ALMINE RECH

Pose of Beauty

Dec 30, 2023 — Mar 3, 2024 | Song Art Museum, Beijing, China

As compared to Li Qing's other exhibitions, this project stands out. The purpose is not merely to showcase the visual significance of Li Qing's works but to thoroughly analyze the reality, concepts, and methods that underlie these creations.

The motivation for this project stems from Li Qing's previous works: the early "Find the Differences" series, where two similar images transform "seeing" into "recognition"; the "Mutual Destruction" series, where two figures overlap, yielding an ambiguous result that points to the mystery of painting reconstructing reality and contemplates the philosophical aspects of reality and virtuality; the "Window" series explores internal and external perspectives leading us into the narrative dimension, exploring time and space in relation to observation. This narrative continues until the emergence of the "Architecture" series, where Li Qing's thematic focus revisits the ongoing reality, prompting a reconsideration of constructed life and radical aesthetics.

To expound on these matters with greater clarity, the exhibition adopts a "typological" approach, categorizing works into several units such as "Frame Paintings," "Windows," "Urban Life," "Hangzhou Houses," and the newly created “Pine" series. The connections between exhibition halls are facilitated by display panels that link various spaces. The aim is to bring these issues together for focused discussion. Within the same theme, artworks are no longer isolated stories but rather transformed into conceptual "characters" and "words." The exhibition's viewpoint, far from being results-oriented, is essentially a retrospective exploration of results, allowing the elements, concepts, and ideas within the works to return to the social context from which they originated.

In response to these questions, we have first added the artist's creative materials to explain the origins of the images within the works: What captivated the artist? What grounds the work? Which historical resources and techniques has the artist borrowed, and what influences from art history are at play? Simultaneously, through these subtle traces, we gain insight into the artist's life, emotions, and source of inspiration. Furthermore, some extended materials redirect our gaze to a broader world, unveiling the real environment in which the artist's thoughts take shape, the divergent branches of concepts, and the soil brought forth from the historical roots.

The presentation of text and archives reveals the thought processes and real-world references behind Li Qing's works, categorized into various themes concerning the "Pose of Beauty": exaggerated and stylized landmark structures in contemporary urban landscapes; acrobatic postures seen in popular imagery and flamboyant character depictions; alluring camping scenes influenced by the internet, crafting an idealized "good life" for the petite bourgeoisie; verdant landscapes with pine trees as central motifs in diverse locales; museum check-in photos that become social media sensations, and sculptures in urban settings mimicking a European lifestyle. These poses function as "beauty" advertisements, presuming that by acquiring them, one attains a life of aesthetic splendor.

The definition of "beauty" is merely an outcome but Li Qing traces it back to the historical context of the early 20th-century modern art movements such as Cubism, Futurism, and Fauvism, which influenced people's understanding of form, fantasy, and aesthetic sensibilities. These movements diverged from Bauhaus, shifting design from "utility" to "form" and from "function" to "aesthetics." Later, Constantin Brâncuși and Henry Moore provided further inspiration for the formalist movement. It wasn't until advancements in science and technology that these "inspirations" could be realized. However, the materials achieving curved beauty created a shell of aesthetics—smooth, reflective, craving for likes, with a strong plastic quality and a sense of empty futurism, interrupting the greatest tradition of humanism: the traces of self-redemption and social redemption.

Yet, how does art achieve these reflections? From the perspective of a painter, Li Qing always manages to discover similarities in appearances, forms, and shapes among different things. However, beyond the role of a painter, Li Qing adopts an intellectual perspective, a position to view things: not discovering beauty within things but contemplating, judging, and reflecting on "beauty." In this way, Li Qing continues the tradition of caricature in art history, echoing the sharpness of Honoré Daumier, the iconic "Luncheon on the Grass" by Édouard Manet, and the postmodern humor of John Currin.

In other words, Li Qing, through the magical rhetoric of painting, reaffirms the function of art in reflecting on reality, extending the meaning of realism. He further develops a new grammar, blending "subjects" into "questions" through the association, contrast, juxtaposition, and intertextuality of visual texts. However, the objects are not fleeting glimpses of modern life but rather a surface aesthetic and superficial existence widely embraced in postmodern life due to a lack of spiritual depth

Curator: Cui Cancan