

周思维：审美研究

文 | 鲍 栋

与同代的很多艺术家一样，周思维的艺术实践也开始于对学院美术，尤其是对现实主义美术的主动背离。中国的现实主义美术通常有两重身份，一是作为一种美学价值与意识型态内容，被作为党派及政府支持和指导的文艺政策的基础，曾经具有唯一的合法性，它包括反映论、阶级论、典型论、“内容决定形式”等一系列的超越于各种艺术门类之上的美学准则。现实主义的第二重身份是在美术中实施这一美学政体的写实主义方法系统，以再现手法为基础，以人物题材为核心，以文学性、社会性的表达为目标等等。延伸到毛细血管的末端，这个方法系统还包括画几何体、画石膏像、画头像、画人体，最后画主题创作，总之就是中国各个美院的保守系科到现在还在教的东西。现实主义与写实主义这两层身份是连在一起的，实际上，两者本来就是一回事，英语中的Realism既是指现实主义也可以用来指写实主义。

在周思维开始读美院的时候，现实主义，尤其是社会主义化的现实主义已经很衰落了，写实主义虽然还是主流，但也已发生了蜕变，原来的目标不在了，于是写实主义的手段成了唯一的内容，所以，基础课程上教的全是写实方法，甚至只是一些写实技法，而用这些方法和技法去做什么，全凭学生们自己的造化了。在当代艺术潮流的影响下，大部分想成为职业艺术家的学生都在试图把自己掌握的某种写实技法和一些当代艺术思想结合起来。

事实上，中国当代艺术中的一个重要维度就是对学院美

术的再利用，尤其是在绘画领域，写实观念与方法被艺术家们个性化了之后又用在了不同的主题中，从70年代末的伤痕、乡土美术，到80年代末的“新生代”、“玩世现实主义”，再到新世纪的“图像式绘画”，都没有抛弃，反而是在利用写实主义的各种因素。另一方面，现实主义话语中的社会反映论和艺术工具论依然潜在地决定着大部分的当代艺术家和评论家，使得这些当代艺术作品都可以视为是现实主义大框架下的某种变体。周思维在其艺术实践的开端所面对的风气就是卡通风格的“图像式绘画”，在那几年，他就读的四川美术学院正是这类绘画的最为强势的地方。

周思维受到了这股“图像”潮流的影响，但他一开始就没有默认那种预设的现实主义框架，他最早的作品是复印现成图像再拓印到画布上，他使用图像，但不是使用图像的符号性，或者用当时那个更时兴的词“观念性”。最简要说，周思维并不对他作品中的图像含义负责，他的图像只是一种“图像存在”。在“图像存在”这个层面上，要强调的是，他和大部分画照片、画影像的绘画的关键区别是他并不是去再现性地描绘具体的“图像存在”，更没有试图去通过这种再现去再现“图像时代”，他的绘画本身就是图像的存在现场。因此，这一些绘画中的图像是自由的，它们之间是一种非叙事性蒙太奇的关系，同时它们也是物质的、媒介的，拓印这种版画式的技法强化着图像的物性痕迹，以及它们的剪影所构成的平面形状，换句话说，图像的所指性被压制到最低，而能指性被凸显。正是在这个意义上，周思维的艺术实践一开始就是既抛弃掉了现实主义，也最大程度上剔除着写实主义的，因为，他要面对的是另一种更难把握的“实”。

图像的“实”，更确切的说，是图的实，“像”的部分被尽量绕开。他逐渐明确地只选择非摄影性、无镜头感的图像，

它们大都是现成的、日常的图画与图形，比如海浪、风帆、菠萝、太阳等等样子的装饰性图样。这些图像由各种匿名的作者设计，被广泛而庸常地使用，早已剥离于其原初语境而成为了一种图像程式，一种并无特别意义的习惯用语，大部分时候只是用来补白。但对周思维来说，这些图形既没有视觉再现的能量，也没有语言表征的信息，它们几乎除了是“图”什么都不是，所以它们是极佳的可真正与绘画兼容、协作的图像，以进一步把握绘画的“实”。

绘画的“实”包括方方面面，整个现代绘画的历史都是在讨论何为绘画的本体，而所谓本体，即是“实”处。但周思维所关心的绘画本体——或者说，一种绘画的存在论——不是物化的和实证主义的，而是有机的、可感的，不是板上钉钉毋庸置疑的那种推论的结局，而是一个需要在反复推敲、如琢如磨中的显现过程。并且，这个过程无法在一个悬空的空白画布上展开，而得借助于某种已有的东西，比如一个常见的现成图像，或者凭借一种有具体来历的限定性，比如把颜料种类限制在儿童12色水彩笔的范围内。有了这些既定性，未定性才能够生长，因此，周思维朝向的是未定的复杂化，而不是那种现成的纯粹化。他一直没有走到抽象领域中去，或许正是因为今天的抽象已是一种不用再去争取的美学捷径了，和他一开始就逃离了学院写实主义那套广播体操一样。

当然，周思维的作品中不是没有再现的痕迹，除了各种图像原型之外，画面上也会偶尔出现光影、空间的暗示，但他始终在警惕和拒绝那种素描性的再现，偏执地拒绝使用黑色，尤其是白色，因为这两种颜料通常会牺牲色彩的纯度，在一些纸本作品中，他甚至只使用彩色打印墨水，以保证色彩“血统”的足够纯正。色彩性正是他强调的绘画本体之一，而素描则往往是雕塑对绘画的殖民，当一个画家使用白色来提亮色彩明度的时候，其实已经背离了

色彩学背后的光学原理，在这个意义上，只有一种完全驱除了素描的色彩才是只为眼睛准备的。作为保持这种纯洁性的代价，周思维只能是利用基本色彩原有的明度，因此画面总是降调的，色层遍遍叠加，在大面积的暗调中激发着色彩自身的能量——在今天这是仍然只属于绘画的能量。

但在今天反复重申这些绘画本体价值的意义在哪？显然不只是为了去证明，即使是在某种个人风格下去证明现代主义的那些形式原则依然是有效的，如果人们只把形式只当作形式，即当形式脱离其价值理念目标和感性经验背景的时候，确实很容易出现那种“僵尸形式主义”。在这里，周思维作品借用那些普通图像的意义就显现了：它们作为一种普遍的审美状况，可以校验我们悬置于画布中的所谓“特殊”经验，使艺术实践不至于在今天的这种专业体制中变成一种孤立的事件。

就根本目标而言，现代主义对艺术媒介本体的强调并不是为了带来那些堆砌着厚颜料的画布，而是为了给每个时代的感性找一个牢靠的基础，一种能够让人们在他们的当代之流中审视这种暂时性的支点。因此，重要的不是那些物质性的画面，而是画面到底引发了什么样的感性，周思维对社会一般审美状况的关切即是为了在绘画之“实”的基础上朝向一种共通的经验之“实”。与此对应，周思维的工作呈现了一种审美研究的向度：他不太在意今天的“现实”是什么，他更关心的是这种早已被美学规范化的“现实”是在何种感觉状况中被生产出来的。如果我们依然认为审美活动中包含着一种对非概念的共通性的诉求，那么在这个康德主义的底色上，形式才不会降格为物化的僵尸。

Zhou Siwei: Aesthetic Research

Text | Bao Dong

Like many artists from the same generation, Zhou Siwei's art practice departed from an intentional distancing from the academic and especially, the realist art. Chinese realist art usually has double identities, one is considered as aesthetic values and ideological contents, serving as the basis of art-related policy making which is supported and directed by political parties and the government. It used to be the only legitimate model, including reflectionism, class theory, exemplarism, namely a series of aesthetic principles beyond mediums and genres such as "content dictates form." The second identity of realism is the methodology of realism that's conducting the aesthetic form as such within art, based upon representational skills, centred upon historical figures while aiming at literary and social expressions. Extending towards the capillary tips, this methodology also includes painting geometric solids, plaster figures, heads and bodies, and finally the thematic works. In short, this is what's still being taught in the conventional departments of every art

school in China. The two identities of realism are interconnected, in fact, they are the same thing, in English Realism can mean both Xieshizhuyi and Xianshizhuyi. (translator's note: in Chinese there're two slightly different terms for "realism", one is "现实主义" and the other is "写实主义", the author is trying to point out that the two terms are virtually identical with each other)

When Zhou Siwei was attending art school, realism, especially socialist realism was in decline. Although it was still mainstream, it went under changes, and its original aspirations were no longer there. The techniques of realism became the only content, thus all the foundation courses were teaching realistic painting methods or even just some realistic techniques, but what to do with these techniques and methods is all up to the students. Under the influences of contemporary art, the majority of the students who wanted to be professional artists were trying to combine the realistic skills they had mastered with ideas coming from contemporary art.

In fact, an important aspect in Chinese contemporary art is to reuse academic art, especially in the field of painting, realistic concepts and methods are stylised by artists and then used in different subject matters. From the scar art and rural art of

the 70s until the "new generation" and the "cynical realism" of the late 80s, and then coming to the millennial "imagery painting", the various elements of realism are still being employed instead of being abandoned. On the other hand, the social reflection theory and art instrumentalism in the realist language still determines the majority of contemporary artists and critics to a large extent, making these contemporary art works some kind of variants under a larger realist framework. At the departure point of his artistic career, Zhou Siwei was facing a situation of cartoonish "imagery painting". In those years, Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, the school where he studied, was the most eminent place for this kind of paintings.

Influenced by the currents of this "imagery" trend, he didn't approve the preset realist framework from the beginning, and some of his earliest works were copied ready-made images which were then printed on canvases. He used imagery, but neither its symbolism, nor the then trending word "conceptualism". To summarise, Zhou Siwei is not responsible of the imagery in his works, his images are merely an "imagery being". On the level of "imagery being", what requires emphasis is the crucial differences between his works and the majority of photo-based and imagery-based paintings, in that he didn't try to depict the

particular "imagery being" with representation, nor did he attempt to represent "the image generation" through this kind of representation. His paintings themselves are the sites of existence of these images. Therefore, the images in these paintings are free, what's between them is a relationship of non-narrational montage, meanwhile they are materialistic and medium-based, whose traces of materiality and the graphic shapes created by their silhouettes are accentuated by the print-making technique. In another word, the significance of the image is repressed to an extreme, instead the signifier of the image shows through. It's precisely in this sense, that the practice of Zhou Siwei had abandoned realism from the beginning, because he wanted to confront with an "actuality" that is harder to grasp.

The "actuality" of the image is, to be more precise, a pictorial actuality, while its "imaginative" aspect is circumvented as much as possible. It became gradually clear for him to choose exclusively the non-photographic, non-cinematic images, which are mostly ready-made, everyday shapes and graphics. These images were designed by anonymous authors, used widely and commonly, stripped off their original context and became some kind of formulae of images, some kind of idioms with unspecific meanings, and are used

more often as just fillers. But for Zhou Siwei, these images lack not only the power of visual representation but also the message conveyed through language. They are nothing but “images”. Therefore, they are images that are genuinely compatible and able to cooperate with paintings in order to firmly grasp the “actuality” of painting.

The “actuality” of paintings includes all aspects, and the entire history of modern painting is a discussion of the noumenon of painting, and the so-called noumenon is where “actuality” lies. However, the noumenon that concerns Zhou Siwei—or to say, an ontology of painting—is not materialised or positivist, but organic and perceivable, contrary to the model of an unquestionable finale after deduction. It’s rather a visualisation process through ponders and deliberations. Besides, this process cannot unfold on a suspended blank canvas, but rather via an existing thing like a common ready-made image, or by certain limitation with solid, precise origin, such as setting the restriction on paints within the 12 colours range of children’s watercolour pens. Only with these presets can the uncertainty develop. Thus, Zhou is facing towards the unresolved complexity instead of existing purity. He never entered the field of abstraction, maybe because abstraction is no longer an aesthetic shortcut to be fought for, in

the same way that he escaped the broadcast gymnastics of the academic realism.

Certainly, this is not to say there aren’t any traces of representation in Zhou Siwei’s works. Apart from the various prototype images, sometimes hints of space, light and shadows would appear on the paintings. He is always vigilant against the type of representation based on sketch, tenaciously rejects the use of black, especially white, because black and white paints often sacrifice the purity of colours. In some paper-based works, he even use solely colour inks for printing as a guarantee on the “purity” of the colours. Colour-ness is what he emphasised as ontological to painting, while sketch is often regarded as sculpture’s colonisation of painting. When a painter uses white colour to tune up the brightness of colours, he or she has already betrayed the principals of optics in colour science. In this sense, only colours that are entirely devoid of sketch are made for the eyes. As the price to maintain such purity, Zhou Siwei can only paint with the original brightness of primary colours, therefore the images always seem falling in tone. Colours are superimposed layer by layer, spark the energy inherent to colours themselves within vast areas of dark tones. Today, this energy still belongs solely to painting itself.

But what does it mean to reaffirm again and again the ontological values of paintings at the present stage? Obviously not to prove, even under certain individual style, the validity of those modernist principals. If people only consider forms as merely forms, when forms betrayed their values, goals and perceptive background, they could easily fall into a “zombie formalism”. Here, the significance of borrowing those ordinary images in Zhou Siwei’s works is revealed: as a common aesthetic condition, they can re-examine the so-called “special” experience suspended in canvases, preventing art practice from being an isolated event in today’s professional system.

As for its fundamental goal, modernism’s emphasis on the ontology of art mediums is not to introduce those canvases laden with thick paint, but instead to find a reliable basis for the sensitivities of each generation, some kind of fulcrum that enables people to examine such temporality within the currents of their own contemporarities. Hence, what’s important is not those materialistic pictures, but what kind of sensitivity the pictures provoke. Zhou Siwei’s concerns for the society’s common aesthetic situations are intended for the transition from the “actuality” of painting towards the “actuality” of a common experience. Correspondingly, Zhou Siwei’s works

demonstrate a stance on aesthetic research: he’s not really concerned with what today’s “reality” is, but rather about the question that, under what emotional state is the “reality” that’s long been conditioned by aesthetics produced? Only if we agree that aesthetic activities contain a demand for non-conceptual commonality, shall forms not be reduced to the objectified zombie upon the Kantian undercoat.

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