

Bloom: Beyond *Shanshui*

The *Bloom Series* started two decades ago, beginning from the initial form of “flowers”, growing like continuously extending vines, gradually exploiting territories, eventually accomplishing a spectacular view, and evolving into an astonishingly rich semantic system filled with complex emotional tension and cultural connotation.

If hard bones coexist with fragile flowers, if dried bones lie with withered plants inside the brick walls, if the dark-toned ceramic flowers with a strong physiological sense accompany the earth and the nature, if the sharp steel needles and the soft skin-like silicon combine with each other, and those *Plum and Bamboo Paintings* consisting of bones, flowers and wire netting, the porcelain insects scattered on the magnificent fur like lice..... harsh and delicate, fragile and tough, cold and emotional, noble and humble, those fabulous combinations and juxtapositions bring the audience various amazing shocks, and meanwhile reveal an alternative beauty that is unavoidable, un-negligible and paradoxical.

During quite a long period, Xiaodan has deeply impressed us with such creation, establishing her highly recognizable and individualized art language and style, and therefore developing her own style among contemporary Chinese female art creation since the 21st century, hence receiving attention and compliments in international exchange exhibitions.

“*Bloom: Beyond Shanshui*” (Chinese pronunciation of landscape) is different from all of Xiaodan’s previous solo exhibitions. Around the theme of “Bloom”, it’s a multi-voice symphony instead of single voice. Applying her favorite and skilled materials and forms, Xiaodan not only continues to manifest her comprehension and paraphrasing about self, life and time, but also makes a representational expression about her long-term multiple contemplation about female, society, history and Sino-western cultures in the name of “beyond *shanshui*”. This is one of Xiaodan’s new explorations in individual creation, and also a response to some important questions lingering in her mind and acquiring her deliberation for quite a long time in a certain sense.

Unlike the usual traditional landscape aesthetics and literati connotation delivered by the word “landscape”, the *shanshui* in “*Beyond Shanshui*” has multiple meanings: it not only indicates classic Chinese literati landscape, which exists as the experience background of art education for Xiaodan and a reference point of her art consideration; but also embodies Xiaodan’s own comprehension and identification of another older “*shanshui*”, which could be traced back to the Shinto landscape before Han and Tang Dynasties and the landscape from the ancient *Book of Mountains and Seas*, which are landscape from naïve human childhood and are more natural and real landscape; and also includes those experiences during the life journey, as those things that she has

walked through, seen, heard and encountered are vivid and lively “landscape” as well.

In Xiaodan’s new works, “*shanshui*” is always partly hidden and partly visible as a proposition of contemplation and an image or symbol with cultural metaphor. It sometimes implies ideal, or reflects reality, or connects with memory, vividly and truthfully delivering the artist’s aesthetic tendency, gender conception, cultural attitude and social concern in heavy or easy ways. Those gentle, warm and ethereal *Jade Shanshui*, weight-bearing *Wings*, *She Says* of consolidated “pages” paying respect to women, *We* dissolving the serious sense of ceremony with daily emotion, *Little Geography – Biscuits* applying a humorous attitude towards the current global pattern, manifest Xiaodan’s creation’s enhanced tones of socialized concerns and cultural criticisms on the premise of feminism.

The exhibition ends with the video *Changes of Life*, presenting the images of remote mountains, the deep and humid woods, the occasionally appearing keel fossils on the sloping field, the burning coal on the earth’s surface, and the artist stewing animal’s bones in a pot..... The long fixed focus, the simple even monotonous camera language, quietly perceive the mystery and power of the nature from ancient times and the miracle flashing from art production within the slowly flowing times.

“The Rose,
The untiring rose that I don't sing
which is weight and fragrance,
that of the black garden in the high night,
that of any garden and any afternoon,
The rose that rises from the dim
ash for the art of alchemy.....

I always feel Jorge Luis Borges’s poem *Rose* seems to be written for Xiaodan and her works, therefore, please allow me to extend this poem to Xiaodan as a present.

Curator: Jiang Mei