

An Overflow of Colors and Gold

-- On Lin Tianmiao's solo exhibition *The Same*

By Chen Jiaying

One said that art is to make visions – we haven't heard of this for years as we were told oftentimes that “art should serve the people”; “art represents the truth”; “art is an expression of oneself” or “art leads the social critics”. But when I came to Beijing Center for the Arts and saw Lin Tianmiao's *The Same*, this old saying suddenly rose before me.

Two hundred and six human bones are bound with threads in hundreds of colors, all displayed from right to left on the wall opposite the entrance in arrangement from the tiniest pieces to the largest ones, with the colors shading from deep blue to yellow, red and back to deep blue. It is hard to distinguish these colors when you watch it closely, but if you take one or two steps backward, then a rainbow will appear, much more beautiful than the one in the sky; but the celestial rainbow is somewhat imaginary, how can one take our real bones for a vision?

In the exhibition hall on the first floor, we see bulky square columns and beams and walls wrapped in dark velveteen. Bones of the humans, animals, birds and fish, enveloped in golden foil, are well-arranged and glistening in the darkness. Some are complete skeletons in squatting or climbing pose; some are in fragments; some are scattered around, and others are piled up disorderly. Displayed on the next floor are large works such as “*The Same for N Times*”, “*Golden Sameness*”, and etc. The entire space has almost been rebuilt, with several fake walls erected for the show.

Different from her former works (most of which used white threads to make light images), Lin's new productions use a lot of golden threads supplemented by other colors to wrap bones as well as tools such as knives, axes, saws, hammers, planes, and gears. These cumbersome bones and tools are bound together with soft threads to create an enigmatic beauty.

While Lin is experienced in using silk threads, the gold foils are her first attempt, which, as she said, can provide a special experience. You have to hold your breath during the production, for a slightest breath would ruin the whole thing. This is like a craftsman doing his work; in his eyes the materials are life in different forms. But isn't life also the same –compact and complete but easily scattered to nothing at the smallest thought and sentiment that comes from nowhere?

It makes *The Same* a bold exhibition to use gold and golden colors. Gold belongs to the Egyptian Pharaohs, and the temples in Inca and Tibet, not our times. Today in this money-worshipping world, gold is a metaphor. What fits us today is the paper money: the wealthy men use paper currency in a wasteful way, and peasants throw about joss paper when visiting a grave to cherish the memory of the dead. But *The Same* chooses to decorate dead bodies with true gold and silver. Here, however, gold

and silver are still a vision. Beside the dazzling “Golden Sameness” is “Black Sameness”. It renders a barren forest, which is made with jet black threads, perched by scattering bones of tiny birds on the branches that covered with shining gold foils, the work reminds the audience of the golden ages.

Turn around and you will get the key work “The Same for N Times”. The exhibition was opened on December 17, merely several days from the Doom as predicted by the Maya. People cannot help but see the exhibition as a metaphor of our age. The prosperity of today resembles Sodom in the Old Testament. I was confused by the view of explosion, for it is too shining a splendor for one to discern whether it implies GENESIS or DOOM. Doom seems to have nothing to do with our reality; while the Sodom of our age has no sign of ending in an explosion, but rather, it seems that it will only rot bit by bit to the end.

Critics believe that The Same has deep implications, while the interpretations differ a lot. For a spectator like me, only an experience with the bizarre splendor of The Same will be good enough. It is said that it cost a lot to prepare such a large installation exhibition; but it is only a drop in an ocean, compared with the production of a movie today which easily costs hundreds of millions. Here, the money is paid to create a splendor that, with its bizarreness, elevates itself from vulgarity. Are the bones pasted with gold foils, twined with colored silks, the same with the white bones in the tombs? Perhaps, both are but a vision. What the Buddha thinks, I know not; yet to me, a mortal, one vision would always vary from another.