

Reverie Fossils

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Wang Qing attempts, as he keeps saying, to give the world a “nickname”. Childish though it may sound, such an expression is actually posing a test for the centrifugal force of every creative mind in thinking, which is nurtured indispensably by intense curiosity, the aspiration to connect with the broader physical and spiritual universe and unrestrained fantasies, all ordinary traits that every child is born with. It’s not hard to find, however, that our growth tends to distract us “naturally” from them and even develop our slights on them – they sound so impractical and intangible after all. In the course of time, most creators are unavoidably bound to have themselves tamed into a seasoned, sophisticated personality excellent at management and consideration. For such a majority, Wang Qing is no doubt an incongruity. He is reminiscent of the director played by François Truffaut in his movie *Day for Night*, who looks a bit weary having to deal with all the trivialities at the filming site in the daytime but still dreams of his childhood filmmaking dream every night in his sleep. In real life, Wang Qing is a visual practitioner inspired by certain words. He would turn his fantasies and nightmares, including the indistinguishable cities and obscure faces and figures within, little by little into meticulously depicted pictorial fables in his art. Even in the current halftime of his journey of life and art, Wang Qing still surprises us with his new changes in art which have been contributing to the wholeness and thoroughness of his work.

The Chinese province Henan used to be a shadow that Wang Qing was unable to shake off for a very long time, and it is also a label which it’s hard to dismiss from any discussion of him. The time, over a decade, he spent in the land has left Wang Qing with a huge number of paintings, photographs and writings. It seems that Henan has cast a grey base for Wang Qing which is able to permeate homogenously all the various mediums he’d use to express his feelings. With a history of prosperity though, this old land is neglected by the current times as a corner covered with dust. Being at an end of such a change in time and space, Wang Qing, surrounded by already stagnant, mundane and even boring things, lost himself with his mind wandering among the innumerable words he had read and the various transitions he had seen and, at the end, focusing quietly on the still objects to be depicted in paintings. But however dramatic he was inside, what waited at the other side of the dusty filter was always simplification and distortion, so his melancholy, laden with too much though, turned out to be not powerful enough. And, gradually and before he could realize it, Wang Qing became a spokesman for those away from their hometowns, as his literati nostalgia for the land neutralized his hidden sharpness and advocacy. Fantasy comes from reality, but it will also be restrained by reality. Having been through all that, Wang Qing says, “I’ve got no way back to that silent, desolate Henan.”

Italo Calvino shows his strong interest in “digression” in literature in his *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. In the case of Wang Qing, what helped him stay temporarily away from the previous plight and rut of painting was photography, which alleviated his primitive impulse in painting for involving the objective environment and, more importantly, induced his review of his past history. In 2017, Wang Qing reprocessed his photographic series *Gansu* and *Kaifeng* taken years earlier by coloring the black and white original prints like glazing porcelain so as to modify the memories and renew the series visually. And in the same period, Wang Qing managed to quickly liberate his

painting from the visual framework that underlies external sights. *A Volume of Geography* and *A Volume of Butterflies* opened new holes inward, settling his imagination on the imageries more suitable for the time – book and specimen. We can certainly find his use of the image of a book in some of his earlier paintings, but these pieces are valuable for constituting an encyclopedia of life of some sort by governing self-consistently the fragments of fantasies within a very finite yet also nearly infinite inner universe.

It would not be an overstatement to say that Wang Qing was brought up surrounded by books. Thanks to his father, however, Wang Qing got used to the company of books at a very young age, and now it's been a lifelong habit for him, so perhaps a folio book is a more comfortable and familiar space for him to paint on than a canvas. Born at the late 1960s, Wang Qing spent his teenage years in the 1980s which was undergoing an unprecedented boom of knowledge around China, so, like many of his peers, Wang Qing also developed an insatiable thirst for reading, but, while the need of most peers for written words drained away with their adolescence, Wang Qing managed to keep it and has further developed a habit of collecting old books. Books can certainly expand the structure of one's mind in content and inspire the creation of visual images. Also, the unique form and space of books have been shaping how Wang Qing looks at the world. Even, the paper of a book, as thin as cicada wings, can also be conveniently used as a painting medium. That's why we can now see the small paintings by Wang Qing on the book covers and the drawing paper composed of some inside pages, just like the scribbles on the inside of textbooks one would make during school days. They can fill up the blanks left by rational thinking and help capture valuable potential inspirations.

Taking a look at Wang Qing's past repertoire, it is not hard to find that some time-tested images of his recur repeatedly over different spans of time. In recent years, his painting is dominated more and more by lines and patterns of planarity, which has replaced his previous habit of layering color to attain perspective in space. More noteworthy is that the images made up of the lines and patterns no longer depend merely on the brushwork. Actively and purposely, Wang Qing makes use of his affinity for paper by means of cutting, dying, even rubbing and squeezing, and, at the end, of collage. Wang Qing selects his patterns subjectively and randomly, like an inheritor of the legacy of the Art Nouveau movement, following in the footsteps of William Morris and Gustav Klimt, and he also works in some mystic Gothic mood by adding layers nearly incessantly to his painting. Obviously, such paper collage and superposition are not purely games of form, but have also caused an imperceptible reversal of the dimension of viewing as changes of form. Most of Wang Qing's previous pieces tend to create a situation as a lure for the viewers, so you start from the appearance and then look into the restless emotional whirlpool deep in a painting. But in his recent works such as *Peacock*, it should be the contours of the depicted that are first captured by viewers, and, as the passage into every such painting is squeezed to vanish, they can only retreat outwards to the surface from the inside as guided by the layers of fragmental details. Like building a maze for vision, Wang Qing manipulates various abstract shapes at will to create bewilderment with flat and infinite details. So he's perhaps trying to demonstrate Hofmannsthal's quote: "Depth must be hidden. Where? On the surface."

The possibility of creation can be fully boosted once the depicted has nothing in real life to refer to

and relies completely on imagination and subconscious. Every work of Wang Qing is the fruit of its own history. Instead of developing at a stroke, every new form is built only on years of making art, like the formation of sedimentary rocks, which can be compared to polishing an artifact – the process of turning its dull look into a coquettish tone. *One Night* also presents a magical spectacle as an intricate web is woven of corpses of insects and bodies of trees, just like a colorful patterned glass window. The light comes from the depths of the painting, but, as we look inside, we can see not the world outside but only the patterned window. Wang Qing's focus may not be merely on words written out, but also on the complicated shapes which can also be taken as a type of careless handwriting or a language too obscure for deciphering. In Wang Qing's *Tiger* where he works in the element of text, handwriting-like patterns and pattern-like text are more inextricable, as if to attempt the representation of the essence of the mind.

In summary, every work of Wang Qing seems to have opened a window of a different dimension; they can each lead to an enormous series, but right now Wang Qing cares more about exploring the infinite diversity of form. One certain thing is that the world in his painting has changed from a lyrical poem of perspective to a flat yet multilayered absurd play; it has gone from one extreme of vastness, thinness and obscurity to another of complexity, thickness and colorfulness. So this world of his, composed of paper fragments and pigment spots, is filled with such a subtle paradox: the most prosperous is also the most frivolous, and the most savage also the most fragile. Isn't this also a metaphor for some part of the real world?

In this exhibition, Wang Qing will be composing a long letter with his unique dream speech and painting to share his upsets, hesitations and anxieties that punctuate his journey of art. As Wang Qing puts it, ignorance and helplessness are the normality of life, and he's trying, in a most honest way, to present to the audience some slices of his life. This will be his approach to connecting with the world, and beneath it we may be able to dig out millions of nicknames he's given to the world.