

Liu Yefu
NO EASY SYMBOLISM

Curated by Yuan Fuca

2018.5.15 – 6.20

MAGICIAN SPACE
魔金石空间

Liu Yefu: *NO EASY SYMBOLISM*

Curated by Yuan Fuca

Date: 2018.5.15 – 6.20

In his second solo exhibition *NO EASY SYMBOLISM* at Magician Space, Liu Yefu presents recent video works as well as a group of small sculptures.

By constantly magnifying the self-contradictions of things or peoples' behavior, Liu Yefu's video works often reflect a structural crisis and deviation from existing meanings on a more abstract level. For this exhibition, the artist has chosen to use "screening," the simplest and most unaffected form, to display his videos, presenting a direct entry point into the judgement of the subjects that the works explore, and hinting towards the ambiguous role video art plays in shaping its own surrounding discourse and value. This group of works is a continuation of the artist's longtime state of constant shifting between Eastern and Western culture. Faced with engaging and criticizing western rhetoric as an individual who has returned to his home country, Liu has made necessary adjustments against the backdrop of recent global political and societal changes. Through his working methods, which blur the boundaries between the private and the public, the studio and the outside world, as well as the staged and the edited aspects of the filmed subject, the destructive power of these adjustments gradually becomes clear. In revising history, language, and image through his videos, the artist manages to speak imagination.

About the artist

Liu Yefu was born in Beijing, China in 1986. His works are influenced by pop culture and trying to give this chaotic society some dramatic interpretation. He is really interested in ideology and stereotype, which come from human history, race and memory. He likes to play with video, sound and performance by spending a little bit money. He got BA from Capital Normal University in Beijing (2009) and MFA from Maryland Institute College of Art in Baltimore (2014). Yefu's recent works have been exhibited at Tai Kwun Contemporary, (Hong Kong, 2019), Magician Space (Beijing, 2018), Ullens Center of Contemporary Art (Beijing, 2017), Le Carreau du Temple (Paris, 2017), YUZ Museum (Shanghai, 2016), Magician Space (Beijing, 2016). His awards and nomination include Huayu Young Artist Award (Sanya, 2016), Photographic and Electronic Media Graduate Fellowship (2012-2014) and his is the finalist of Toby Devan Lewis MFA fellowship (2014).

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Bubba goes home, so does Forrest

2018

Pottery clay, oil, resin, etc.

Approx.12 x 12 x 6 cm

没有简单的象征
NO EASY SYMBOLISM

刘野夫
LIU YEFU

2018.05.15 - 06.20



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Bubba goes home, so does Forrest
2018

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Exhibition view: Liu Yefu: *NO EASY SYMBOLISM*, 2018

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*Er wird dich verwerfen als wärst du ein Stück
Kartoffeln, das die Hände verbrennt verbrennt*
2018
Pottery clay, oil, resin, stainless-steel fork, potato
Approx. 15 x 15 x 20 cm

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Damascus 3 days 2 nights only for ¥ 3500
2018
Pottery clay, oil, resin, approx
10 x 10 x 1 cm

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AD, Proposal I

2017

Single channel HD video, B&W, sound

2'4"

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AD, Proposal II

2017

Single channel HD video, B&W, sound

1'47"

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AD, Proposal IV

2017

Single channel HD video, B&W, sound

1'36"

AD, Proposal I, II, III, IV, V
2018

This work contains five independent videos:

Liu Yefu made five advertisements and blended the commonalities between art history, war, terrorism, capitalism, and racism in a commercialized aesthetic form in a creatively way. The witty performance penetrates political issues into the consumerist model. Serious criticism was once again established while being dispelled and entertained.

1. A female impressionist is attacked by a tiger and died when she comes to the Orient for life drawing. This accident is a coincidence with Tora Tora Tora (Tiger Tiger Tiger) – the codename for the Pearl Harbor attack. Beneath the conspiracy and sneak attack, you will discover that it's merely a steak advertisement.

2. Saddam Hussein is sentenced to death by hanging, his penis is erect due to the suffocation. But then an inflatable doll falls down from the gallows. What is the difference between the so-called "radical" of the artist and the terrorism actions? As the penis on the background, historical images are also being consummated again and again.

3. Pouring from the plastic bottle to the glass bottle added with lemon, water becomes a product with a capitalism aesthetic and served to the table. From now on, water releases its original function and becomes a capitalist signal, as the torch of the Statue of Liberty, it guides the people who are willing to follow.

4. At the end of "the Eight-Power Allied Forces Killing the Boxer Rebellion", the last prisoner was shot by a military officer, his head was cut and ready to be shown. A bearded officer confidently smokes his cigarette while playing with tellurian. This is just a Lucky Strike ad, also an explanation of Chaplin's dictator in the new century.

5. A Western explorer breaks into a village in deep Nepal. Due to the camera or her rudeness, she is expelled by locals. She still protects the children while running away. This is an advertisement of GoPro camera with the slogan of "Be a Hero", which records what happened.



How Many Horses

2018

single channel HD video, B&W, sound

14'39"

How Many Horses

2018

single channel HD video, B&W, sound

14'39"

How Many Horses is the next episode of Doubaner on the Grassland. It records a bunch of young people who are playing three board games, which based on the consensus on the trick or the existence of a snitch. This work conveys a common conservative attitude with a simple taste: all the problems and meanings could be dissolved by the chats and entertainments. It represents a moral victory, and how it negotiates and coexists with the real world.



是谈恋爱能激发你在性上面的变态

Doubaner on the grassland

2018

Single channel HD video, color, sound

8'15"

Doubaner on the grassland

2018

Single channel HD video, color, sound

8'15"

Douban.com is a social media website in China, it's also an online archive which provides information about books, movies, TV shows, and music, etc. It's one of the most popular social platforms in China, particularly with millions of literature and art enthusiasts. *Doubaner on the Grassland* records a conversation that occurred on the grassland, and simulates a typical discussion within a Douban group online: a middle-aged artist is discussing with an art graduate on topics, such as art, race, sexuality, emotions, sex, and so on. During the whole conversation, the rational analysis and critics, suggestions and dreams of personal life, approvals and denials are interwoven together. Meanwhile, those images from the reality were projected onto the virtual screen above the grassland, dislocation has been occurring between the flux of images and everlasting monologue. It reminds us of the hesitation prudently between the modern and contemporary, deconstruction and Dadaism.

SOTA: Liu Yefu and the Art of Cultural Assimilation at Magician Space

Writer: GJ Cabrera

Source: thebeijinger

Time: Jun 18, 2018 3:53pm

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SOTA: Liu Yefu and the Art of Cultural Assimilation at Magician Space

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State of the Arts is our regular arts column whereby we take a look at the newest moves in Beijing's creative scene and highlight art news as well as exhibitions, artists, and openings that you should seek out.

As it stands, art history is an ongoing creation and re-interpretation of what happens in the art world, and what is the art world if not the result of many forces at play, each pulling, contending, articulating to each other in order to determine what is relevant, hyped, hot, and driving the zeitgeist. These forces tend to be stronger in certain regions because let's face it, it's not a phenomenon dissociated from the political nor economical context that generates it. Therefore, as a result, art can be also a colonial concept.

We might try to see it from a referential standpoint and understand how it works as a whole: wealth and relative development in certain periods in certain areas nurture artistic ethos and help to develop a framework to sustain them and make them flourish. The political gravitas of such regions, by the means that exist at the time, create circles of influence and bring such elements to those regions that embrace, for whatever reason, what they see; sometimes in an assimilating way and others perhaps too literally on account of the art's influence not aligning with the local needs/concerns/lines of thought.



Liu Yefu's *No Easy Symbolism*, on display for one final week at Magician Space, tackles these specific concerns by forcing the visitor to look beyond local scenarios and to ponder what's going on on a more global scale, merging art and politics, and why not, life as a whole. The works here are on a quest to uncover the intersection between people and nations approach and confront global tensions in the hopes of achieving new ways of thinking, hoping to usurp the dichotomy of East-West and pre-established discourses.

The show's discourse is highly symbolic – or surreal – as the Beijing-born artist Liu Yefu tells us during his recent interview with State of the Arts. We, in turn, cannot help but feel that his toying with surrealism, as a cultural movement, are employed so as to fight back China's current march towards rational thought and materialistic values fueled by a growing middle and upper class.

The exhibition itself consists of a set of still-life sculptures and a relaxed screening room where the artist's video pieces are played uninterrupted. They may sound simple enough, but there's a lot more than meets the eye. So as to further understand Liu's worldview, we spoke to the artist himself.

TBJ: How would you define your art practice?

Liu Yefu: My art practice is an extension of my [put-on-hold] painting practice. It's about history, race, memory; and it's surreal.

What motivated you to choose video as the main medium for your work?

I just can't be satisfied with my poor painting skills.

Do you feel that people are still able to connect to video the same way they used to in the past? What's behind your decision to arrange a cinema room installation?

My small still-life sculptures are actually about the failure of the West, or perhaps the failure of 20th century in general in so much as "oil and soil" refers to "iron and blood". The failed dream ("Bubba Goes Home, So Does Forrest"), failed aesthetics (Potato Piece), and even failed democracy ("Damascus 3 days 2 nights only for ¥3,500").

It's not a judgment but more like an indistinct feeling according to my personal experience. Chinese viewers might think "wow, it's a real potato," or the collector will get art-priced dirt. Either is totally fine to me.



"Damascus 3 days 2 nights only for ¥3,500"

Could you elaborate on how you came about with the idea of the "AD" pieces?

The "AD" piece reflects the idea of history having been consumed or modified by a chaotic kid. It's my childhood sketch on history books. For example, a tiger eating a female impressionist while she's painting in Asia ("Proposal I, 2017") can be related to Tora Tora Tora (tiger tiger tiger) – the codename for the Pearl Harbor attack. The Japanese dildo advertisement ("Proposal II, 2017") comes from my version of Saddam Hussein's hanging in which he is erect when he's hanged. The image of the Statue of Liberty holding the torch is turned into a water ad; she is holding a glass bottle of water instead of the torch – beautiful and fragile. The "Eight-Nation Coalition Killing the Boxer Rebel" is just a Lucky Strike ad. It's never easy to turn these images into symbols, but I can't help but ask myself: Does history really exist like this? Or does it have more layers of possibility? Or what does history look like today or in the future?

In the exhibition, there's a subdued yet humorous criticism to certain elements representing the so-called "Western" values/concepts/ways of doing/thinking, and how they can overthrow or eclipse local perspectives. Do you think this represents the central theme of the exhibition as well as representing the current reality in China?

Yes, you could say so, but it's more about a dialogue between two regions with different writing systems – the alphabetic and the pictographic, or a conversation between logic and ambiguity, speculation and perception. Having grown up in a country that uses a pictographic writing system, I wonder if being ambiguous allows one to do something that the 'Western' logic or clarity doesn't. While the order established by the alphabetic West fails once and again (like Western criticism for example), is the ambiguous Far East still running normally? Could this 'natural and turbid integrity' perhaps create more opportunities for the world and provide us with more solutions?

As the exhibition title implies, I'm imagining there is possibly some more subtle, deeper symbolic connection between events like 911, World War II, the Gulf War, the Syrian civil war, Brexit, the German refugee crisis, Trump's government, and a happy-looking group of people playing games. Taking that idea further: violence or gentleness, stress or calmness, sorrow or happiness, Space X or bike-sharing, knowledge or ignorance, civilization or the primitive? If history does indeed repeat itself, is it possible that the 'post-modern' has come to an end now, earlier than we expected, and we've returned to modernism or the primitive era? Or will it become an infant listening to the noises outside? Now let's forget about the identity as an artist. For ordinary people, what matters much more now is - what is happiness like? What is future like?

A few months ago you were part of a larger group show *The New Normal* at UCCA. Do you feel like a part of a relatively homogeneous group in terms of what motivates your art practice or preoccupations?

I'm not sure, because I'm not sure what the other participating artists stand for. But I'm really interested in some of their work, for example, Yao Qingmei's.

Do you have any short- or long-term collaborations in the works?

I'll go Xinjiang province to travel this September. Let's see what will happen then.

No Easy Symbolism is on show at *Magician Space* until Jun 20 and is the last exhibition that the space will hold prior to undergoing renovations later this month.

Photos courtesy of Sun Shi

Visual Arts

SOTA

State of the Arts

Art

Liu Yefu

GJ Cabrera

MAGICIAN SPACE
魔金石空间

Liu Yefu

Education

- 2014 MFA in Fine Art, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD, USA
2009 BA in Painting, Capital Normal University, Beijing, CN

Solo Exhibition

- 2018 *NO EASY SYMBOLISM*, Magician Space, Beijing, CN
2016 *Episode 1*, Magician Space, Beijing, CN

Group Exhibitions

- 2019 *Guangzhou Airport Biennale*, Guangzhou, CN
Art Basel Hong Kong, Hong Kong, CN
Hic Sunt Leones, Surplus Space, 798 Contemporary Art Centre, Beijing, CN
Performing Society: The Violence of Gender, Tai Kwun Contemporary, Hongkong, CN
2018 *Frontier: Re-assessment of Post-Globalisational Politics*, OCAT Institute, Beijing, CN
2017 *The Ecstasy of Time: Reframing the Medium of Knowing*, He Xiangning Art Museum, Shenzhen, CN
Dream-atic, Christian Louboutin SLT Gallery, Beijing, CN
Every Skyscraper is Built from the Ground, the 2nd Changjiang International Photography and Video Biennale, Chongqing, CN

De Bruits et de Mouvements, Videobox Festival 2017, Paris, FR
The New Normal: Art and China in 2017, UCCA, Beijing, CN
Digitale Körper in der Screen-Landschaft III - Projekte von Liu Yefu, Goethe-Institut China, Beijing, CN

On Drawing: Visibility Of Power, J: GALLERY, Shanghai, CN

- 2016 *HISTORICODE: Scarcity & Supply*, *The 3rd Nanjing International Art Festival*, Baijiahu Art Museum, Nanjing, CN

OverPop, Yuz Museum Shanghai, Shanghai, CN

Floating, curated by Yuan Fuca, Post Mountain, Beijing, CN

Lost in Shenzhen, curated by Jiu Society & Steller Course, Shenzhen, CN

Art Sanya – Huayu Youth Award Nomination Exhibition, Sanya, CN

- 2015 *No Dice (I)*, curated by Howie Chen, Kimberly-Klark, NY, USA

S/K, a Play by Tingying Ma, Pershing Square Signature Theatre, New York, NY, USA

- 2014 *Sludge Jam*, curated by CJ Brazelton, MINT, Columbus, OH, USA

VOX X: Present Tense, curated by Howie Chen and Matthew Brannon, Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA, USA

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