

LI SHURUI
LSR • TENDEREST AFFECTION

This is the first time you are showing a video work. Has it influenced the way you have created the exhibition?

Yes, for me it is a new medium to be getting into, and I enjoyed considering its dynamic inside the space. It will be fairly immersive and fill up the space with sound as well, occupying its own room, and I think there will be a good balance with the other spaces. It adds a dimension to the exhibition that I have not had in my previous solo shows.

The movie seem to deal with an intimate part of your life, you and your partner are the main actors. How does it relate to your paintings? In the movie, we see your paintings in different scenes. Have they a narrative effect or are they part of your intimate environment?

My partner and I are both so deeply dedicated to our ocean swims that they cannot be easily separated from other aspects of life. The sum of your experiences and all that makes your being what it is determines your aesthetics as well. Your aesthetics are, of course, what determine how and what you paint (unless you are playing the kind of game in which you deliberately resist your aesthetics).

My paintings in this film have a narrative effect perhaps, but more accurately they are on the same plane as the scenery I chose to shoot, or the flowers and furniture we placed, or our clothing.

However, for us, the environment is also narrative - if narration is the creation or revelation of a world, and not just a list of actions that happen in a setting. That leads to the question of what is a story - what is content, or what are the different types of content in a medium, and are those categories useful for being in a state of mind conducive to experiencing a work. And of course this also leads to the question of content and form, and the possible divisions of these things that are part of analyses that have various functions in the realm of «art» or «things for sale» or «things situated so that they may transmit information.» In the end these are talking points for a book club, but not really significant in the naked process of birthing a ghost in the forest.

Different traditions and sources of painting overlap in the show. Could you describe them and tell us how they influence each other in your work?

The most direct explanation for the appearance of traditional Chinese visual art together with «Op art» in my exhibition is that both of these languages or aesthetic systems happened to come into my life. I knew nothing about visual art, but they have appealed to me, or contained logics that I understood, or felt...the Soviet propagation of Western realism has had a significant influence on art education in China. Western realism was not something I was good at. I was unfamiliar with developments in modern culture...but i felt they were putting too much emphasis on very restricted notions of form and narration. When i finished my degree at the art conservatory I did not have the resources to do installations, so I relied on the field of painting for its comparative convenience.

I wanted to paint the depth and texture of light and space, a purpose which put me into the category of so-called «abstract» art, and naturally within that category I have been put into perhaps another more specific category... these labels ultimately help you participate in the world of art as a vocation, or dialogue, and can help lead to certain people noticing you, but of course they don't necessarily have anything to do with the logic of your work or its process. I live in China – the aesthetic tradition here is pervasive, and being immersed in painting made me more sensitive to the language of vision every day, which made me just absorb all sorts of stimuli and produce these things. More in-depth examination into certain phenomena can reveal that apparently unrelated aesthetic systems or languages are connected at different points in their development or evolution...for example, in Qing Dynasty Imperial decorations sometimes you see a spherical image that greatly resembles the language of contemporary western «abstract» art, and it is encircled by another extremely intricate design. Taking different elements from a variety of histories and placing them into new language environments, or narratives, or ideological systems, alters their significance. So a part of my work is finding ways in which these elements can be reassembled into new statements, or perhaps new ways of seeing things.

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Your work has a very physical impact. Your paintings are very optic and you use sex in your movie. Is it your wish to touch each viewer directly and individually or are you also interested in describing a more general history? Can the effect be generalized?

To touch individuals I believe is also inevitably to take part in a more general dialogue that has a long history and includes voices from many places. But, if we are talking about conscious intention - the paintings and my film all come from something that for me is very physical, probably before it is intellectual -- aesthetics for me are something determined by my heart, and body, and mind. The floating spirit that tells me something looks good or not does that through my feelings, and the logical analysis comes afterward. If people resonate with something I make, I think it is more likely they are also resonating at that «physical» level. The senses are responsible for so much of our reality. Included how we intellectualize. So in that respect, what happens is essentially that the works are affecting people as individuals, and perhaps if enough people are affected deeply enough, or affected in a certain way, that resonance becomes significant enough to be interpreted as a statement in that dialogue regarding some general history - the history of some aspect of civilization, or of consciousness, or of energy, or something deeper and beyond our puny intellectual capacity to even have a word for it yet.

With the movie, it almost seem as if your life and your couple are your studio. Would you agree?

Yes that is in part true but perhaps you can't tell the story of a whole life in 24 minutes on a screen. There are certainly many other important aspects to my life that are not in here, like my son, and many of my close friends and family. But the narrative of the movie focuses on a central part of my life, especially since for me, like for a lot of artists, including my partner, life revolves around the work of living, and that is more a holistic, spirit-is-material endeavor, not just a vocation, but something that also includes my career. So I guess «studio» should be replaced by «shrine» or «temple,» and perhaps my works are prayers, or the outcomes of my rituals, or just flowers I pick from the garden of this collective brain hahaha.

Interview with Li Shurui, Paris, 2018.

Li Shurui is born in 1981 in Chongqing, China. She Lives and works in Beijing.