

The thoughts of 21 Chinese creators on the architectural aspects of art

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How to form a structural thought on Chinese contemporary art? Maybe it takes more than the distance of looking, which enables a more lucid understanding than being a participant. Maybe it takes cross-references between different fields to form a more dialectical point of view. This is the topic brought to us by Eli Klein Gallery this December in Miami. The gallery hosted the exhibition “Architectural Representation in Contemporary Chinese Art” at One Thousand Museum designed by Zaha Hadid during Art Basel Miami Beach. Even the show has ended already, but the calming down of art provides us with a more serene aspect to review and gazing back at the thriving conversation.

The exhibition brought works from 21 contemporary Chinese artists that were inspired by architecture and expressed artists’ own awareness and thoughts. Meanwhile, Miami as the background also created a camouflaging effect for the core idea of the artworks in this exhibition, and this camouflaging ability allowed artists with different styles and purposes to present the meaning of architecture and landscape in their own perspectives.

One Thousand Museum is a 705 feet high residential tower that is located in downtown Miami. Standing next to the Museum Park, one can feel the city’s modernity along the culturally diverse environment. White streamlines crossing and gathering together construct a structure surrounding the tower. The streamlines converge just like plant roots growing, and the lines are winding and rounding the structured glass building surface with a symmetrical aesthetic presentation. The skeleton-looking arcs are constructed with glass fiber reinforced concrete as the load bearing structure that supports the floor and provides more space inside the building.

The exhibition was held in the penthouse of the building, and audiences can overlook the city view of Miami and the seashore. The Atlantic ocean is in the view, and the horizon separates the bay from the skyline. The outside view also echoes the show inside through the space and light. The gallery owner Eli Klein places artworks along with his carefully selected furniture pieces within a living space, making the white-tone interior environment a fantastic exhibition space. As a result, the simple geometric lines of the space draw the viewers’ attention to the works, where art and daily life merge. In this case, the audience seems to be able to perceive the artists’ discussions and encounter different ideas in daily life, which is thought-provoking.

One Thousand Museum, as one of Hadid’s last projects before she passed away, possesses her signature design style. She favored sculpture-like geometric shapes and had a deep passion for art. Russian avant-garde had a profound influence on Hadid, whose early works were mostly inspired by Russian artist Kazimir Malevich and the suprematism movement. By combining both the graphic composition and the floor plan of the building, it forms a three-dimensional space

through the deformation and restructuring of rich geometric elements, at the same time, creates a highly innovative architectural language that breaks traditional theories and constraints. Such language combines both functional and aesthetic pursuits while closely related to the form of the architecture.

With the development of computer technology, round and organic forms became common in Hadid's architecture. She had geometrized the natural landscapes such as mountains and caves, and used software to generate curved surfaces to create simple and rich shapes. People are able to appreciate the beauty of topology from it where it combines human wisdom with natural shapes to evoke the complex but rhythmic structures. This seemingly unruly but rational control presents us with a future design trend.

The interior display of One Thousand Museum showcases Hadid's signature style, especially her careful attention to the visual elements. The door handles used in the apartment were produced by Italian brand Villa + Villa, originally designed by Hadid for the famous hotel Hotel Puerta America in Madrid, Spain. The orderly but soft geometric streamlined shapes become the finishing touch of the space that echoes her architectural style .

Hadid's partner Patrik Schumacher described the firm's architectural practice as "parametric design." Although the building they designed has an avant-garde look, its background cannot be separated from the past. The Gothic structure and the works of architect Antoni Gaudí, who has a strong personal style, are all referenced to their design.

Indeed, we can see the profound influence of nature and modern art on Hadid through her design. However, Hadid had also chosen another path similar to the ideas of the participating artists - which is not to stick to the past but rewrite or subvert the traditional heritage.

Coincidentally, Hadid's career has a lot to do with China. She had designed several public architectural projects in China and had visited the Great Wall and the classical gardens of Suzhou. She had marveled at the great scale of the Great Wall and encountered the harmonious cityscape built by the oriental craftsmen who were inspired by the natural environment.

Inside the space designed by Hadid, new dialogues were created between works of different contexts. Different cultures merge and intersect while diverse ideas and paradigms colliding with each other to create new possibilities. Artists' creations from the exhibition involve different medias and materials, including realistic painting, photography, sculpture, and installation,

The landscape and architectural space of traditional Chinese gardens imply people's intervention and reflection on the environment, focusing on the essences conveyed by the entire space and the subtle influence of the environment on the mental state of the people in it. Artists reduced the composition of the building and refined them into simple shapes. The

details of the building were regarded as aesthetic symbols constituting the works, which appeared in their own creations to explore the essences of architecture.

Artist Gao Weigang converted the outline of the door into a two-dimensional line with a sculpture base where the shadow supposedly existed. By using 24K gold and stainless steel structures, he suggests a perspective rule through the most ordinary objects. As for the sculpture 《锐化 - 片》 (2017), artist Yang Mushi gathered multiple triangular structures together where all components were self-ground and cut. After a repetitive and tedious working process, the sharp woods have transformed into abstract lines which create a dangerous perception with a minimalist form of beauty. The coexistence of these two qualities makes the work even more intriguing.

Huang Rui, as an active artist in the late 70's, has his own seat in The Stars Art. His works are often symmetrical sculptures in the shape of Chinese characters; to develop the beauty in material itself, and add more modern value to traditional essence of beauty. On the other hand, artist Wang Enlai uses spray paint cans and stones to create an installation piece, showing the act of using pre-made objects to represent an architect with the materials. These elements lay in balance like moments.

From this perspective, the artists in this exhibition care not only about the essence and the composition of an architect, but also the social attributes of architectural elements. Throughout the changes and developments in the world, they've introduced a new way of explanation strategy into the creative world.

Liu Bolin is known for his series "Hiding in the City". He usually chooses to locate himself in front of a political or cultural location. By letting his assistants paint on his body, he vanishes into the surroundings. This act brought him into all kinds of social conversations, it encouraged the viewers to think about individual, collective and one's self.

His three works took place in The forbidden city, World trade center and The Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington DC. He "hid" himself next to *Delusions of Grandeur 2, 1948* by Belgian painter René Magritte in one of the pieces. This quotation act represents the salute to art history. Liu Bolin's art and René's work are both trying to trigger delusions, illustrating the impossibles in life.

Besides these special languages, artists also rely on figurative painting to show their results of observation to social problems. They capture emotions and opinions from different time periods, and use architects as a common memory carrier. They tell stories of history and city transformations with painting, then let the visual resonance do the rest of the work.

Hu Haibo uses traditional Chinese medicines to pile up fun memories of childhood. With just a little more attention, the viewer can see that the figures in the traditional backgrounds are built with different colors of leaves and stones. These materials might be able to awake a similar memory. In Zhou Zixi's paintings, the coexistence of modern buildings and traditional houses

brought up the completeness of China's history and city development, depicting the drastic changes that took place with the era.

Liu Weijian has illustrated a metaphysical city view which reminds us with Italian artist Giorgio De Chirico. The tiny figure was placed in an empty space with a detachment and lonely atmosphere, implying the phenomenal of post-industrialized society. This landscape was inspired by reality, but also represents the fantasy of the artist who is trying to point out the irrational element in the image.

Outside of figurative painting, artists in the exhibition are also responding to the society with avant-garde techniques in art making.

Hung Tunlu From Taiwan China brings a 3D image, with multiple layers of grating technique on the lightbox, different images are being viewed from an angle, a modern eastern women figure was created. With the development of pop culture, consumerism, commercials and mass media publication, people are held hostage in this dazzling science fictional environment behind the figure.

Turning an architectural material into an abstraction element is what Shen Zhenglin does in his paintings. The metals are bent, crushed and placed on top of one another; so the lines and the rhythm gives it a powerful visual impact.

Capturing time and exposing the unnoticed details in cities are the artist's pursuit for this exhibition.

Birdhead group pointed their eyes to the private objects in a public environment. When traces were made, artists present them in a poetic, humorous or even rebellious picture.

In the piece *Building 2*, 2017 by Ji Zhou, the artist chooses to capture the city phenomenally with large frame formats by taking pictures of the same site at different times of a day, and collage them together as one. Therefore, time has been compressed along with the image. A city's hologram has been exposed in one image; while the light and shadow exaggerate the linear depiction of time.

While having the same interest in capturing city architects; instead of depicting the familiar side of the buildings we know, Hong Kong artist Eason Tsang Ka Wai chose to observe the rooftops from a bird's-eye view. How people have given multiple functionalities and status of their roofs, and how it shows the complexity of the different living status. Eason stands from a bystander's point of view to present the diversity of lives and fates.

Throughout these pieces, the reflection of how the artists see the connection between life and architecture has been revealed. They illustrate the diversity of meaning and features of architecture and bring the viewers into a conversation of the environment where they live

within. This includes their opinion for Chinese modern architecture - a reflection of the era's spirits and social circumstances. The works that are included in the show are also a representation of one of the various modern social values.

When architecture becomes the reflection of the contemporary spirit and social status, the works in this exhibition are fragments of times under today's social value. They are like a mirror, reflecting the contemporary that we live in.