulation of Yan Xing's work per se, but rather about the emergence of a milieu in which it might become intelligible. And here is perhaps the difference between Yan Xing (and his generation) and Chinese modern artists since the May Fourth Movement of 1919: Yan Xing's art interpolates not an imagined national subject, but a disembodied global one. Sexuality—and particularly male homosexual eroticism, which accounts for a rather large proportion of the artist's subject matter—is a marker, but not the agent, of this shift. “Awakening China” is not on the agenda; in its place instead is a concerted effort to get out from under the generalizations that apply to the admittedly problematic discursive field of “Chinese contemporary art.”

But what does this mean in terms of Yan Xing's actual artistic output? Formally, we might point to the recurring device of the in situ assemblage, a sort of de-peopled, highly allegorical *tableau vivant*. Works like *Lenin in 1918* (2013), from his previous Galerie Urs Meile exhibition, or *Aesthetics of Resistance* (2015) from the current one, draw their narrative and visual force from the knowing alchemy

望。在鄢醒看来，围绕现实主义进行的对话正是艺术概念开始运转的空间。而他的作品在不落入关于艺术的艺术这一元批判叙事的前提下，实际上非常关注更广义上的“艺术”以及“艺术的”概念。对鄢醒来说，“艺术”不光是一个语义概念，也是一个社会空间。对其他艺术家和历史的指涉之所以可能，也是因为这种指涉发生在一个其他人都理解并关心的领域内。上述动态关系在影片《艺术，太艺术的》(2013)里体现得最为明显。在这件作品中，鄢醒邀请同由麦勒画廊代理的艺术家王兴伟和谢南星参与演出，再现了爱德华·霍普(Edward Hopper, 1882—1967)油画里的若干场景。<sup>6</sup>这些没有颜色，但光线突出的画面有点儿像艺术形式某种最原初的具现：它们是关于评论的评论，鄢醒在几十年后重现霍普的构图，正如当年霍普油画本身也是对欧洲经典雕塑和绘画主题的重新阐释。以霍普这样一位成长于美国经济高速增长期(与今日中国不无类似)的社会现实主义画家的作品为再现对象，这一选择非常重要，因为它很具体：鄢醒没有重现波提切利(Sandro Botticelli, 1445—1510)或伦勃朗(Rembrandt, 1606—1669)的绘画，而是把目光对准了霍普，说到霍普，所有人都会不约而同地回忆起当时美国尚且天真的现代艺术传统，那时纽约还只是个地方性的小圈子，直到五十年代才真正改头换面。有没有让你想到2000年代初的北京？

然而鄢醒并未就此止步，通过这件作品，他针对艺术能够做什么这一更为宽泛的问题提出了自己的主张。用艺术家本人的话说：“作品中出现的所有特征全部指向一次对‘艺术’本身的探索，可以这样说，如果没有艺术家自己对‘艺术’的错误理解，绝不会有更好的‘太艺术’的定义。”<sup>7</sup>但这段话到底是什么意思？母语非中文的观众在观看鄢醒作品时遇到的一大障碍肯定是中英文之间的差异：中文文本暗示意味丰富，且简单扼要(比如这件作品的中文题目就影射了尼采(Friedrich Nietzsche, 1844—1900)的著作《人性的，太人性的》(1878))；英文翻译往往看似故意含糊其辞，时不时还夹杂一些自信满满的坎普式说法(如Super-Arty)。如果不考虑翻译问题，说鄢醒对“‘艺术’的错误理解”正好成全了他的“太艺术”究竟意味着什么？我们也许还可以从比较作品题目及文字说明的中英文文本的角度去分析鄢醒到目前为止的创作，以此探讨学者刘禾(Lydia H. Liu)所谓的“跨语际实践”中存在的适当性与倒置。

这又把我们带回到重庆，带回四川美术学院及其声誉卓著的油画系——除了罗中立对查克·克洛斯的“误读”以外，这里还见证了何多苓的安德鲁·怀斯(Andrew Wyeth, 1917—2009)、陈文波的詹姆斯·罗森奎斯特(James Rosenquist)等许多其他“误读”的诞生。和主要从欧洲以及北美地区艺术前辈或同辈处借鉴转译

的老一代中国艺术家不同，鄢醒和他这一代人的创作自然而然地从属于一个本身已经扩大变得全球化的艺术语境。我认为，鄢醒与上述老一辈实践者最大的区别在于对他而言，跟现代主义及其后续运动的这种延迟的交流形式并不意味着通向人道主义启蒙的道路，而是一种生活方式的选择。反过来，他对这一广义艺术概念的忠实又来源于艺术家对自身所处的全球化文化社会环境自信满满的理解和熟悉。

不过，在围绕鄢醒的话语中，除了他跟“艺术”和“艺术的”之间的关系问题——就像艺术家在文章开头与卡特兰的对谈中兴致勃勃地提到的那样——另一个同样模糊且由多重因素决定的概念跟艺术家的关系也同等重要。这个概念就是“中国”。鄢醒对艺术概念直白且毫无批判的接受与他对中国以及中国当代艺术叙事的绝对反感互为表里，而他的作品总是不可避免地会被放到后者的框架下解读。我们只需要听听艺术家本人的说法——尤其是他对2013年纽约大都会艺术博物馆“水墨艺术”展的批评以及2014年致艾未未的一封公开信(两者都发在Facebook上)——就能感觉到内在于其中的紧张关系。他在对“水墨艺术”展的批评中写道：“我觉得很遗憾，同时也很高兴，我从来没有也永远不会(作者注：做那些被他认为是只拿中国传统和政治说事儿的老套艺术)，我希望我能活得长一些，在有生之年看到来自中国的艺术获得平等的知性理解。”<sup>8</sup>

因此，问题可能在于：鄢醒的作品对我们理解目前正在中国慢慢成形的这种国际化当代主体到底有哪些帮助？这种主体又可能会如何运作？将提出什么样的要求？其长处与盲点分别在哪里？更直白地讲，多年来中国艺术一直被说成是对海外创作手法的简单模仿和幼稚借用，现在它突然将自身放到一个理解世界的位置上，我们应该对其作何解读？当然，它在多大程度上做到了这一点同样有待考察。这些都是我们现在针对鄢醒可以提出的问题，也很可能是接下来二十年其他中国艺术家同样需要思考的问题。我们都清楚不要只从表面意义上理解鄢醒对普遍性的暗示。但随着艺术家一步步挖掘现代主义及其后续运动的遗产，他提出了一种诱惑人心的美学与政治，其动人之处就在于它尖锐的具体性。鄢醒的超级写实主义，与他的前辈艺术家罗中立的作品一样，只能属于此时此地。

翻译：杜可珂

of objects placed in close proximity. Looking at the latter piece—a desk strewn with revolutionary treatises, a glass paperweights, postcards of generically classical sculptures, and, crucially, sleeping pills with their deadly aura—one is drawn into a scenario in which recombinant elements and their semiotic associations produce a field of possible intelligibility. The objects work together, yet they retain their individual power. Retroactively imagined posters for bygone avant-garde movements, designed by the purported inhabitant of this ill-fated desk, populate the rear walls, which are shorn of a few layers of paint so as to escape, albeit barely, from the white cube. Here we are in that particular mimetic register where we see not only the character, but in the posters, his creative output. Yan Xing’s is a vista that invokes the exquisitely artificial environments of Elmgreen & Dragset (their 2013 Victoria and Albert Museum exhibition *Tomorrow*, which recreated the home of an imagined, failed architect comes inevitably to mind), but also the infatuation with the utopian imaginings of early Communism shared by artists such as William Kentridge, and the playful evocation of the same by others such as Pedro Reyes. Though Yan Xing’s imagined nostalgia for the early twentieth century is perhaps not as deeply rooted as his elders’, it is exacerbated for being so explicitly, aesthetically denominated. Perhaps this particular visual device of the sculptural set-piece is, generically speaking, especially suited to a moment when we are looking for the specific power of the thing in space—and not the image, with all its infinite reducibility and transmissibility. The utopianism of the politics discussed is displaced, transmuted into the utopianism of faith in the signifying object.

Another important strain in Yan Xing’s work involves that great performative genre of the present, the constructed situation. This appears first in 2010 with the piece *They Are Not Here*, in which seven affectless guys—some sort of narrative opposite to Yang Fudong’s relentlessly lyrical *Seven Intellectuals* (2003–2007)—are locked in a hotel room, playing out their assigned roles. While not as contingent on coaxing the (sometimes unknowing) audience into participation as the work of artists like Tino Sehgal and Lee Mingwei are, Yan Xing’s situations nonetheless allow a degree of latitude to their actors, as in the follow-up piece *Realism* (2011), wherein performers dispersed among the audience at an opening read passages from and asked questions from

André Breton’s (1896–1966) *Surrealist Manifesto*, their interventions syncopating the major melody of the artist’s own reflections on a male nude sculpture that occupied the center of the gallery. In subsequent performances—*The Sex Comedy* (2013), in which a table full of actors in Kiev debate the significance of the phallic artifacts before them; *The Sweet Movie* (2013), in which a film crew in Venice sets up for, but never quite shoots, a pornographic film—the artist lurks offstage, orchestrating interactions that somehow transcend the objects and spaces around which they occur. The curious interlocutor, particularly one with no personal knowledge of the artist, is left wondering what the stakes of this or that particular interaction might be.

This is precisely the place where the notion of “realism” resurfaces—a fraught polemic, which holds an uncertain promise for Yan Xing, as it has for so many artists in modern China and elsewhere. For Yan Xing, the conversation around realism is precisely the space where the notion of art begins to operate. And his work art, without slipping into the meta-critical vein of art about art, is nonetheless very interested in a larger idea of “art” and “the arty.” His is an idea of art as both a semantic domain and a social space, where references to other artists and histories are possible precisely because they are enacted within a sphere of others who know and care. The work in which this dynamic becomes most apparent is the film *Arty, Super-Arty* (2013), for which he enlisted performers, including his Galerie Urs Meile stable mates Wang Xingwei and Xie Nanxing, to act out scenes from Edward Hopper (1882–1967) paintings.<sup>6</sup> Drained of color but infused with light, these compositions resonate as somehow archetypal instantiations of artistic form: they are commentaries on commentaries, decades-later reconstitutions of Hopper’s compositions, just as Hopper’s compositions were themselves reinterpretations of earlier motifs from European and classical sculpture and painting. The choice of Hopper—America’s social realist, who came of age in a developmental era not unlike that currently unfolding in China—is significant because it is specific: Yan Xing is not restaging Botticelli or Rembrandt, but instead the works of an artist synonymous with the still-naïve, modern artistic tradition of what was then, before the ascendance of New York in the 1950s, a provincial scene. Prescient echoes of Beijing in the early 2000s, anyone?

<sup>1</sup> 《莫瑞吉奥·卡特兰对话醒》，发表于《芭莎艺术》，2012年11月号，296—299页。

<sup>2</sup> 罗中立，《〈我的父亲〉的作者的来信》（1981），收录于巫鸿编辑的《中国当代艺术：原始文献》，纽约，MoMA，2010，25页。英文翻译：Michelle Wang。

<sup>3</sup> 罗中立，《〈我的父亲〉的作者的来信》（1981），《美术》，1981年第二期，总第158期，4—5页。

<sup>4</sup> 艺术家陈述，《近作》，麦勒画廊，北京/卢森，2013，136页。

<sup>5</sup> 乌利·希克，《写在M+希克藏品目录前面的话：我为什么收藏了这些作品》，<http://www.westkwoon.hk/en/mplus/ulisiggs-foreword>，2015年11月点击登入。

<sup>6</sup> 其中包括《纽约的房间》，1932；《酒店大堂》，1943；《夏夜》，1947；《夜间会议》，1949；以及《阳光下的人》，1963。

<sup>7</sup> 艺术家陈述，《近作》，麦勒画廊，北京/卢森，2013，120页。

<sup>8</sup> 醒，Facebook发文，2013年12月10日。

Yan Xing, however, does not stop here, arguing through the piece for a more general idea of what art can do. In his words: “All of the features that appear in this work point to an exploration of ‘art’ itself. One could say that without the artist’s misinterpretation of ‘art,’ there would certainly be no better definition of ‘Super-Arty.’”<sup>7</sup> But what does this statement even mean? One hurdle for the non-Sinophone viewer of Yan Xing’s work is certainly the discrepancy between the allusive clarity of his statements in Mandarin (this title, for example, refers to Nietzsche’s *Human, All Too Human* (1878)) and the seemingly purposeful ambiguity, combined with confidently campy coinages like “Super-Arty,” of those same statements in English. Awkward translations aside, what does it imply to say that Yan Xing’s “mistaken understanding of ‘art’” is precisely what has allowed him to become “overly artistic?” Another analysis of Yan Xing’s works to date might be based entirely on comparing the Chinese and English titles and texts he offers concerning them, looking for the felicities and inversions of what the scholar Lydia H. Liu has called “translingual practice.”

This brings us back to Chongqing, home to the Sichuan Fine Arts Institute and its venerable Oil Painting Department, which, in addition to Luo Zhongli’s “misinterpretation” of Chuck Close, has given us He Duoling’s of Andrew Wyeth (1917–2009), Chen Wenbo’s of James Rosenquist, and many, many others. Unlike earlier artists in China, who borrowed from and translated the positions of their predecessors and contemporaries mainly in Europe and North America, Yan Xing, like other artists of his generation, makes work that sits naturally within an artistic context that has expanded to become global. I would argue that the difference between him and these earlier practitioners is that he believes in this form of deferred commune with Modernism and its aftermath not as a path to humanist enlightenment, but as a lifestyle choice. And his allegiance to this concept of art in general, in turn, grows from a deep and confident familiarity with the global cultural milieu in which he now finds himself.

And yet in the discourse surrounding Yan Xing, the question of his relationship to art and the arty—as he referred to so exuberantly in the interview with Cattelan which appears above—is on equal footing with that of his relationship to another

concept, equally vague and overdetermined: that of China. His overt and uncritical embrace of the idea of art runs in parallel to his deep aversion to the narrative of China and Chinese contemporary art, in relation to which his work is inevitably read. One need look no farther than his own writings—particularly a widely circulated critique of the Metropolitan Museum of Art’s *Ink Art* exhibition in 2013, and another open letter regarding Ai Weiwei in 2014, both published on Facebook—to get a sense of the tensions inherent here. As he wrote in the *Ink Art* critique, “I am so sorry and lucky, I don’t do ever and would not do forever [making what he considers clichéd art about Chinese tradition and politics], I am hoping I can live longer waiting for the equal and intelligent understanding about art from China.”<sup>8</sup>

So perhaps the question then is: What does Yan Xing’s work have to tell us about the emergence of a contemporary cosmopolitan subjectivity in China? How might this kind of subjectivity operate? What sorts of claims might it make? What are its strengths and its blind spots? Put more crassly, after years of critiques of Chinese art claiming that it derivatively and naively appropriates foreign devices, what do we make of an art that suddenly posits itself as understanding the world? And of course, to what extent does it? These are questions we might ask about Yan Xing now, and which I suspect we will continue to ask about artists in China for the coming two decades. We know better than to take his intimations of universality at face value. And yet as he excavates the heritage of Modernism and its aftermath, he puts forth a vision of aesthetics and politics that captivates precisely because of its grating specificity. His hyperrealism now, like that of his generational predecessor Luo Zhongli then, could only belong to this time and this place.

- <sup>1</sup> Interview with Maurizio Cattelan, *Bazaar Art China*, November 2012, pp. 296–299.
- <sup>2</sup> Luo Zhongli, “A Letter from the Artist of *Fatber* (*Fuqin*) (1981),” in Wu Hung, ed. *Contemporary Chinese Art: Primary Documents*, New York, MoMA, 2010, p. 25. Translated by Michelle Wang.
- <sup>3</sup> Luo Zhongli, “A Letter from the Artist of *Fatber*” [Wo de Fuqin de zuozhe de laixin], *Meishu* [Fine Arts], Issue 158, no. 2 (1981): pp. 4–5.
- <sup>4</sup> Artist’s statement, *Recent Works*, Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne, 2013, p. 136.
- <sup>5</sup> Uli Sigg, “A Foreword to Viewing the M+ Sigg Collection: Why I Collected What I Collected,” <http://www.westkowloon.hk/en/mplus/uli-siggs-foreword>, accessed November 2015.
- <sup>6</sup> These include *Room in New York*, 1932; *Hotel Lobby*, 1943; *Summer Evening*, 1947; *Conference at Night*, 1949; and *People in the Sun*, 1963.
- <sup>7</sup> Artist’s statement, *Recent Works*, Galerie Urs Meile, Beijing/Lucerne, 2013, p. 120.
- <sup>8</sup> Yan Xing, post on Facebook, December 10, 2013.