<Title> “The Artists Talk Back”

<Introduction> The students in Professor Travis Jeppesen’s Curatorial Writing and Thinking class spent the past semester learning to write about contemporary art. For an assignment towards the end of the semester, we decided to speak to some artists in an interview project […]

“I made an interview with him because we had a similar conversation last semester, and I wanted to talk about calligraphic creation,” said Yi Ma. “He believes that calligraphy reveals the beauty of power. And he thinks that the highest level of Chinese calligraphy is located in improvisation, and that it belongs to time and space.”

Just as Zhou Bin’s calligraphy works are the creation of “characters,” and have the meaning of Chinese traditional culture, Xi’ Guanlei’s public project “I is Another” also uses “characters” (Oracle bone transcriptions) as the creative theme to translate culture. Xi is an artist who is also deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, and sees that as one of the most important sources of inspiration for his work. In addition, Xi’s creative inspiration for the series of self-made adobe series also comes from the earliest Chinese poetry collection, *The Book of Songs.* The words in the *Book of Songs* were misappropriated as the title of his work. He calls his work "Land Art" rather than installations or sculptures. He likes to create in outdoor spaces, especially on the ground. Many times, his works are created just for nature, that is how he communicates with nature. He adores creating work with clay because that is a part of the earth and that can be related to other natural elements. He always thinks of the soil as alive.

The persistent spiritual communication between Xi and nature is very moving. He made artistic creation based on the extremely rational theoretical basis of philosophy. At the same time, he was cautious about the involvement of business and the audience, refusing any exhibition of the work.

“For me, the objective to make art is to communicate with nature, and to respond to the rhythm of it, via contemplation.”

Just like Xi Guanlei, Cheng Yu's works lies in his respect for nature and poetic images and elements. First, Yuqin Wang and Mengqi Zheng contacted several other film directors, some of them agreed but didn't reply to them in time. Cheng Yu did. He is a 24-year-old graduate student in the directing department of Beijing Film Academy. Although his answer were very short, he replied to the students in a timely manner. Secondly, after discussion, our group was more interested in directors of literary films, and felt that their works were more in line with the requirements of art, so we chose directors of literary films. As we did not have a video conversation with him, we do not know his appearance. But through his WeChat Moments we can perceive that he is a freedom-loving, life-honoring and kind person.

Long shot, the sound of the film and the local customs of Xinjiang. This kind of vast and vivid film atmosphere attracted us. In the subsequent interview, he himself admitted, “The main difficulty of this film is to create in an unfamiliar territory, but this is also very interesting.” “Some of them (environmental sound in movies) are collected locally, and there are also parts of anthropomorphic sound, all of which have been artificially designed. The nature of the film is different from the real nature.” This made us have a deeper understanding of the praise of environmental sound in the film at the beginning. His films are also free, which is very similar to his personal character.

Xu Hanyin similarly has a rebellious streak to her persona. Her creation involves painting, photography and performance art. This series of artistic practice is based on the context of academic art. But like most young artists under the academy system, her artistic trajectory rejects conventions and is full of unknowns, and always persist in the search for self. Xu Hanyin's works are usually grotesque and novel, but they can strongly convey people's primitive emotions. She and ICCI student Stephanie Chen went through the art examination together. Although they ended up going in different directions——Chen pays more attention to art theory, and Xu always insists on creating – they often find themselves exploring in the same context.

Recently Xu moved from a relatively open city Chengdu to the relatively conservative city of Wenzhou to continue her postgraduate study. But the stricter environment does not restrict her artistic creation, and her behavior is bolder. This is exemplified in the lighthouse's performance art. She breaks through the notions around by breaking through the limits of her body. And this behavior itself is between extreme thinking and emotional feelings. In the interview conducted with Chen and her classmates Andy Xue and Grace Yan, the focus was on Xu Hanyin's persistence and the transformation of artistic practice in the context of the new academy.

Xu Hanyin shares some similarities with Yan Xinyue. Firstly, both of them experiences the environment transitions between the small town and the big city, and this transitions greatly changes their artistic style. For Xu, her creation becomes much aggressive after she came to a relatively conservative environment. While for Yan, she turns her sight to the big cities. Besides, just like Xu, Yan also focuses on observing and displaying the subtle emotions of people. Xu chooses areas that touch herself, such as the subtle relationship between people and society. In Yan's dream-like work, the subject is mostly the busy, gloomy people or things in big cities. The painting may make people feel the emotion of jealousy, passion, and also a feeling that something is going to be lost.

Yan Xinyue is a young Chinese artist who currently lives and works in Shanghai. She graduated from Royal Academy of Fine Art Antwerp (Belgium) with a MFA in painting in 2018. In her works, under the artist's careful arrangement, we can often find some surprising details. That’s very interesting so Grace Lian interviewed her. Such as her latest work, she hid a word in her piece that I didn't even notice until she reminded me of it. She said: I hope that people who own it in the future will suddenly find out one day that there seems a word in this painting, like a secret.

Says Grace Lian, “Yan Xinyue continuously dedicates her creativity to exploring painting through in-depth investigations of a scope of different themes. Through her treatment of colors, lines, light, and space, she invites viewers to revisit moments from life. Released from the weight and tedium of everyday reality, the viewer empathizes with the artist by experiencing her visions in the familiar context of the city. Just like her work describing commuters, everyone wears fake wings, which showed that they all had their own dreams, but their status is a yoke.”