

Pre-Construction: Migration and Farewell

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Time, as it goes by, has still failed to bring Shih Yung Chun any closer to the present or future that is growing more and more alienated and out of control. His desire for control has always been focused on the past times and the topics obsolete in current society. For artists, perhaps, it takes both time and distance to create and respond to the things that really attract them and, in this ever-accelerating age, refer to some rare elements that it's hard for us to have any real access to. In this sense, art-making is a mode of instinctive self-protection to Shih Yung Chun that allows him to create his personal time, keep distance from the present and then construct an extremely personal art-making context to not only confront but somehow imply the constantly changing real society. These all have everything to do with the program in the artist's personal life and with his personal experience, by awakening or rebooting both of which over and over, he deconstructs and then reconstructs what he finds still worth narrating and exploring. In the construction of special geographical space and time, he's somehow capable of arousing certain forgotten memories for the only sake of bidding farewell more formally, and this is Shi Yung Chun responding to the forgetful grand historical view with his continuously fortified personal history.

Shih Yung Chun was born in Taipei in 1978. Take a comparative look at his history and a semiotic one at the messages delivered by his works and it's not hard to find that he's deeply influenced by his experience with a military dependents' village and the material fruits of the thriving age of the "Four Asian Tigers" that he witnessed during his growth. First of all, some political reasons put an end to the age of the military dependents' villages in Taiwan, revealing to Shih Yung Chun in a shocking way the helplessness of every individual in face of a grand narrative and the various reactions of different individuals. It seems to him that there are many interrupted narrations in either the remains in the old sites of the villages or the reflections, which can never be cut off, upon that special period in history and the personal feelings suppressed by collective planning. All the new things that came along with thriving of the "Four Asian Tigers" have left the deepest memories in the artist's life experience. As a few decades have passed, we tend to look at that part of history today from an overly macroscopic point of view or more from the perspectives of economics, international relations and regional political, but, as a witness, Shih Yung Chun's experience in the period of change can be embodied by many concrete things, such as the old

objects, toys and furnishings recurrent in his art, which have all become evidence of an age and containers of time as well as some irreplaceable carriers of the sentimental part of Shih Yung Chun's art.

During his later growth, the part of memory has been more and more valuable to the artist, who keeps referring back to those years in his works, specifically his aesthetic preferences, visual elements and general visual impression, by blending in his later experience and concern about the reality. As we know, there is no way to reverse the "arrow of time" essentially, but Shih Yung Chun's works, just like time machines with wrong-set parameters, attempt to locate some node of time or space he cares most about with different mediums alternatively, and this very node, drifting ambiguously, relates to a variety of complicated elements in reality and is a mix of different sets of space-time and political and cultural symbols, all of which reminds us of the concept of Utopia – a concept that means not only "Nowhere" or "Erewhon" here but also "U-Topos" and consists in art-making or thinking with extraterritoriality in time and space, and it's an absolute field hidden between artistic inspiration and sparkles of the mind, extremely individualized but also reflecting the real world. I believe this is the very concept of space-time Shih Yung Chun is really trying to locate.

Take a close look at Shih Yung Chun's work, be it photography, installation or even the descriptive language in his novels, and it's not hard to find that painting has been the base of his creation and is linked with all of his creational directions and his logic of thinking, as the traces of painting are all over his setting and preset observational angle for every medium he employs. As before, Shih Yung Chun's latest works focus on his personal collection, mostly old objects from everyday life such as furnishings, toys, clothes and photos from the past, most of which date back to the specific time mentioned above. They are loved by the artist and have been part of his collection, hence an emotional connection in between, and, by working them into his own art, it seems that the artist is trying to double-check such a connection. Interestingly, in his latest works, we can see some subtle change in his depiction of human figures. First of all, he never focuses on strangers. Like the objects in his works, the human figures must also be familiar to him though a genuine emotional connection. In his process of painting, the artist works on human figures the same way he does on objects as to his approach to painting and investment of emotion. That he turns his human figures into sculpture-like or prop-like elements – if we look at it the other way around – is a form of personification of the objects in his painting, which makes it more justifiable

to install in his painting human figures deprived of particularity. To the artist, they are perhaps just as cherish-able and collectable as the objects and expected to be part of some above-mentioned U-Topos built by the artist. In this sense, you'd find yourself in a trance viewing Shih Yung Chun's painting, as, instead of something specific, what he really wants to emphasize is actually a mixed feeling of alienation and ambiguity in some non-specific space-time.

This latest solo exhibition of Shih Yung Chun held in Hive Center for Contemporary Art (Beijing), suggestive of both "migration" and "farewell" as I see it, is, on the one hand, related to his own novel *Pre-Construction*. In half-seclusion, he made all these works, put up all the spatial installations and photographed in a single cabin on the mountain where his life was led. Shih Yung Chun constructed the private yet fecund cabin into a self-contained and autonomous territory of his own, which, as in its later artistic metaphors, embodies an individual's concern for the future and social anxiety of rather broad significance. In this sense, the novel is not merely a parallel script to the exhibition but more a collection of the artist's predictions and presets about the fates of both his own and the world in the future based on his personal experience. On the other hand, the artist had his studio in Taipei wrapped with wood boards and translated it over to the exhibition space in Hive Beijing in a method like mold casting, so that a true and false private space of his is revealed to the audience, and, while interconnected with the novel in a mutually justifying fashion, places all these works of his into the narrative space of the script and the real personal experience of the artist. By the end of the exhibition, the artist wants to destroy the cabin in Beijing as an end point of both his novel and his creation of the entire stage, like doing a ritual of sublimation, and, unlike William Faulkner's *Barn Burning* and Haruki Murakami's *Barn Burning*, which are both rituals in sadness to dissolve the sense of nihilism, Shih Yung Chun's destruction "by fire" is more like an active attempt to get to an end with some sort of joy or a formal ceremonial farewell as in the artist's own words: "That's all for this stage, so now I'll be developing interest in something else." Through these two actions, the artist is driving his transgression approach to art-making to a peak. In his case, the transgression, as first theorized by Bataille and further developed by Foucault, doesn't mean simply eliminating the boundaries between art mediums, like installation, photography, painting, novel and performance, and their grammar, nor thoroughly surrendering the meaning expressed in a medium to the opposite or the other side during a switch, but more keeping around the boundaries and constantly releasing a powerful force of both destroying and generating while approaching the extremity.