

Cui Jie: Lines of Flight between Surface and Model

Yuan Jiawei |

✍ FEATURE



"Substance for a writer consists not merely of those realities he thinks he discovers; it consists even more of those realities which have been made available to him by the literature and idioms of his own day and by the images that still have vitality in the literature of the past. Stylistically, a writer can express his feeling about this substance either by imitation, if it sits well with him, or by parody, if it doesn't."¹

In the opening part of their book *Learning From Las Vegas* (1972), authors Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour quoted as above from Richard Poirier's appraisal of T. S. Elliot's use of image superposition, spatio-temporal intertwining and other means of expression in the seminal book *Wasteland* (1922). The quote was meant to encourage architects to adopt an inclusive, non-chip-on-the-shoulder attitude, so they could derive simulations of reality from the existing landscape and reconstruct reality by means of representation. Amid a wave of postmodernism, this full-fledged approach of developing and utilizing the value-in-exchange of symbols caused a breach in creative barriers between art and architecture, and cast light on the way in which modernism captured pure form. In particular reference to urban construction and development, the interchangeability of the identity of artist and architect is instrumental in pushing the notion of space towards a dimension verging on democracy. In this vein, Cui Jie, an artist who came of age in the 1980s and 90s, shows a keen grasp on the various architectural patterns that have had a profound effect on the rapid renewal and expansion process of Chinese cities, and is adept at selectively harking back to these precedents of modernization in her painting and sculptural practice, thus triggering a momentary sense of the immediate future. The architect's psyche reflected in her work goes beyond a mere collage-like schematization of architectural elements. Instead, her works are predicated on a technical enthusiasm for the city's "autonomous surface" (hereafter referred to as the "epidermis") and a pattern recognition of geographical misplacement or anachorism.



Cui Jie, *Building of Cranes*, 2014

Oil on canvas, 150 × 110 cm



Overpass at Shuangjing, 2014
Oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm

The "autonomous epidermis" of the city refers to Cui Jie's use of the angle of façade design as entry-point into a production of architecture devoid of depth perception. She fully unleashes the mediating significance of her compositions, and couples it back to painting itself. She relies on modes of expression involving the Deleuzian "generative diagram," founded on the ideas of Peter Eisenman. By stacking together fragments of the cityscape such as streets, squares, basements and pedestrian overpasses, she demonstrates and makes plain the architectural process of an "incident unfolding." The countless geometric surfaces and lines passing through her compositions cause a melding of the smooth and grainy forces at work in the picture. Previously, China has drawn on a plethora of prototypes for the basic realization of its modernization: German Bauhaus, Russian Constructivism, Stalinist architecture, the Japanese Metabolism school, the International Style spearheaded by Le Corbusier, etc. By culling eclectically from these influences, the artist condenses these prototypes into a "structure of feeling"² that documents the evolution of spatial forms and the history of differentiation. More concretely, from 2013 to 2014, this "structure of feeling" emerged in her works as her envisaging of the symbiotic relationship between architecture and sculpture (in particular, public or municipally ordained sculptures). The sculptural qualities of architecture and the architectural qualities of sculpture are accentuated in one and the same canvas. In *Building of Cranes* and *Pigeon's House*, birdlike shapes are depicted in pairs, encircling a typical residential building in a configuration hinting at the notion of habitat, a congealed and ardent sense of belonging, a remnant subconscious of the era of collectivism. The piece *Worker Cultural Palace in Dongguan* shows a public place once used to promote public life during that same era. Embedded in the image are a magnified, spherical celestial body and a circular orbit pattern, both of which owe their social educational importance to the fact that science and technology have always been symbolical of advanced productivity.



Worker Cultural Palace in Dongguan, 2014
Oil on canvas, 150 × 200 cm

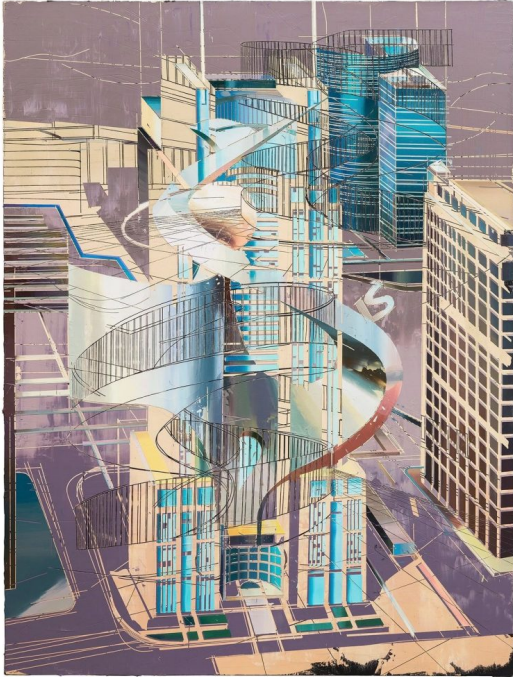
From 2015 to 2016, in preparation for a sculpture commissioned by CASS Sculpture Foundation, in an unprecedented feat, the artist agreed to the foundation's wish of producing and 3D-printing a data model for one of her two-dimensional works juxtaposing sculpture and architecture. Unlike the final physical sculpture, which sported much larger dimensions, this scale model served as a research reference from which to glean more know-how on the sculpting process, while computation errors in the data conversion process provided wiggle-room for imagination. Cui Jie lays bare the state of distortion occurring within this back and forth transfer between sculpture and architecture. Continued stripping down of the image inspired her to create a series of white sculptures, which helped add a sense of layering to the epidermis of this interplay between sculpture and architecture, i.e. the canvas itself.



Pigeon's House, 2016
Colored stainless steel and aluminum, 260 × 450 × 250 cm
View of "A Beautiful Disorder," CASS Sculpture Foundation, UK, 2016

Meanwhile, Cui Jie expanded her paintings' focal points to peripheral elements such as hotels, hospitals, airports, or infrastructure that played a pivotal role in China's reform and opening-up policy, such as *People's Commune Dining Hall*, a structure which grafts together the international window shapes typical of the country's transitional period with the majestic and robust, populist forms of an earlier past. Rather than being geographically defined, the

localities depicted in her works are essential nodes that act as vectors for globalized network flows, eventually leading Chinese cities towards a homogeneous, generic state. Seeing how external capital attraction lies at the root of urban construction and development, the commercial structures that go hand in hand with this influx of capital occupy the center of every major city, and dictate the everyday work routines of the ordinary middle class. In her work *Shanghai Bank Tower*—the title of which refers to a building erected under the guidance of the Kenzō Tange Associates—Cui Jie highlights the exterior wall decorations of this neutral looking financial office block and its surrounding buildings: glistening blue glass panes and a number of suspended spiraling staircases intersecting with S-shaped blocks. To a certain extent, the work pays tribute to the concept of “symbiosis” espoused by Japanese post-war architects. Biology-inspired tropes of this sort are a common sight in Cui Jie’s creations, as if to resist the mechanical principles and industrial processes of our modern age. Her works hypothesize on the ambivalence of either sublimating within reality or escaping it, while dynamically flowing lines are put to use as optimal tools for severing the suppressive constraints imposed on individuals—especially middle class ones—by cities’ existing regulations and rigid networks.



Shanghai Bank Tower, 2017
Oil on canvas, 160 × 110 cm



View of “To Make a Good Chair,” Antenna Space, Shanghai, 2019

Deleuze formulated the following: “One is no more than a line, like an arrow crossing the void. [...] One has become like everybody. [...] One has entered becomings – animal, becomings – molecular, and finally becomings – imperceptible.”³ Cui Jie has, in effect, shown proof of her inherently revolutionary mentality with regards to precise control over formal language. By closely following those “lines of flight”⁴ referred to by Deleuze, and thus “becoming” along different pathways, she drives centralized social organization structures—which are represented through architecture—towards a point of criticality. Nomadic thoughts incited by lust assist her in moving back and forth between the individual and the collective subject, thus enabling her to find a connection with her environment and with others.



Contessa2II, 2019

Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 220 × 180 cm

Courtesy Antenna Space

In Cui Jie's most recent work, this connection appears as a more downright humanistic inclination, as she shifts her observation to the conjugal relation between the human body and the singular artifice most accommodating to its dimensions: the chair. An across-the-board look at the history of architecture in the 20th century led Cui Jie to become more mindful of chairs created by architects who took on the role of designers throughout the modernist movement. Apt examples of this are the Red and Blue Chair designed by Gerrit Rietveld and Marcel Bruer's Wassily Chair. These chairs were generally emblematic of their makers' architectural styles, and were instrumental in molding style into taste by virtue of being embedded in all aspects of daily life, yet without necessarily being a perfect fit for the human body itself. Conversely, the now ubiquitous ergonomic chairs might well be feats of architectural subjects that truly override the individual. They don't so much provide support for the average white-collar worker to work and perform their labor more efficiently, as endorse and help uphold the moral image of the middle class. The works showcased in Cui Jie's 2018 solo exhibition "Maison Fueter" and the 2019 solo exhibition "To Make a Good Chair" all bore relation to this theme. Not only did the works in these shows conspire with the rooms of the exhibition venue itself, but Cui Jie's perspective also began to drift in and out of architecture: this went beyond her displaying the bearing of a *flâneur*, but also related back to a consideration of the individual within the office environment furnished with ergonomic chairs, desks and half-open cubicles. Moreover, her addition of surface textures using sprayed-on specks and moiré patterns confers on the entire canvas an appearance of a glass curtain wall or digital screen, which interacts intertextually with the digital screen on the canvas facing an ergonomic chair, all of which echo the "screenification" of modern life. It is on this basis that Cui Jie attempts to capture the bustling and chaotic background noises of fractious cityscapes, as well as the coloring of three-dimensional architectural shapes by various systems of lighting. This temporal way of documenting the "economic outer shell" of our society, has helped bring to light the "formal essence" of a host of spatio-cultural issues. (Translated by Sid Gulink)



Steel Pulling Glass Curtain Wall, 2019

Acrylic and spray paint on canvas, 220 × 180 cm

Courtesy Antenna Space

1. Richard Poirier, "T.S. Eliot and the Literature of Waste," *The New Republic* (May 20, 1967) p.21.

2. The notion "structure of feeling" was first put forward by Raymond Williams in the 1954 book he co-authored with documentary director Michael Orrom, titled *Preface to Film*. Later on, it was further expanded and developed in the book *The Long Revolution* (published in 1961) and the 1977 publication *Marxism and Literature*. This notion refers to an epitomized manifestation of meaning and value experienced by a generation of people in

their daily lives. Having been repeatedly passed on and duplicated, this mode of thought clearly reflects the impact social and historical contexts have on individual experience, to the point of being inseparable from larger, complex relations of ethnicity and local culture that are being formed.

3. Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, pp. 199-200.
4. Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, new edition. Paris: Flammarion, 1996. pp 49.

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ABOUT

LEAP is the international art magazine of contemporary China. Published twice a year in Chinese and English, it presents a winning mix of contemporary art coverage and cultural commentary from the cutting edge of the Chinese art scene. It is a crucial platform that fosters critical and radical discourse on contemporary art and culture in China.

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罗伯特·文丘里（Robert Venturi）、丹妮丝·斯科特·布朗（Denise Scott Brown）与史蒂文·艾泽努尔（Steven Izenour）在《向拉斯维加斯学习》（1972年）的第一篇开场如此引用了理查德·波伊尔（Richard Poirier）对T·S·艾略特在《荒原》（1922年）中使用意象叠加、时空交错等表现手段的一句评价，以此鼓励建筑师亦可采取一种宽容的态度，从现有景观中获得对真实的模拟、凭借再现重塑真实。这种将符号的交换价值彻底开发并加以利用的做法在后现代主义浪潮中极大地打通了艺术与建筑之间的创作壁垒，且与现代主义对纯粹形式的捕捉有所映射。尤其针对城市建设与发展的话题，艺术家与建筑师的身份互动更是把空间的概念推向了一个趋于民主的维度。在这个脉络中，成长于八零、九零年代的艺术家庄洁敏感地把握到对中国城市加速更新与扩张进程产生了深刻影响的各类建筑式样，并深谙如何在自己的绘画与雕塑实践中对这些现代化先例进行选择性的回归，从而触发即刻的近未来体验。她的工作所反映的建筑师思维并不单纯在于对建筑元素的拼贴式规划，而是对表皮自治的技术热情以及对地方错置的模型认知。



崔洁，《仙鹤的房子#1》，2014年
布面油画，150 × 110厘米



《双井桥的天桥》，2014年
布面油画，150 × 200厘米

首先，表皮自治是指崔洁从立面设计的角度切入无深度感的建筑生产，充分释放其构图的媒介意义并将它反馈到绘画本身。借用源于德勒兹哲学的埃森曼（Peter Eisenman）式生成性图解（generative diagram）的表达，她把街道、广场、地库、天桥等风景片段积累起来以演示并解释建筑作为一个事件被展开的过程。大量穿透内部的几何块面、线条致使画面混杂着光滑与纹理的力量，中国为基本实现现代化而曾借用的诸多原型——德国包豪斯风格、俄罗斯构成主

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中文

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义与斯大林式、日本新陈代谢派、柯布西耶之后的国际风格等——在她的折衷处理下浓缩成一种记录着空间形态进化与分化历史的“感觉结构”（structure of feeling）²。这种“感觉结构”具体呈现为她从2013年/14年开始对建筑和雕塑（特别是公共或市政雕塑）之间共生关系的揣摩，建筑的雕塑性与雕塑的建筑性在同一画面中被强调。以《仙鹤的房子》与《鸽子的房子》为例，这两种成对出现的动物造型对典型住房的环抱之势暗示着“栖息”——一种凝结的、稳固的归属感，来自集体主义时代的潜意识。而《东莞工人文化宫》涉及了在同时代曾为促进大众生活的一类公共场所，放大后的球形天体与环形轨道嵌入其中，因为象征先进生产力的科学技术也是社会教育中的重要科目。

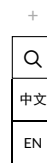


《东莞工人文化宫》，2014年
布面油画，150 × 200厘米



《鸽子的房子》，2016年
彩色不锈钢与铝，260 × 450 × 250厘米
“无序之美”英国卡斯雕塑基金会展览现场，2016年

2015年/16年，崔洁在准备英国卡斯雕塑基金会的委任作品时应其要求，首次为自己的这类平面的“雕塑－建筑”制作数据模型并进行3D打印。与最终更大尺度的实体雕塑有所区别，比例模型作为研究方法能够生成更多过程性知识，而数据转换所导致的计算错误提供了更多想象的条件。崔洁深入挖掘绘画与雕塑在如此往来传递中的失真状态，反复的图像演绎刺激出了她的白色雕塑系列，也增加了“雕塑－建筑”之表皮也就是画面本身的层次效果。在此际中，她把关注点扩大至涉外酒店、医院、机场等或许对改革开放起到关键作用的基础建设，如《人民公社大酒店》将转型期中的国际窗口形象与过去雄伟健壮的群众形象嫁接到一起。这些地方无地方性，却是促进全球化网络流通的必要节点，甚至将中国城市都引向均质的“平庸”（generic）之境。对外部资本的吸纳是城市建设与发展的根本，与之配套的商业建筑占据着各大城市的中心，统治着普通中产阶级每天按部就班的工作。在《上海银行大厦》中，崔洁着重以刻画了这栋由丹下健三都市建筑设计研究所担当指导的综合性金融办公大楼及其附近大楼的外墙装饰——闪亮的蓝色玻璃，并布置了若干悬浮的、螺旋上升的楼梯以及S型体块与之交叉，某种程度上是对日本战后建筑提出的共生概念发起致敬。为反抗近代机械原理与工业流程一般，诸如此类的生物学隐喻在她的创作中屡见不鲜，不但假设出一种或在真实中“升华”或从真实中“逃逸”的矛盾情绪，且流动的“线”被应用为最佳工具，以打破城市既定规划与其严密网络对个体、尤其是中产阶级个体的压制性束缚。



《上海银行大厦》，2017年
布面油画，160 × 110厘米



《Contessa2II 椅 2》，2019年
布面丙烯、喷绘，220 × 180厘米
Courtesy Antenna Space

诚如德勒兹的描述：“我们自身只是一条抽象的线，就像是一支穿越空间的箭……我们像所有的人那样进行生成……我们进入到生成-动物之中，进入到生成-分子之中，最终进入到生成-难以知觉之中……”³ 崔洁对形式语言的精准控制实际上体现了她潜在的革命心理。通过紧紧跟随那些“逃逸线”（lines of flights）⁴ 并生成不同轨迹，她将以建筑为代表的中心化社会组织结构推向临界，由欲望引起的游牧思想帮助她在个体和集体主体间来回移动，从而寻求到与环境、与他者的联接。这种联接在她最近的创作中显示为一种更彻底的人本主义倾向，她观察到人体和与其尺度最为匹配的单体建筑——椅子——的共振关系。纵观二十世纪建筑史，崔洁认识到在现代主义运动中扮演设计师的建筑师们的椅子——如里特维尔德（Gerrit Rietveld）的红蓝扶手椅与布鲁尔（Marcel Bruer）的瓦西里椅——通常是其建筑理念的标志，用于将风格打造成品味以植入日常生活的方方面面，但未必是作为最贴合人体本身的存在。而如今随处可见的人体工学椅或许是真正凌驾于个体之上的“主体”建筑，与其说是为一般白领更有效率的工作与劳动给予支撑，不如说是为中产阶级道德形象做出背书并帮助他们维持这一形象。她在2018年个展“富埃特教授的别墅”以及2019年个展“造一把好椅子”中展示的大量作品与这一题目有关，不仅和现场居室空间达成同谋，并且崔洁的视角在间开始游离于建筑内外，不限于自身漫游者姿态的表达，也反馈到人体工学椅所在的办公室环境——写字台、半开放的隔间等等设备——对个体的观照。另外，因加入了点喷、摩尔纹等表面图像肌理，整体画面拥有了类似玻璃幕墙或电子屏幕外观，而与画面中朝向人体工学椅的电子屏幕发生互文，回应当代生活的“屏幕化”趋势。在此基础上，崔洁还尝试攫取繁忙、喧嚣、嘈杂的城市背景音以及不同照明系统对建筑立面造型的渲染。这种对社会“经济外壳”的时间性记录将揭露出更多空间文化问题的“形式本质”。



《刚拉索玻璃幕墙》，2019年
布面丙烯、喷绘，150 × 200厘米
Courtesy Antenna Space



“崔洁：造一把好椅子”展览现场，天线空间，2019年

1. Richard Poirier, "T.S. Eliot and the Literature of Waste," The New Republic (May 20, 1967) p.21.
2. “感觉结构” (structure of feeling) 的概念由雷蒙·威廉姆斯 (Raymond Williams) 于1954年在与纪录片导演迈克尔·奥洛姆 (Michael Orrom) 合著的《电影序言》中提出，后来于1961年发表的《漫长的革命》 (The Long Revolution) 和1977年的《马克思主义与文学》 (Marxism and Literature) 中得以不断延伸和发展，主要是指一代人在日常生活中所体验到的意义与价值的集中体现，而这种思考方式在继承和复制中清晰地反映着社会及历史脉络对个体经验的冲击，甚至与民族、地方文化等整体复杂关系的形成不可分离。
3. 德勒兹 (Gilles Deleuze)、伽塔利 (Félix Guattari) 著，姜宇辉译，《资本主义与精神分裂（卷二）：千高原》，上海：上海书店出版社，2012年。第279页。
4. 在德勒兹看来，“逃逸线”具有相当积极的意义：“逃逸正是在生产真实，创造生命，获得武器。”详见Gilles Deleuze with Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, new edition. Paris: Flammarion, 1996. pp 49.

专题



关于

《艺术界》，英文名LEAP，2010年创立于北京，是现存唯一一本国际发行的中英双语当代艺术刊物。LEAP关注中国当代艺术以及更为广泛的文化议题，同时将艺术批评与文化研究的语境与国际艺术圈和学术领域相链接，打开话语维度——既敏感于当下的文化趣味，又对其进行反思，是当代艺术与文化的批判性话语在中国重要的发声阵地。

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