

Out of the Depths: About Tan Yongqing's Work

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Nowadays, it's quite hard to impose ancient techniques and standards of drawing on painters since, due to the convenience of Internet materials, the swiftness of electronic drawing in stimulating the human brain and the ensuing accurate response, a "work", the product of an artist, already fully prepared, would have its keynote basically preset, almost equal to the on-site execution of a plan. Certainly, it's not so easy to realize what's in the mind, and, in addition, the difference of artists in aesthetic tonality has contributed to the present coexistence of various thought-provoking opinions about painting, a traditional medium though it's widely known as. In modern times, in particular, its systemic interconnection with humanism has made painting an indispensable historical medium of human behavioral traces which deserves continuous writing. Through this special medium, Tan Yongqing bridges the states of man in the transitional stage between metaphysicality and animality, the latter of which is inherent in humanity, so his art can be viewed as a concrete activity based on the present, able to both facilitate introspection and connect with others.

Since the start of his art practice, Tan Yongqing has been dedicated to exploring life consciousness in painting. From his pieces painted in college years to his recent works, his exploration of life has unraveled in different dimensions as to its commonness and the sense of depth. And we can trace the exploration back to the various setbacks the artist suffered during the gradual growth of his self-consciousness, and his spiritual orientation was also somewhat provoked in the process. Like the grabbing of life-saving straws in a panic, it started as a belief and turned further into faith, and what played secretly on the situation was the defeat of the declined simplex ideology or a theory about life by the trueness Tan Yongqing perceived. To think rationally and dialectically all along also failed to lead the grown-up into the elusive midair of darkness, and "faith", metaphysical in a way but hardly teleological, contributed more to the rational self-certification of a certain process, which allowed Tan Yongqing to settle temporarily at the time as to at least persuading himself that every encounter of his is traceable, hence his turn from an ecclesiastical fashion to a very personal collection of "faith". In a sense, Tan Yongqing seems to have indeed experienced such a process of self-modernization. Reverting to Tan Yongqing's art, we can find that the process has clearly been quite an influence on his later creation, and, despite the ever-simplification in the different stages of expressing his will to explore life consciousness and the paradoxical, complex and conflictual part about humanity due to the evolvement in thinking and the external influences along the way, the artist has been longing for first-hand experiences, escaping formatted creation and boosting his self-improvement.

Like a diligent gold digger who won't stay at one spot for long, Tan Yongqing, as a modernist, has it that, through rational collecting, programming and blending, one should start by finding himself a trustworthy personal language, then go on to explore the outskirts of such trustworthiness and to collect equipment and armed forces that can keep upgrading this core, and persists in practicing his self-awareness and behavioral patterns along with the increase of his personal potential, which allows things to be known rapidly. Man's thinking not only covers himself but can also reach out to be the brain of everything around. From his "Portrait" series to "Human body" series, we can

see, in a sense, a process of the artist examining himself top down, so his depiction goes to where his consciousness reaches. And it's also a show of reason in Tan Yongqing's painting. Although a lag would happen to either the hand or the brain about this, there is definitely a contest between consciousness and practice, which is justified by the necessity for ritualism if a portrait or human body is expected to look gentle and refined in a way and be tinted with a little profundity, and the final impression a work gives is determined by the consideration of such ritualism which calls for a sense and more an eye of reason that can contribute to the certain proportion. In the tug between the everyday and ritualism, Tan Yongqing has achieved a form of balance in his painting, and yet, during this stage, the accumulation of experience has the artist extend the ritualism to still objects, which means, clearly, that no sublime experience can be generated from such objects confined in a certain frame (the very frame of the painting) without deformation or implantation of cultural elements. So Tan Yongqing implants some narratives and sentiments in the combination of the still objects or environment and the human body. What Tan Yongqing has been working on recently is how to harmonize the imagery with the narrative or achieve some sort of unity between them. As a turning point, *Stabbing Tiger* (2018) was like discovering a new path in chaos, which might seem an encounter with a Utopia but actually was also a chain reaction that started from building his own buildings and went on to the laying out of his aesthetic experience and the participation of more and more sci-fi thinking and religious experience (or religious knowledge). So Tan Yongqing has been considering what to include in his narrative and what's the best way to achieve it. As he sees it, fighting and resisting are but a tug between each pair among spirituality, humanity and animality.

Specifically, the animality inherent in humanity can only be appropriately studied after revelation during which what Tan Yongqing employs is obviously not as demonstrated by the bloody kind of words but still bears an aesthetic tonality, and his painting impresses one not with any surprise or sudden thrill but with the elusive and meaningful part about the work developed through a form of cunningness that "functions secretly". As for spirituality, a metaphysical pursuit, what makes it possible to keep the heaviness of flesh from being a burden is only the tug between humanity and animality and the constant verification of the spatial proportion occupied by human consciousness in the making by humanity and spirituality. This is also part of the continually interweaving and growing clues in Tan Yongqing's painting. The change from one version of his *Fighting* to another (2018 and 2019 respectively), from naked to dressed, seems to aim for identity but actually for character and integrity; the role exchange of male and female in his *Embrace* dissolves the sexual desire of the religious symbol - "long hair", and what takes its place is a sense of suppression or a form of divinity, so, perhaps, metaphysics can only be attained by suppressing one's desires in real life. In painting, Tan Yongqing has found a subtle balance between the release of violence and the suppression of desire. Undoubtedly, Shinoyama Kishin has inspired or nurtured the human figures in Tan Yongqing's paintings in a fashion between erotic and eccentric while Chiaki Kuriyama is overwhelmingly tempting in terms of image and character, just like an Ex Machina who seeks to liberate herself by taming her opponent through a series of human weakness – callous though, she is irresistible. But it's obvious that Tan Yongqing has only extracted a possibility of the characters for deformation, and even dealt with them in a landscape style, transplanting a special texture to the skin of his figures through a painting technique. Take *Landscape of a Head and Body* (2016),

Landscape of a Face (2017) and *The Surface of a Human Face* (2018) as examples, and we can easily find that none of the figures depicted have any identity, but, as can be put in one category, they can show us how the artist's approach has been changing. Later, the employment of dressed figures switched his art to a new stage or a different dimension of thinking, which involves some social factors despite his subjective role exchanges for the subjects in question (as in *Beating the Dog* (2019) and *Fighting* (2018)) to make paintings with scenes similar to but actually against the reality. Still, with his *Tide* (2019), *Dark* and *Innumerable Summer Nights* (2018), Tan Yongqing seems to have also created a new situational space, which serves as a training camp for the artist's construction of text-based images.

In his journey of self-construction, Tan Yongqing can extract more experiences from accumulative text than from more intuition images, not to mention the quantity of situational imaginations text can provide, and this is probably because the room for imagination given by text is often related to some narrative, and what Tan Yongqing hasn't discovered or can faintly perceive may just be the certain narrative that underlies some text. For example, he has found great comfort and spiritual resonance in many literary works by masters like Marquez and Lu Xun of modernism and Sartre of existentialism on the nature of survival. Therefore, Tan Yongqing's works of this stage not only present some images but include more of the artist's thinking or at least deliver part of his personal ideas: his *Tide* (2019) is a liberation of feelings and a sign to encourage humanist reflection; his *Innumerable Summer Nights* (2019), nevertheless, conveys more sentiments of his own. As in text reading where we are faced with two dimensions: what the writer wants to narrate and what can be interpreted, there is also a balance between Tan Yongqing's personal or private ideas and what he tries to reveal to the audience or what suffices to allow him to be accurately and publicly known. So Tan Yongqing is trying to work the method of interpreting or reading text into the clues of his images.

In a word, a new way of narration can fill in if one bumps into emptiness in the quest of meaning, or fill up the infinite space hanging above the human brain as regards emptiness, existence and so on. By constructing a new narrative, one can escape the exploration of the ultimate question, and, instead, place himself in an imaginary setting that is not only the skeleton of the painting but also a personal part of the artist. In the light of the Creator's compassion, the artist has learnt to marry literary thinking with his art, and, during the drift between reason and perception, time is dissolved, the sense of life stretched and the depth of life saturated and enriched. In this process, the artist is trying to have himself so enriched as to cover up any huge black hole, wormhole and undescribed space wrapped not by reason. It's perhaps just like a clique who is obsessed with daily life, always looks for commonality and ritualizes it and, at some moment, gets to the divinity, spirituality and even animality hidden in humanity. In the artist's game of painting, roles can be exchanged, and the outcome of such exchange is an abnormality. In this sense, it's quite obvious what unique feel the artist attempts to deliver out of the depths: words that need explanation and condensed images reflect each other with a moonlight-like alloy texture and the making of art has become a perpetual outlet for the artist's ever-accumulating feelings.