

Cao Shu—A Dimension of Strangeness

Text / Lee Ning

The term “strangeness” tends to appear in a context contrary to that featuring “familiarity.” A sense of strangeness creeps over us when a substantial gap opens up between obvious facts and our expectations, which is tantamount to a “tug-of-war” between strangeness and familiarity. Such a neutral position has been entirely embedded in the current status quo and gradually concentrated as the representational symbols of visual consumption. It is exactly this kind of observable representation that Cao Shu sought to visually coordinate and peel off. In other words, the artist employed a vision-based methodological approach to “re-view” the gap he created between his works and things people think they’re familiar with. While the “re-viewing” gave a window into the universe of his works, Cao further molded it into a paradox in which the sense of strangeness and expressed wishes clashed and mismatched. It seems that the usual way of communication, cognition and emotions have been immobilized as a known yet distant “cognitive symbol.” The artist added a visual “dimension” to this process, juxtaposing psychologically perceived “arrival” with visually mismatched “distance,” thereby bringing a subtle touch of disappointment to the setting of the imaginary scene, which implied a long tussle between approaching and continued delay. In this sense, the unique attributes of colors, the intervention from symbols, and the clashes in the plot development that Cao demonstrated in his works enabled us to experience the “strangeness” that we’ve never extracted and observed, even though we’ve been familiar with it.

In general, a point-to-point relation between objects is the most common manifestation of the transition from “observing” to “seeing” of the self, which made objects’ existence and status obvious at a glance. Once we engage with the “obvious at a glance,” however, the medium for the point-to-point transmission will create an “imaginary distance” while removing a process of great complexity. Cao’s solo exhibition hosted by the OPENCASTSPACE was dedicated to revisiting and then blurring the imaginary distance in terms of visual structure. A medium can be compared to something that links or affiliates two objects, and messages tend to be hidden in the transmission from one object to the other. The two points do not suggest the nature of the two objects. As far as Cao is concerned, transmitting processes constitute messages, and transmitting methods languages. The message conveyed depends not so much on the observer as on the form per se—the content points towards the question as to “what the observed is and what the observer is.” Cao’s works revolved around “a rhythmic sense of strangeness.” If we unveil the mystery of the precipitates comprised of time, social realities, and ways of communication, we may find that the kernel content cannot exist by itself in isolation but in a context with differences and similarities. The sense of strangeness disclosed by messages and contents is exactly the upcoming “waiting” highlighted by something beyond the representation—the knowledge structure of contents is thus reorganized, and the way of thinking redefined. Based on a specific context of “visual structure,” Cao’s works transplanted the “general relation” of another context’s content onto that of this specific one. His work *Meet-ing*, for example, placed familiarity and strangeness in a context of a lukewarm relationship. This restructured context echoed his other works such as *Stranger* and *Color of Concept* that vividly revealed the anonymity, the undetermined subjectivity, and the loss of authenticity in the digital era. “I find the aesthetic and political schemata in art unexceptional, because we are subject to our daily lives and the social structure. It has something to do with our understanding of visual tastes. The existent aesthetic structures become consequences and conclusions, because the normality of our humdrum routines tends to be the object of consumption. We need to identify alternative structures in our manual labor. The shapes and colors all around us are becoming the channels and structures for our understanding of the world as well as the contents and messages in transmission,” so stated the artist.

曹澍——陌生的“度”

文/李宁

“陌生”往往是在与“熟悉”相对的语境中出现，当眼前的事实与想象中的熟悉事物保持某种距离时，陌生感也会随之出现。这可以被看作是一种熟悉与陌生的“拉锯状态”，而这种鉴于中性感的状态完全置身于今天的生活现状中，又逐渐浓缩成某种被进行视觉消费的表象，甚至是符号。曹澍正是鉴于此种可观的表象，进行视觉地统筹与剥离——在视觉的方法论基础上重新把人们理念中所熟知的东西与自造的视觉距离发生“再观看”的探讨关系。曹澍让“再观看”在作品中成为理解的窗口时，又同时把它设定为一种矛盾——陌生感与成立的愿望之间地摩擦、错位。似乎当下被惯用的沟通方式、认知情绪都被固化成一种并未接近但已知的“认知符号”，曹澍则从中设置了视觉的“度”，将其心理认知的“到达”与视觉错位的“未及”并置在一起，使得在构成完整想象的情景时，又附带一种落空感，也可以被看成是接近与不断延迟的推演状态。此时作品中所使用的色彩属性和符号地干预、情景跟踪中的碰撞，都进一步让人去体验了今天我们所熟知的但未曾被提取和观看的“陌生”。

通常，从自我的“观看”到“看到”，最多的方式与结果就是事物的点对点，于是事物的存在与状态也呈现出一目了然。但当我们与“一目了然”发生关系时，那点与点之间进行传达时所使用的媒介本身，在去掉一种过程的复杂性时，也同时承担了一种“虚设的距离”。曹澍在开采空间的个展就是对这种“虚设的距离”进行一种视觉结构地回归，并加之模糊。媒介就好比是为两个东西之间提供关联或引导关联的事物，通常从一个东西到另一个东西的过程里，信息会潜藏其中。相对这两个点并不预示着：一个东西的本质是什么，另一个东西的本质是什么，曹澍认为往往构成信息内容的恰恰是那个中间的过程，同时这之间的传递方式也构成了语言。形式本身决定了传递出的内容——内容引向“被观看者是什么，观看者是什么”的思考，而不是观看者决定了传递的内容。曹澍把作品的节奏设定在一种“陌生感”上，当把时间、社会、沟通方式所沉淀后的现象的表皮揭掉，去看其中的内容时，我们发现内容并不能单一存在，它都建立在异同的语境里。恰恰信息和内容所透露出的陌生感也正是表象之外所突现的将要发生的“等待”——内容的知识结构被重新组织，思维方式也被重新定义。曹澍的作品是基于一种“视觉结构”的语境，把另一个语境中内容的“通用关系”嫁接在这个语境中。例如作品《相遇》，就是把熟悉和陌生设定在了若即若离的契合点上，这种重新组织的语境应对了像《陌生人》、《概念的颜色》等其他作品一样，在数字时代失本真性、匿名化、无确定主体的现实。这也就像曹澍所说，“我觉得整个艺术里的审美与政治结构并不特殊，因为我们都制约在生活和社会的结构里，这与人对视觉习惯的理解有关。现成的审美结构作为结果，作为一种结论，生活中的常态是被人们所消费，我们需要在劳作的过程中发现不一样的结构。我们生活里处处接触的形状、颜色都正在成为一种理解世界的通道和结构，也能成为内容和信息本身。”