

Preface to Zeng Hao Solo Exhibition

By Weng Ling

I started to host an interview program “Arts China”, an onerous job that will last a year, from the beginning of 2010. I was surprised, in a few hours of interview with every artist, by the dear energy and creativity of arts. In the past few years I have paid few visits to the studios of artists, as the market operation has reduced the production of inspiring works of contemporary art and my own focus has mostly turned to cross-disciplinary exchange and cooperation. Now, in the interviews with the artists in their studios, I am richly rewarded not only with an understanding of the artist’s production and growth of their inner mind, but also with the self-examination of the artists against the rapid growth of art market. I am thrilled by the energy piled up for their new productions. A new sort of energy is brewing, and in the heart of this energy is a calm observation and meditation that deeply moves me.

For a long time it has been a luxury to “be emotionally moved”. The grief in our heart seems to regain its power in the occasions of natural disasters these years. Again the soul burns within the cold body that has long been confined by materialism and lust for power. With these calamities, the Creator has aroused in us another intellectual gift, that is, self-examination: the whole world begins to examine itself! China, now experiencing crazy primitive accumulation of capital, as all the existing major nations ever did, is at the same time trapped in various social conflicts as a result of fast, premature development. That is the context in which the contemporary Chinese art prosper. Nevertheless, as you see, the contemporary art have now entered a dilemma. The works of yore that once enjoyed an exorbitant price have now become a source of aesthetic fatigue, losing all its avant-garde charms. Everybody is avid for the coming of the next renaissance. Still, however disgusting the present is, we have to show respect for history: we are doomed to be disappointed and to beget junk only, when we decide to treat culture heritage and innovations in the attitude of consumerism, a fast-food mentality.

Zeng Hao has been a constant concern in the artistic community. And we almost witness his every major turn, from the first personal exhibition in 1997 in the Central Academy of Fine Arts Gallery, to the 2006 exhibition titled “Looking Around” in Shanghai Gallery of Art, and the upcoming “Summer” that will be hosted by the Beijing Center for the Arts. Labeled by critics as one who “keeps a scrupulous connection with mainstream art”, Zeng Hao always moves me in an unexpected way, with his habitual “slow expressions”. In these new works, Zeng Hao continues the presentation of vacuity, adding to his works explanative titles that are even more “meaningless” than the titles of date and time given to his previous works. However, a prevalence of emotions is to be found which implies a pursuit

of meanings. Such a contradiction composes the very essence of the Chinese society including the community of contemporary art. As is the case in his former turns, Zeng Hao who never talks much is always sensitive enough to grasp the proper pulse of reality. It is estimable, especially in the current context, of his sensitivity penetrated in the production of these works. It should be known that lots of artists are at a loss in face of the new reality and environment.

There's no doubt that we live in a senseless age, an age without belief, without a sense of belonging, even without anything that can stir an emotion. Apparently, it resembles the confusion in the 90s. But, with a careful study, you find that the 90s differs from the current times in that in the 90s people have been long starved before they were suddenly offered a fresh, open world, while in the current age, when globalization is almost done, China and the whole world are both confused about their future development. It is a radical difference resembling that between monotony and emptiness, a difference between shallow senselessness and deep senselessness. For contemporary art in China, we have experienced the learning period; the Chinese artists now are challenged by the same art issues as the international artists. Now we have no model to refer to! What shall we do now?

Either to explore new things from within tradition, or to make use of the reality, we share a mutual ambition to establish and renew the contemporary humanistic spirit. Zeng Hao belongs to the latter. He remarked in his self-introduction that "Purposelessness, meaninglessness and ennui have played a very important part in our life. I seem to be more and more unaware of the meaning of art. Or rather, I am confused about the meaning of my work." On the other hand, he repeatedly expressed his desire "to be doing a constructive work", "painting something sensible and understandable". It seems to us that the accent on "meaninglessness" prompts a reflection upon the "meaning" of things. In fact, every age in history has its contemplation and pursuit of "meanings" in their own manner, such as meaning of life, meaning of art, etc. Even those heretical, senseless, subversive theories or behaviors represent a disguised expression of "reasonableness".

In brief, we should be happy that we are still able to be emotionally moved, to move others and to move ourselves. Both elites and the common people in our community have been aware of the importance of reformation and renaissance, and are steadfast in their silent work in support of the process. Culture is a cause that requires the test of time, reflection, accumulation and perseverance. So is art, even to a greater degree. We need no perplexing statements such as "what is the essence of art", "what is the purpose of art", etc. – they are important questions, yet the best answers have to be found in earnest practice, in the inner experience and honest perception by every individual. It is not

necessary that Zeng Hao and his new works will answer to all the questions above mentioned; still we hope that it will open a new window for contemplation. “I will always walk towards the horizon, even only to find nothing beyond it.”