

Interval: Ji Xin

By Yang Jian

There's no denying that Western classical art has a profound influence on Chinese art, but even the localized practice of Renaissance painting in China ends up stuck on the level of linguistics and aesthetics and has never touched any particular issues in reality or probed deep into the ideological core of Renaissance painting. The art of painting failed to see a full release of the extensive reflections inside the Renaissance philosophy, of the rational criticism over ignorance and of the idea of liberating man's subjectivity, thus jeopardizing the effective activation of knowledge production and concept production after aesthetic value was imparted to this form of art, hence no substantial influence on or change to tradition; and before China had the chance to see the play of its authentic cultural essence, this ideologically rich form of art got covered by the Chinese movement of contemporary art that pursues innovation in language and iteration in art. Perhaps, it's also because of the thick religious undertone of classical art and the various related changes that Chinese academic education has not yet begun any deeper study or discussion of this kind of teaching. An interesting fact is that, back in the period of the May Fourth New Cultural Movement, the artworks of Renaissance and relevant cultural ideas were playing the role of ideological weapon, and providing the Movement with pertinent spiritual nutrition incessantly, so, other than the Enlightenment, they became another reliable source of ideas and inspiration for intellectuals.

When the style evolution that triggered image creation became meaningless, painterliness began to return, and resources of art history began to be re-explored for new pivots of classic significance. Since the start of the Reform and Opening-up, the popularization of formulated Western art originated in Chinese compulsory education and the worship of the European life and aesthetics have tremendously boosted the public visual acceptance of Western classical painting which is considered by quite a number of people as the synonym of "Western painting", the opposite of Chinese painting, hence its high effectiveness in being popularized and accepted; and, in an imperceptible way actually, this form of painting is allowed to export and construct people's ideology and aesthetics on a more macroscopic level, retaining the rich sociological and communicational values of this old language of painting. In addition, as Renaissance philosophies are still able to help fulfill the spiritual demands of Chinese at the moment, classical painting, as one of the painting languages, is still a sturdy pivot with ample capability to assist artists in their explorations and practices. Even in the international world of contemporary art, we can also find hot artists like John Currin, Nicola Samori and Glenn Brown who still include the form of classical painting in their practice and see it as a pivot.

The charm of classical painting's eternity forms an important backdrop of Ji Xin's practice of painting which aims always at finding forms of classic significance so as to repeatedly polish his own linguistic approach, search for unique linguistic features and to stimulate the deeper power of sensibility inherent in the artist. In the past two years, Ji Xin has found an increasingly clear clue for such a manner of practice, and, by taking in nutrition from both Chinese traditional classic forms and Western classical ones and repeatedly balancing and sculpting in various aesthetics and differences, the artist has been manifesting self and mental

state in an increasingly solid and pure way, and breaking through his inner sensibility in every stimulation. After his first solo in 2014 that marked the initial establishment of his own art-making features, the artist found that it was hard for the previous art-making approaches with tunnel vision to satisfy his abundant creative desires and emotional gaps inside, so he extended his art consciously from his compilation of personal fairy tales at the stage before. Like his character, Ji Xin's creation seems to be in calm progress, but deep inside, the undercurrents are turbulent, along with the roaring of desires.

A young girl once so described in her letter to Andrei Tarkovsky: "There's another kind of language, another form of communication: by means of feeling, and images. That is the contact that stops people from being separated from each other, that brings down barriers. Will, feeling, emotion – these remove obstacles from between people who otherwise stand on opposite sides of a mirror, on opposite sides of a door. The frames of the screen move out, and the world which used to be partitioned off comes into us, becomes something real." (quoted from Kitty Hunter-Blair's version of Tarkovsky's *Sculpting in Time*) His latest works "Angel – Back" and "Angel – Front" remind me of these words, which can also be written for Ji Xin, considering his progress in creation. He loyally believes in his intuition when organizing a painting, and he's good at arranging indistinct relevancies in his image so as to replace the part where logic is set, at turning the aesthetically compact sensibility into a solid product through painting, and at breaking free with reserve, giving the image a charming kind of character that defies duplication. The artist doesn't absorb classical styles in a processing way of style archaeology, but most of the time, the absorption is purely based on the artist's own visual awareness or the intervention of his own formulas and logic, which is an easier way to arouse feelings deep inside.

By means of painting, Ji Xin is bringing down the style barriers among various art languages and elements, like most of his works features the elements such as northern Renaissance, Gothic, the Middle Ages, the Republic of China, cartoons and comic strips. With a variety of basics inherent in painting, the artist forcefully keeps all the elements beneath painterliness, so that the elements, multifarious as they are, in expression cannot be independent from but only attached to painting. In the meantime, the artist is also trying to erase the emotional obstacles between each other, and to create a flattened emotional entrance leading into the artist's favorite emotional interval. The typical example in his paintings is the childlike facial features, more or less, of all the figures in his works, be it serious or easy, in spite of the adult physical traits and situations of many. It's as if the artist found a confusing and absurd entrance, sneaked into the common perceptual world of adults and children, boosted the harmony between each other through painting, the best way to express inner emotional links, and wiped out the difference between adults and children in painting. We can also see such reverse-aging settings in John Currin's painting, but different from Ji Xin's works, his seem closer to Neil Postman's concept of "childhood" in *The Disappearance of Childhood* and involve his satire on and criticism of the middle class.

"Interval", the title of this exhibition, originally means the interval between two acts of a play, and thus symbolizes the interval between two kinds of space and time. Ji Xin's creation falls

right into such “grey” space, as he’s neither performing vigorously and preaching argumentatively nor looking on soberly and making well-knit deductions. Emotionally, “Interlude” is an ambiguous interval where the artist likes to stay; but on the structural relationship of his works, it’s more like a description of the mutual-metaphor condition of the several creative threads, implying that fear dwells in beauty and likewise beauty can always be found in fear. Creation ferments after being stirred into this kind of absurdity and contradiction, which in art is represented by the synchronous integration of harmony and drama; a contact is made by the vividness in painting with the possibility of such integration in which all the adjacent are working into each other.