

Revealing the Original Existence- On Yeh Chu-sheng's Paintings

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“If gods and demons never existed, we could not express the phenomenon of life through art: the ultimate function of art is to describe such existential frustration.” - Rothko

Yeh Chu-sheng's artistic creation has always been closely related to introspective exploration and the relationship between humans and the environment. His solo exhibition “2012; 2021” is based on a return to the site of his former studio—the place used to be his studio nine years ago, and it was renovated into a commercial building after a fatal fire. Such a “return” not only refers to fixing the gap in his artistic creation but also an opportunity to re-examine how one can be remembered through art.

1.

The exhibition includes his four painting series, “Change,” “Come True,” “Trial,” and “Metamorphosis,” which profoundly reflect his introspection on life and the environment. In Yeh's paintings, there is always a specific and personal quality, a thoughtful structure, and a sense of stability in a spirit of tribute to the universe and a priori existence. The themes of Yeh's works are highly relevant to ecological and environmental realities. His works respond to concepts from beliefs and metaphysics; furthermore, they also reflect the external environment, depicting the actual state. In other words, it is the artist's abstract presentation after observing the natural environment. Most of the time, when talking about abstract paintings, we always take them as compositions created merely by forms and colors. However, Yeh Chu-sheng draws inspiration for his paintings from nature and daily life. He then further internalizes all these elements and applies forms and colors, which embody his life, on the canvas. Such internalizing practices and his interpretation of nature are in line with how Paul Klee has defined: Artworks contain rich metamorphosis of natural forms, only through art can nature be regenerated, and symbols of art be brought to life.

Clement Greenberg, the renowned American art critic, argued that the painting's essential qualities are the flatness (two-dimensionality) and the defining moment for flatness. With his discourse and support of the abstract painting, he has established abstract expressionism as the

dominant movement in modern art. Greenberg further indicated that the pictorial space is the essential part of abstract painting. When looking at Yeh Chu-sheng's works, you may find musicality of rhythm and movement once emphasized in Wassily Kandinsky's works. Yeh pays particular attention to the expression of texture and the visual momentum it can create. During the exhibition, he gave a lecture, "Drawing Class in the Last Semester," in which Yeh, as usual, explained the differences of pictorial texture and its composition. From his lecture, we may realize that the seemingly abstract texture and pattern are transformed through the artist's observation of nature. The texture is what "objects" have marked. Yeh's attention to texture reveals that abstract art is the platform dedicated to the contents and representation of nature, and it liberates these natural qualities through the pure form of painting.

2.

In several interviews, reviews and even conversation between us, Yeh Chu-sheng repeatedly asserts that painting must connect with everyday life. By observing various phenomena in life, painting can serve as a medium to document every aspect of life. For the artist, the contents and even styles of his creations must be consistent with his life philosophy. One must observe, contemplate, and manage related techniques and elements to establish a lengthy and complicated incubating process to master painting. Some of the exhibited works demonstrate how the artist applies his perception and metaphysical thoughts in creating a space as profound as the universe on the two-dimensional canvas.

Texture and pictorial space in "Come True 39" and "Come True 40" exhibit Yeh's complex and delicate painting techniques. He spreads the mixture of sand and pigment on the canvas. With shades of colors and marks left by the brush strokes, Yeh releases his emotions when painting. Following the pattern created by the texture, we see torn, eroded, and uneven surfaces where flatness, textures, and shapes meet. Through the textural pattern formed by layers of pigments, Yeh Chu-sheng provides the viewers a sense of voluminous space within his paintings. These works identify the mysterious and indescribable power in the human mind as a lyrical chanting.

In the framework of Theodor Lipps' concept of empathy, he considered the aesthetics experiences as free pleasure. Yeh Chu-sheng's painting presents a relaxed view of life. He transforms

his perception of life and beliefs in religion and philosophy into abstract territory filled with emotions. Wandering among the colors he uses and textures he creates, we experience unconstrained freedom. Therefore, the elements presented in his paintings, whether the scale of lines and forms or the saturation of colors are delicate and subtle. With his seemingly simple techniques dealing with colors and flatness, these abstract images turn the inexpressible ideas into tangible phenomena, and further affecting the viewers' subconsciousness.

As to "Trial 32" and "Trial 39," Yeh Chu-sheng used dark shades such as black and blue to depict the transition of time as well as the natural landscape. In the seemingly peaceful and tranquil scenery, the gradation and contrasts of colors present an attractive depth. Does the image merely serve as a tribute to the late-night or the ocean? Yeh paints various shades of a single color with his delicate brushwork. We can almost experience how pure and precise his brushwork is as the phenomenology that seeks the nature of things. Only in a peaceful and ideal state can the works' messages take on their genuine significance. Undoubtedly, Yeh Chu-sheng attempts to take us away from the mundane and bustle world through his paintings, and further bringing tranquility to the viewers' minds.

3.

Yeh Chu-sheng has been generously showing his concern for environmental issues in his paintings. In this exhibition, "River Variation" has much to do with his concern for nature. When we carefully read his works, we can realize that although the artist draws inspiration from the natural environment, he nevertheless subjectively pursues the universe's ultimate meaning through his introspective artistic creation. Such interests for human existence leave an open space for the viewers' interpretation, just as "Change 07" refers to—There are various perspectives to examine every aspect of things.

Perhaps for Yeh Chu-sheng, what art can do is to reveal the wonderful products by the creator and the inherently enlightening quality of nature.