

Words before the Opening of the 2nd “Shan Shui” Exhibition

by Weng Ling

At this time last year, I was working with a group of friends, although from different disciplines but drawn together by similar interests, to establish the “Shan Shui” as a “green” art platform. The first “Shan Shui” project, titled “Nature on the Horizon of Art”, combined a contemporary art exhibition with a series of symposiums and events, and marked a joint effort by professionals and practitioners from different fields/industries/social sectors (e.g. environmental protection, the intellectual community, governments, businesses, NGOs, architecture and design, as well as performing arts, etc.). It was a splendid time which brought to light intensive communication, meditation and collaboration on basis of our common beliefs; and it was also an unforgettable time in terms of my professional life as a curator.

The past year has brought about much complication and uncertainty, and many notable events including: the intensifying financial crisis; the World Expo in Shanghai; China becoming the world’s second largest economy; the Large Hadron Collider experiment making new breakthroughs; natural disasters occurring one after another; social and environmental problems... and, “environmental protection” continues to be the world’s new buzzword.

We must admit, although regretfully, that “environmental protection” has become the subject of collaboration and competition in the world’s politics and economy; and also another domain for pushing forward particular ideologies. Often times, given the considerable power and interest disputes surrounding the subject, my colleagues and I have to stop “doing something practical” and look back at the original point - obtained from discussions among like - minded souls, especially with Lu Zhi and Lu Minjie - that is our deep love for nature and wild life, concerns for our surroundings and warm, supportive feelings. However, the world is changing, and this original point, even though it sounds pure and even a little bit naïve, is something so strong and firm that we can always refer to it for power and love against uproar and desolation.

“H₂O”, the subject of the second “Shan Shui” exhibition, coincides with the appeal for reviewing the unchanged when faced with changes. Compared with last year’s exhibition which concentrated on external subjects such as species diversity, global climate change, environmental politics and green industry chain etc., “H₂O” looks toward the internal, much like a mirror to ourselves. Giving birth to both humanity and the earth, it bridges the inside and outside of humanity in a mysterious

and profound way. As one of my favorite Italian writers Italo Calvino wrote: "The sea where living creatures were at one time immersed is now enclosed within their bodies." - I know that one of the artworks exhibited this time was also inspired by his words. Regarding the artworks presented in "Shan Shui 2010: H2O", from video installations from prestigious Chinese artists Wang Gongxin and Song Dong, American pioneering video artist Bill Viola and Brazilian-German female artist Janaina Tschäpe, to ten documentaries made by "grassroots artists" and presented by the Shan Shui Conservation Center, though they are different in terms of their perspectives and methods, the artists all use water as a means for reaching "humanity".

Will we have a better world? What can art do for our times? The answer varies as our views towards the future differ. No matter whether they are optimists or pessimists, the people coming together to the platform of "Shan Shui" all engaged in serious thinking and practice. There is at least one good sign - a great many friends living abroad, like the inviting curator Mr. Christopher Philips (who is the chief curator at the International Center of Photography at New York), Ms. Sally Wu who made important contribution to the success of the exhibition, as well as our participating foreign artists, have already understood and adopted the term "Shan Shui" instead of its English paraphrase as "landscape" or "mountains and water". This is our aspiration for initiating "Shan Shui" - to bridge the east and west, to break through boundaries of different industries and disciplines, and bring together power, love and the beauty of the arts.