

THE PERSISTENCE OF MEMORY – Lu Yuwei's Path

There is an extremely important part of all human souls, which seems completely ignored by most of Chinese so-called contemporary artists: the sense of Persistence of Memory. Memory is not a matter of neural connections, nor a simple revival of some good or bad experiences: it's something deeper, radicated in the human spirit, which rules as a guide, as an active flame inside the mind. Anyway, in nowadays China, this Gift seems to be inconsistent: better, seems to be a shame. Most of Chinese contemporary painters, even important, have no message to communicate: sometimes, they have an anti-message, and generally they lack in it, too. After the pioneers of political-social critics, the same society and politics became decorative: as it were if art had nothing related with Memory, but just with a poorly lived history, and mainly with a fashionable trend.

Is it possible, I wondered, that all this mass of civilization is flooding away so suddenly? Is it possible that nobody notices it, that all people are so occupied in business that they cannot help losing their Humanity? That's what I was thinking of while I was looking for Chinese young artists, both in the new commercial galleries and in the large standardized studios.

And finally, my request, at that time already become a prayer, was granted: when I met Xiao Lu at her studio in the crowded Weihai Road, not only I found a terrific space in Shanghai downtown, an artists' oasis inside a century old warehouse compound, but also and mainly an 800 square feet high-ceilinged room which contained another world, a history, a feeling for Memory.

The prerogative of the Artist, I strongly believe, is the ability to recreate the World, inventing a new Universe fitted to be an environment where to breed the Artist's soul – then, no matter whether we talk about paintings, music or else, this gift is rare, for it implies several natural and experienced features.

Anyway, Xiao Lu owns it: I found her paintings strongly linked to both her human feelings and the stream of history; all except decorative, they are the results of her melancholic personality, her feelings and her studies about the City where she lives and which she paints, and the rational research of an Artistic way and development. After graduating, she started painting the people in Shanghai: crowds of people, whose faces are recognizable as different natures and attitudes, but quiet, wordless, indifferent in spite of their proximity.

Personal Landscapes, as she named this series, is the first step of her search on the City and People spirits: time is stopped, and it appears clearly there is not a real path for this people, not a way of salvation from the chaos inside and outside them. Probably they are looking to the wrong direction, they try to hide their belonging to the human race, their deepest Nature, and focus on an atheist pursue to economic and social improvement, avoiding to look their own distorted images mirrored by the other people walking on the street.

But this situation cannot last forever, especially for the most sensitive people: the monochrome background of the previous paintings started being replaced by a wall, first covered by desert windows, as it appears there is something over it, then the same windows are populated by single characters. The break is evident: now, people are looking at other people, there's time, flatness gives the way to perspective, and a complete artificial blindness cannot be sustained anymore. Anyway, this wall does not constitute a division, is not a separation: the people are all the same, independently from their position, and the city-life is the same for all of them, both inside and outside the wall.

But, how many people here are conscious of their Humanity? How many aware of Memory? At this point, Lu Yuwei has found her main path, her fundamental theme, which is driving her also into the development of her art: in the next series, *Boundaries*, she links this theme, the window, with the plainness of her first paintings. It looks like the same people of the wall are getting involved together, flattened on the same layer: mainly women, they are as posted into a wall, they have become part of the environment, and, moreover, the canvas acts as the looking glass of the observer, which can find oneself in it, start thinking, wondering about his nature and Memory.

Finally, we have *Windows*, where the characters can look safely to both other characters and outside to the real world, protected by the wall from any external interference. They are still in the City, they belong completely to the City, but they have found their spot, their position and their path, they have rediscovered their humanity: the sense of moral solitude of the crowded first paintings is almost absent, although the people are in scarce number or even alone, for they are re-acquiring Something else and caring less and less about the outside world.

The entire story is the research of Lu Yuwei, a woman desperate for the doom of her City, for the falling into the dark and the meaningless, permanently looking for the Human Soul inside everyday people, the people you can see in the street, rushing or walking, rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, good or bad. And from a lot of people without Memory, finally she discovered a few ones which still have it and keep it into their deepest thoughts: it's this Persistence of Memory that she welcomes in her art, that she found in herself and injects into her paintings, not denying or hiding anything, linked to her Past and her Self-consciousness as a Human Being.

And that's what she expects to find in the other people in the outside world, as she already found in her paintings.