

山水

SHANSHUI

Walter Yu: Between East and West

Walter Yu

Walter Yu (于朋)

Between East and West

By: Walter Yu

I was born in Beijing. The speed of China's development since the opening-up policy is indeed unprecedented. I remember that in my youth there were nurseries and fish ponds next to where I lived, today this place has become a commercial area of asphalt and large shopping centers. I was there again, but I couldn't find the alley where I used to play with the neighbor kids, and I couldn't find the tree I had climbed. All this makes me sad. I think that the Chinese cultural area has a very strong postcolonial coloration. I didn't like this atmosphere, I wished to follow a more natural state of art, so I came to Germany when I was 22 years old. I always wanted to study art, but first I studied German and German literature in China in order to be able to realize this dream here in the West. The process of learning German has inspired me creatively. I draw a lot of creative resources from literature, which makes my work more poetic. Being able to study art in Germany was a blessing for me. At first, I thought there was no difference between Germany and China, because people everywhere are just people. But then I changed my mind that there

is a big difference between Germany and China, from the form of organization to the relationship between individuals to the mental state. Now I think again that people everywhere are just people. In fact, it wasn't until I arrived in Germany that I realized that I didn't understand enough about China. But after I came to Germany, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of China. This understanding has also helped me to understand German society. I used to have a rather clichéd impression of the West. This impression has been corrected since I have been in Germany. I think people can have multiple cultural foundations, and I have understanding, sympathy, love, and compassion for both cultures. I don't have a very strong sense of belonging to a particular country or culture. I always feel like I'm a stranger, a traveler who has come to this world, and being alive for me means being in a foreign country.

I love traditional Chinese art. There is a significant difference between artistic creation concepts in China and the West. The Chinese tradition does not describe reality, but fantasy space.

Untitled, ink on red-lined Chinese writing paper, 28 x 18 cm





Street Lights, ink on paper, 24 x 18 cm



In such a fantasy space I can feel wonderful poetry. But I have to be careful, because this kind of poetry is very similar to a scam if it is not honest. A certain shortcoming of the Chinese painting tradition may be that it has fallen into a metaphysical dilemma. But the works of literary painters have an incomparable elegance because of the high cultural level of these artists. You are a very important role model for me. I am also fascinated by European art traditions, I admire the masterful depictions and the fine materials. The creation cycle of a traditional European work of art is much longer than that of a traditional Chinese work of art, from the preparation of the painting ground to the rubbing of the paint, it requires a very fine artisanal technique. This makes me feel that paintings can be as exquisite as gemstones.

On the one hand, I see the masterful achievement of European artists, on the other hand, I also see the spiritual power of those who want to free themselves from social conventions and religious

shackles. Maybe I'm more inclined towards oriental poetry and fantasy in terms of taste. I have created many ink works as well as oil paintings. In my opinion, I don't focus on a particular visual language, Chinese tradition and Western tradition are extensions rather than limitations for me.

I think the educational model in modern society is uniform worldwide: we also study mathematics, physics, chemistry and biology in China, but the learning intensity is higher because of the higher competition. It's more a question of quantity than quality. However, due to the peculiar politics of modern China, universities are also government agencies, and the professors of art academies act like civil servants (sic.). In Germany, I met more idealistic professors, such as my professor Valérie Favre and my late philosophy professor Reinhard Knodt, who were really interested in art and how to communicate it. But I have to say that I am critical of contemporary art. I think the system of contemporary Western art was a backlash against the aristocratic system of its time.

Am I Western or Chinese oriented, or am I a link between the two cultures? If you ask





a stone, "Are you hard?" it will say, "I don't know." If you ask the seawater, "Are you cold?" it will answer, "I don't know." Whether I'm a link or not, I can't answer. The origin of my creation is not to be a link. As I said, I feel like a stranger to being alive. So far, if life has meaning, I can understand that there are very beautiful things in both Western and Chinese culture, and when I see them, I feel that my life is not in vain. But I also hope that China and the Western world will learn to understand each other better.

My pictures often show dream-like visions. We wouldn't say we're dreaming if we were dreaming of an unchanging darkness. We wouldn't feel alive if our senses weren't stimulated. So basically, we only perceive changes, in this sense life and dream are very close to each other. We are all perceivers of our perceptions, but the concept of perception would not exist without a perceiver. My penchant for dream images may come from poetry and fantasy in traditional Chinese art. Summarizing my creative methods, I can distinguish three: The first method is that I imagine myself to be some kind of extraterrestrial by distancing myself from this world, because in such a distance, when I think about the human world and human activities, I can gain a strange,

absurd, sometimes downright comical perspective. The second method is to introduce myself as a different person, a soldier, a widow, a drunken vagabond, a lonely king. I look at life through the eyes of these other characters. The third method is that I try to imagine an imaginary journey during which I can see wonderful landscapes, architectures, people and things. Then I try to portray them in reality. Many of my paintings are based on visions. On the other hand, the motifs are also created through the selection and experimentation with techniques and materiality. For example, if I use a stencil, I have to consider the possibilities and limitations of this technique.

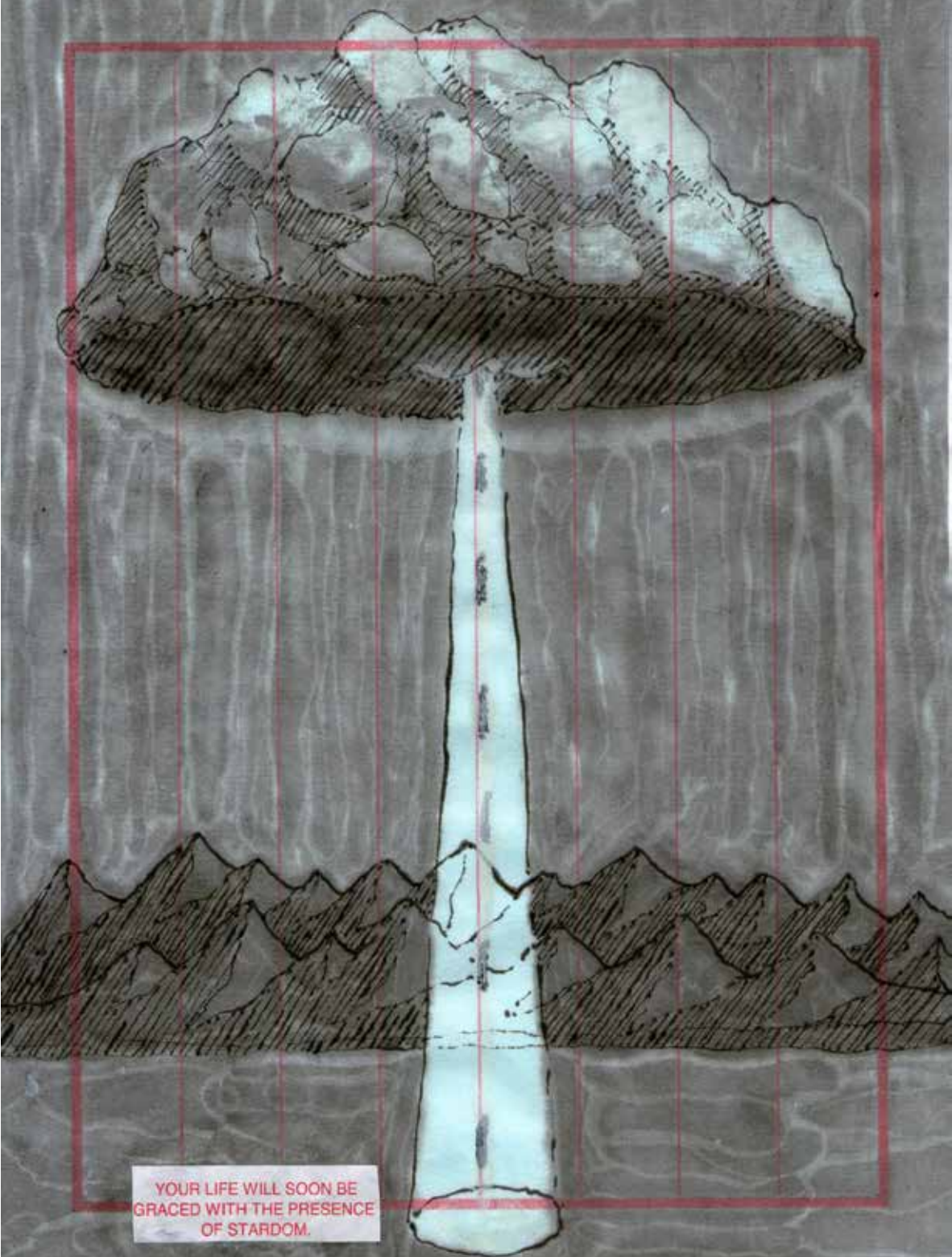
On the one hand, my ideas come from the response to life, the desire to create a spiritual space for myself, and on the other hand, from technical experience. There was a phase when I drew illustrated diaries. Many of these diary entries arose from dreams. But now I feel like I'm dreaming while I'm creating, to create fantasy space for myself. On the one hand, my story of the ghost horse stems from a dream that I was a court painter and encountered a major blockage, and on the other hand, I also incorporated legends about the famous Chinese horse painters Han Gan (706-783) and Li Gonglin (1049-

陋室
空思
晴日
偏逢
連雨
陰



《光海》 *Light Ocean*, oil on canvas





1106) into the story. But what is traditionally referred to as "inspiration from heaven" is, in my opinion, deceptive. I am convinced that there is no higher being who makes decisions or has a will. The process of my painting satisfies my desire to move to a more beautiful world. I don't think art is mystical or shamanic channeling. The essence of art lies in the comparative, which is what I mean by the "more beautiful world". Art in itself has no entity. However, there are many contemporary artists who, in principle, vary rather than create. This is a big problem in the system of contemporary art. The source of inspiration for such artists is Google. In my opinion, this type of occupation is like the cycle of a machine. If I had to choose between sky and Google, I would choose heaven.

Walter Yu (于朋) was born in Beijing in 1989. He studied German language and literature in Beijing as well as fine arts at the Berlin University of Arts. His work, which has been exhibited in Germany and China, has won several awards. He develops his own artistic language from contemporary Western stylistic elements and traditional Chinese pictorial tradition. For him, his reduced and quiet works are like reading notes, like poems in painting and drawing. They become a kind of landscape of the soul, characterized by a melancholic, poetic mood.