

Return to a World of Selfhood

By Ye Ying

For Weng Xue Song, what the fate reveals to him seems to come from a contingent occurrence, some kind of call that prompts him to take his necessary road after he have idled away a couple of years.

The year of 2002 is the demarcation line in Weng's life. At the very beginning of that year, he remained occupied with a variety of social activities. An accidental visit to Xinhua Bookstore at Wangfujing Street, where he did not set foot for long, led him to a nationwide-used sketching model book, in which there were two pieces he drew a decade before. It seemed that Weng almost had forgotten the nearly ten years of his being a teacher of sketch, when, in his twenties, he often sketched alone from nature along the Yangtze River.

He has once been so obsessed with painting in his youth.

In 2002 when Weng just turned forty, he had not taken his brush for years. As a matter of fact, he had been associated, as was self-proclaimed, with society by means of his craftsmanship on his move from Chongqing to Shenzhen, and then to Beijing. It was in that year that some clues of fate that ever left a few marks in his youth resurfaced in his life, as if inviting him, a long wanderer, back to a world of his own – an invitation that could not be declined.

It was in that year that he shuffled off all invitations and took up his brush and colors with his hands that once dexterously made a living for him. At the beginning they were clumsy, but little by little, waken up together with his brushwork. It was in that year that he decided to take himself seriously so that, when he turned senile, he could calmly face up to the perseverance of his youth and the expectation of his old age.

Xue Song was addicted to painting since his childhood. The hot temperament specific to Sichuan natives is untraceable from his appearance but internalized as a kind of composedness. In his early twenties, he considered himself even as the weak before he otherwise composed himself in sketching and adventure. With a painting stand on his pack, he often walked along the Yangtze River all day long and his painting captured floating clouds and mountains on the riverbank, as if his mind was freed from worldly troubles at that time. On other occasions, he was often found, with his friends, climbing high peaks without any extra supportive means. That was evidently the result from adolescent stamina

and loneliness. The wild imagination in painting and the sense of conquest in rock climbing were all surging unconstrained even if there was no one ready to share them.

In those years, Xue Song was not admitted into Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts, a school associated with a series of names of well-known artists. But that failure otherwise sharpened his will. Reading in a book that in Russia Rapin Art College, 120 hours was required to draw the plaster statue of Gorky, he followed suit according to this requirement. In this almost reckless manner this peaceful young man was self-trained so that the traces it marked on his later works were still observable.

In 1980s' Chongqing, the great honor for youths in love for art was to be selected to national exhibitions of fine arts. Xue Song was more excited on being selected to military art exhibition in 1986 than on the first of his personal art exhibitions held in Beijing 20 years later than that. In his office there was a couplet, "coolly defy temptations, willingly committed to arts", which was wrote by his bosom friend to imply his devotion to art.

Perhaps outdoor adventures had inspired him to walk out of his spiritual confinement. The social vicissitude in 1990s tempted him to go even further with so many obsessions in mind that he could not wait to pack in his brush and canvases.

In 1990s when all dreams were mixed up, many people had confused dreams with desires. In such a turmoil, this young man, occupied with a variety of social activities, was no longer the youth of art who claimed on the bank of the Yangtze River to live on his craftsmanship.

The life of the past seemed to be a dream. The floating clouds in Chongqing and various design contracts were all in the dream and in real existence, but they often slipped from his memory due to the too fast pace of life.

In this way, he has been led through several totally different phases of life. But now Xue Song is sitting in his studio in Chaoyang District, Beijing, with a sketch of rocks in front of him. If asked about when he entered upon painting rocks, he would suddenly dodge away by claiming what he drew was just how he felt about "flowing" rather than stones.

His life was shifted to another track in 2002, which was not planned but as if predestined. He often mentioned two words: dream and reality. Between reality and dream a stone might metamorphose

into clouds or air filling the space and the time to the full, which was not a dream but an existence created by his brush. He often felt that time was juxtaposed for rocks and clouds once pervading his youthful sketches were not some concrete existences any more but interfused, recycled in his memory and imagination to resolve themselves into a void world, where he might follow his own will without necessary recourse to external justifications or youthful brute force.

Back to his own world, the youthful brute force of his ebbed away but the internal composedness remained as his peculiar air, which settled one down and created an internal world he could not feel during the first half of his life. This world was full, full enough to overflow with nameless romance.

He claimed, "What I draw is not mountains or stones, nor concrete nature. What I draw is flowing thoughts and nature in my mind".

When he returned to painting in 2002, he probably might not predict this unexpected discovery. After wandering for years outside Chongqing, his return to painting led to an internal world never described before. In this world the mountain might be a mountain, or might not be a mountain. Abandoning his rationality and reason to his thought and brush, he sauntered in a dream of black, white and grey.

Going through the naïve phase of life, what he needs now is not some kind of certification or conception, but a sense of freedom and self-realization. A man living on his craftsmanship should drop the living requirements to the lowest, but when so did he; he tastes what a poetic life is.

That poetic life is something elusive to its searchers, but ready to occur as fate happens to be.

He also faintly feels that there are more than dream and romance in the internal world and there is some attraction that cannot be fathomed out. When he was young, he loved to explore the karst caves in Sichuan basin. Poking a long bamboo pole down in a cave and sliding down along it, he was often excited in the pitch darkness and loneliness by the thunder of water.

Now, since he has chosen a lonely road, he has to resign himself without any hesitation to his fate.