

## A Suspended Relic of a Moment

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Sugar, as a highly addictive “legal drug”, has been covering up the biological weakness of mankind, just like when we have to choose between two evils, we always go for the lesser, and we always have desires we cannot let go of, but civilization, ethics, morals, and faith have been driving us to fabricate various concepts to cover up our endless pursuits of dopamine, endorphin, and blood fluctuation. Sugar, innocent as it seems, can always manage to survive the self-censorship of mankind. Interestingly, since 8000 B.C. when sugar was found in sugarcane in sweltering New Guinea and introduced to the world, sugar has been viewed as highly positive in society, so we have compared it to things like status, wealth, happiness, and love; even in current times when the world is filled with diverse and confusing modern language, it’s also hard to smear the good name of it, and even, still, when used in some argots or metaphors, it implies exciting seductiveness. And, as it’s also become part of your tongue memory, a happy physiological reaction would be triggered when we see even just the word. If salt is for our instinct to survive, then we take in sugar as a fulfillment of desire.

With the theme “糖” (“Sugar”) in Chinese and “Kundalini” in English, Zhang Ji’s solo exhibition seems to be a gathering of banter about a soft spot of humanity; as far as the materiality and social connotations of sugar are concerned, it has to break through the mist of sugar and also toss man’s helplessness when facing desire as a question to the air, embedding the reckless, random, potential, imaginary and confusing suspended stance in the painting, to answer the recurrent question that has never ceased to intrigue and puzzle humanity. Compare Zhang Ji’s painting to sugar: furious bantering can also be joyful and terrible pain can also be viewed as a worthy give. Like a sugar addict, he indulges himself with art-making or painting; like a selfish sugar producer, he keeps covering and revealing in painting for excitement and colossal profits; and he even gives his audience visual vessels that they cannot say no to and enjoy relying concepts and emotions upon, like someone who hands out sugar.

In Zhang Ji’s painting, we can often see the unstable composition and light areas and lines of weird shapes, which often partition and squeeze the human “body” (deformed body parts, exposed organs, peculiar exposure, reproduction worship, and totem-like torsos). He prefers his painting

going curve, diagonal or vertical to horizontal, and the division by brushstrokes, traces, and lines makes Zhang Ji's version of bodies or his whole world of painting look restless and unstable. Zhang Ji has his transcendental understanding of "body", and most viewers, I included, find it hard to expound on his highly personal style. We can only make a summary that the body is a social public medium, and the package of modern civilization has shadowed the social properties of its structure, and, thanks to the magic of painting, we can unravel everything, make public every unspeakable secret about the body.

The way I see it, exposed bodies can always make people feel being robbed and drown them in upset, except when they are part of public shows. For bodies that need to be exposed to the public, one type is for erotic purposes, so the exposers have to overcome the uneasiness and shame in their blood. Another type is based on an inverted doctrine of man. Some believe that we are born naked and we can bring no clothing with us when we die, so nakedness is our natural state, and the truth about us. Thanks to the magic of painting, we can expose the body to arouse the truth with another language in a current parallel world. Zhang Ji is excellent at disassembling bodies at their most sensitive and indulgent postures and then piecing up body parts and organs in a montage fashion to create new ambiguous yet easily recognizable creatures. Most of the creatures are acting excited and joyous, but when you take a sober look at the body part components, you'd find a strong contrast between the obvious biological and sociological meanings of the organs and the current mood of the painting and the conflict and friction in between form a peculiar visual tension. This is when Zhang Ji, with his busting personal coloring habit, acts like a person who keeps tossing firecrackers into a fire, making a spectacle of sparks.

Painting techniques and mediums are like established rules. Choosing a certain medium and technique is no different from taking a rule. So it is no wonder that all of this happens – the artist may not realize it but his technique and the medium have made many decisions for him. Specifically, Zhang Ji takes an extremely unstable painting style and a kind of rarely active action – most of the time, his painting begins entirely from a random idea and works out accidentally to be greatly different from the first place. His process of painting is like self-bothering and entanglement. Everything is accidental, paradoxical, and bewildering. The artist, however, believes that everything in it has its meaning, just like painting is soaked in time and a process and eventually a deep-level physiological reaction is triggered, so this is the developing direction he has found for his painting.

What's most representative of Zhang Ji, as I see it, is his choice to control the narrative structure and where the ending goes, but not any amazing visual outcome or treatment. In this sense, the characteristic of Zhang Ji's narrative has to do with its structure and the visual endpoint of the painting. In his narrative, hilarity always seems to be the role to set off gloom and heaviness, hence nonsense and absurdity all over. These paintings must be dissolving the so-called human connection and rejecting such popular feelings as "sentimental humanitarianism", must be questioning reason and mocking at concepts like set patterns of painting, legitimacy of painting, and classic paradigm. Nowadays, styled painting is prevailing; it seems that there's no need to feel ashamed if a work of art is an imitation or reminds one of any artist of the same category, but encouraged to take a high profile to get the piece licensed and legitimized. In comparison, Zhang Ji's art is like walking on the verge of styled painting and allows viewers and researchers to generate different ambiguities and rationalizations in their understandings. Or, in his own words, "I want my painting to wild enough so that it can easily remind one of me".

Painting, as an action, a mode of thinking, and an outlet for desire, has been a stubborn part of Zhang Ji, and, like a recurrent mirage, it lures him to quest for a deeper world. His painting is filled with eroticism, violence, a sense of guilt, and illegal passion. Nothing is more attractive to Zhang Ji than painting. In his eyes, painting can fold repeatedly, stretch and convey every encounter, in reality, he has the freedom to express and discuss, but the will of painting and the trait of a moment cannot be well-designed, as every piece is the relic of a relevant random suspended life experience.