

Comedy Struggling on the Verge of Emotions

—Zhang Miao Interviewed by Yang Fenglian, April 22, 2016

Zhang Miao, a “comedian” in every sense of the word, amuses us with his remarks, varying from vulgar to brilliance. To him, the exhibition is a theater, where he struggles on the verge of emotions to build in a most “simplified” language, a world that appears to be charged with emotions but is indeed “highly rational”.

Yang= Yang Fenglian, Zhang=Zhang Miao

Indefinite but Concrete

Yang: Your works, as well as this exhibition, have fairly high color saturation. Are bright colors stimulating to you?

Zhang: No. I need simple colors. Blue should be blue and green should be green. Complexity of colors is distracting and will betray your judgment. Colors are not the point. They are only an excuse.

Yang: What excuse?

Zhang: Take red for example. The idea of red varies from person to person, so I just give myself a reason what it should be. No need to make a fuss about color modulation. You just keep trying and see what fits you.

Yang: What logic does the exhibition follow?

Zhang: It is indefinite but very concrete. What kind of green or what kind of red, I cannot say for sure, but the way these colors are presented are very concrete.

Yang: So you mean, there is no order for the viewers to follow?

Zhang: The space fits such a sense. Details are linked to create an indefinite effect.

Yang: But do you have a definite idea?

Zhang: I don't know. I proceed with these works. It is not only the result that counts.

Yang: These ducks give a strong sense of form.

Zhang: I had made lots of wood frames. I cut one round one in a slanting way, and then the two ducks are there. The beak is imagined as a topee. The one on the left is too big and it falls. It gives a vivid sense of life. These two ducks, as a matter of fact, had been intended to go with the two paintings on the left, to make them less painting-like.

Yang: They themselves are paintings, aren't they?

Zhang: Maybe, but I'd rather not. They started as two windows, and then two stickers on the wall, but end up differently. I think paintings become horrible when hung on a wall. We can say a painting is good or bad. That's the only difference.

Rid of Myself from the Works

Yang: The trees and the sky in your paintings have something to do with your real life visual experience?

Zhang: To paint a tree is only an idea that came quite casually. I started with something simple. If I want to paint something, that means there is something for me to express, but I don't care much about the so-called expression, as I focus more on the trail and error on the painting surface. These two paintings here have been

layered over about 100 times. They started out very realistic depictions.

Yang: So there is no such thing as “inspiration” while you paint?

Zhang: Inspiration can change while I paint. This is important. When you meet the Cat Eyes, you will find no emotion in them, neither angry nor witty. They struggle on the verge of emotions.

Yang: How do you manage your emotions?

Zhang: I remove myself from the work. I exhaust myself, so much so that there will be no energy left for those things.

Yang: Then how do you know if a work is finished?

Zhang: I’m not sure when I can say a work has come to its end, but if it is in a formation, I can have an overview and adjust the parts to the whole.

Yang: So the blue part seems comic, and the red part serious?

Zhang: Neither comic nor serious. It’s playing. Colors can nevertheless communicate, but I try to restrain, so that it won’t talk nonsense.

Yang: Is there something dishonest about individual ideas?

Zhang: It’s like a trap we set for ourselves. If I’m not angry, but I insist on showing anger, in the end I will get frustrated and become actually angry. But you see, these emotions are not mine.

To me “Labor” is a Negative Word

Yang: Those welded works give a strong handicraft feel.

Zhang: I've been trying to avoid such feel. I try to keep a distance from the works.

Yang: It took lots of turns in the work, didn't it?

Zhang: The brass frame for example, it is about 250 kg. The tip is solid. It had to be welded from two sides, there were many curves to match. It is rather complicated. Sometimes to weld the inside I had to cut some parts on the outside first and weld it back in the end.

Yang: The center point of the polo ball determines whether it look flat or three-dimensional. Is there some kind of principle behind that?

Zhang: Every polo has its own fixed position. As the plate shows, each section takes five minutes. There are twelve sections. It turns every five minutes. There are 144 balls. Take the last but two row for example. From left to right, the red part grows both in size and in intensity. Then comes green. There are two sets of high light, embossed with golden and silver, the position is fixed. I think the high light is fairly exquisite.

Yang: Did it follow the same complicated procedure as the metal frame?

Zhang: Every block of color is printed from an iron plate, like a jig saw. Every color change correspond to a change of plate. I kept all the plates in position in the round metal boxes.

Yang: You've hidden the labor involved.

Zhang: To me, labor is a negative word. Everyone is capable of working hard, and every work is the fruit of careful thinking, so there is no need to stress it. The content should carry more weight.

