

NATURE, FRACTURE AND GRIEF

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Shang Yang's art features a unique way of dealing with Nature. Presented in his earlier works, Nature is fragmented into small pieces, "patched up" on the canvas by the artist without spatial depth. In consequence, when interpreting his ideas of Nature, viewers tend to feel lost in a situation where the sense of depth and grounding is completely dispelled; the temporal and spatial measurement has disappeared; and the possibilities of Nature are unmercifully limited. Nature no longer extends in an organic way; its expected state of existence and evolution is facing traumatic challenges.

Shang Yang's basic viewpoints on Nature – as itself, or as its form on the canvas – is changing. His Nature is mottled, no longer a natural beauty; what we see is rough skin with scars and wrinkles and a tough soul suffering from devastation – in fact, it is not as splendid or overwhelming as people expect it to be. We can't feel soothed either as there are no profound, tranquil, flowing, mysterious, or vain elements in Shang Yang's Nature – it has isolated itself from both the Chinese and Western traditions in painting landscapes. Nature abruptly appears in front of people – so ugly, ruined and stiff that people feel it is too offensive to stand before it. It is not traditional landscape painting: it neither draws our instinctive obsession towards Nature, nor allows us to appreciate it in tranquility. Shang Yang is attempting to alter the practice of art appreciation – instead of capturing attention by creating beauty and comforting the soul, he distracts the viewer from his paintings and hurts them. Shang Yang's paintings are composed as a spur against the viewer – he employs anti-appreciation, anti-enjoyment; he aggressively disturbs people's illusion of the positive relation between Nature and beauty.

What hides behind the change in Nature when its inherent grace and awe vanish, specifically with the disappearance of "scenery" or the "poetic imagination"? Shang Yang seldom includes any human figures in his painting, which indicates the end of the traditional relationship between Nature and human in a classical sense. Nature and humans have interdependently composed an organic mechanism, a too tight and stable connection to dismantle. Mother Nature gives birth to humans who live in its embrace, and so the changes in Nature will follow the changes of humans. Shang Yang's portrait of the historical change in Nature has implied the change of humans, and the relationship between the two. Nature is a mirror of contemporary people, it has scarred and wrinkled skin just like

ours; its fractured pieces suggest the state of humans today.

The questions to be asked are: What changes have happened to Nature? How did these changes occur?

In the "Sightseeing", Shang Yang has provided an answer: humans are no longer humble before Nature; they play with it, laugh at it, and discriminate against it. Those rare human figures depicted in this work are self-esteeming; they stand aloft above Nature, trying to control and govern it. Humans have broken their bond with Mother Nature, and re-constructed their relationship by applying modern perceptions and technologies. The "scars" and "wrinkles" of Nature created beneath Shang Yang's hand – the rough lines, unexpected forms and panes, unaccountable data and marks, modern sayings and slang, and improperly connected symbols – have recorded the ambition, grief and cruelty of an iron-and-steel era. Nature is suffering – anguishing under a planned project as described in the above lines and signs. Shang Yang uses the "Dong Qichang Project" to imply a dangerous fact: that Nature is included in humans' analytical project to be exploited. Mind you, Dong Qichang from the Ming dynasty lived during an anti-planning period, while his works presented a statement of Nature before it was entrapped by human action.

When did these projects toward Nature begin; and how? The "Dong Qichang Project-2" has revealed the transformation. Shang Yang has juxtaposed Shanshui (lit. mountains and waters) of various forms and styles from different times – an imitation of Mi Yuanhui's Shanshui, an imitation of Ni Zan's Shanshui, and Shanshui of the internet age. Thus, we see the transformation of Nature in the mindset of humans which follows a historical progression, integrating the concept of history and time back into Nature. Contrary to the common concept that defines Nature as being immune to history and culture, Shang Yang believes that Nature has its own history and culture. Nature is not isolated or objective, but with conflicts and competition, oppression and resistance occurring all the time. These reasons signify the differences of the three types of Nature presented in the "Dong Qichang Project-2" – each pertaining not only to the style of expression, but also to the lapse of time. From this point of view, Shang Yang has eliminated the classical contradiction between Nature and culture.

In the "Dong Qichang Project", Shang Yang has placed two to three different natural features side by side to compose a central space with visible fractures. In terms of the form, it is completely integral, constituting a panorama of Nature; however, each section possesses a sensually unique texture and composition. Therefore, we find pairings of contradictory heterogeneities existing in the same space, arousing dramatic conflicts – the original Nature and the destroyed one; the poetic and the projected; the self-contained and the artificial; the artistic and the mechanical; the air-brushed and the hand-

painted. From this viewpoint, Shang Yang has painted the huge gap generated over time between the two halves of a contradiction, rather than composing them as a whole. History has disconnected the context of Nature; and Shang Yang has cut off Nature's artistic reproduction, and when a style of Nature vanishes, the corresponding artistic style, and even a life style will also surely end.

This demands the focus of Shang Yang – to convey the change of the interdependent aspects of Nature, life and art; as he believes that these three aspects are closely associated with each other in a cycle: life shapes Nature, Nature shapes art, and art shapes life; and vice versa. However, the integration of a classical Nature, life and art is collapsing today. All of them change their semantic meanings, cut out their ties and set against each other: life is against Nature, Nature is against art, and art is against life. The opposition and breaking of these connections have filled Shang Yang with grief and burden. He feels it is arduous to adapt to the change, which results in his paintings filled with seriousness and heaviness. Art for him is not for entertainment or cynics; not even for aesthetic consuming. He is writing an art biography, grieved and discouraged not only by artistic styles, but also for the intellect and culture. His intended drift away from the prevailing painting methods is a way of instilling an intellectual critical tradition into the consumer-dominated system of contemporary painting.