

Chin Kong Yee's Artistic Review

Chai Chang Hwang (Independent Curator, Art Critic)

[Artist Introduction] Chin Kong Yee was born in 1973 in Ampang, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Having studied under the Art Department of the Central Academy of Art in Malaysia, he received a formal training from his professors, on basic artistic skills. Before being engaged in full-time creation, Kong Yee lived a period of his life making his living simply off drawing cartoons, illustrations, and decorative paintings. The richness of life experiences not only cultivated the painter's deep connection towards people, but also his detailed observation towards objects. Despite of having to undergo a phase where he felt unexposed or underrated as an artist, and having to face the political conditions and social issues of his time, Kong Yee has always remained calm and unperturbed; through multiple series of his artistic creations, the artist shares thoroughly his ideological values and personal universe. He named his practice of self-exploration and acquisition as "Actuality Accorded Paintings" and constantly continues to explore this unique path of creative methodology. Since 2003, Kong Yee has publicly exposed the results of his exploration consistently, every two or three years. So far, he has accumulated a total of eight solo exhibitions; and in recent years, his paintings have also made their appearances in international art exhibitions such as in Germany, France, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Indonesia, Singapore and many more. With his consistent and self-contained overall performance, Kong Yee's artwork has also attracted the attention of many collectors. Using natural and urban landscapes as backdrop, supplemented by the combination of oil painting and retouching techniques, Kong Yee thrives in the successful illustration of the relationship between different times and spaces, and in integrating them into one layout that is fantastical, lively, bright, and yet realistic at the same time. A few years ago, Kong Yee purchased a new village house near his hometown. After refurbishing it as his residence and studio, he has since then settled there. The vast courtyard houses and three or four of his lovely dogs provide space for his lover and him to do some gardening and vegetable planting. When Kong Yee doesn't feel like painting, he enjoys taking a sip of coffee as he sits and watches the blue sky and white clouds in the backyard.

One.

From the context of cultural history, painting plays a vital role as one of the main carriers of an artist's spiritual development. However, as history moves forward, with more than a hundred years of modernization, despite artists' countless trials and attempts on establishing their own aesthetics, they must face the fact that they are placed within an industry of contemporary art and visual culture. Will there still be creators who hold traits of indifference or motiveless as their core values?

As far as the profession is concerned, artists face all sorts of problems that would challenge his sincerity. For example, when facing poverty and lack of income during his life, an artist's performance and innovation must serve as his vocation. Thus, how can he be full of excuses? Nevertheless, even if he/she does not care about his internal affairs, he will still one day end up speculating and securing his own gains, wouldn't he – then face accusations of not abiding by rules?

I have been cruising within the local art scene for a long time. Looking at the different ways in which my fellow colleagues are eclectic and unique in performing their own tasks and doing their own things, I personally think that Kong Yee is a much more serious artist.

Two.

Normally, an average person's sensory tractors will produce some kind of reaction after being stimulated by the outside world. Talking from the point of view of human's perspectives, creators and audiences, the behavior of a painting and of viewing the painting itself, represents two different sets of knowledge, experience and information systems.

Our perception and sense are 'reflections of the intuitive image of objective things that are formed in the mind'. Which means, our sense reflects the individual attributes of objective things, and perception reflects our overall configuration of objective things. While perception is based on sense, it is not just a simple integration of the two, but an organic whole made of a large number of information attributes and different relationship modes of the objects. According to 'Wikipedia', the difference between perception and sense is usually completely indistinguishable. The sense is the initial processing of information, and the perception is an in-depth processing of information.

In my opinion, the results of the recent creations by Kong Yee are quite different from the space effectively created by single-point, two-point or three-point perspectives in the traditional sense. It is amazing! Kong Yee did not completely negate the art of retina. Instead, he focuses on how to begin from the human eye. Through borrowing the controllable modeling principle, he repeatedly deploys and identifies sets after sets of abnormal visual order. As a visually-observed art, his work is purposely and temporarily in an unstable spatial state, as if superimposed and made up of different knowledge experiences, where the information content is complex; both ambiguous and concealed. This strategically allows for the observers standing outside of the painting to unconsciously and willingly be sucked into the presentation.

Kong Yee has obviously put a lot of hard work on the issue of information attributes and their relationship structure. Starting with the "New Landscape Series", he tends to use two-in-one rectangular composition to compose his work. This two-way co-construction method allows the space itself to display a large number of variables after being decomposed and compounded: for example either by arbitrarily juxtaposing two frames/pictures—or changing their top and bottom or left and right transpositions. Thus, every time a change is made, it always derives a difference in sight. Moreover, once the overall perception changes, as worded by the painter himself: the reality becomes more illusive! (2)

For someone like Kong Yee who bases his operational production on exploration of possibilities, it is reasonable to foresee the following results: the image structure is full of uncertainty and the visual presentation is also non-absolute. In any open spaced that is pre-defined, any person (the perceiving subject) has the right to construct their own opinions on objective things, and thus consistency in aesthetic judgment is almost impossible; the above situation is not hard to imagine, and the painter should be able to self-examine and confirm this.

To put it another way, Kong Yee does not really care about "pursuing absoluteness." (3) Not only that, but he also opened up the art of artistic practice to multiple interpretations, and approaches calmly and unhurriedly the critical point of human emotions...

Three.

I am very clear about the motivations for my artistic creations... — Kong Yee has said this to me more than once.

As a contemporary painter, Kong Yee did not blindly dance to the rhythm of conformity with the rest, that is, being passionate only on the heated discussions within global cross-lingual visual culture research community, such as imperialism, colonial history, territorial politics, national identity, space production and so on. The above-mentioned themes are not ones that can easily be translated by ordinary people by means of art. When I witnessed various artists of different race around me dancing to tune [...thinking that middle brows were high-brow] (I purposely decided not to enclose the speaker's name), and as a result constantly making a fuss in "the name of investigation and research" with no clear purpose and no rigor in their methods. I am grateful that Kong Yee, unlike many others, does not suffer from this bigheaded disease.

Kong Yee is very much inspired by Western classical painters and sculptors, and thus has always paid special attention to the 'line of sight' process in art (I will address this in the next section). As far as his genre is concerned, Kong Yee's paintings are very much inseparable from landscapes. (4) From the streets of Kuala Lumpur and the East Coast suburbs in his early work, and all the way to his latest years, where he traveled to urban landscapes of many countries in Europe and Asia, whether getting inspiration for small works or big masterpieces. Being an expert in oil painting, Kong Yee also started to use Chinese brush, ink, rice paper and Chinese painting as medium of expression several years ago. He is mainly known for his landscape paintings. For example, the "Busan Seascape Map" is one of his very eye-catching pieces.

If we are discussing in theory of content, then Kong Yee choosing "city well" as one of his framing sceneries is undoubtedly another amazingly intellectual choice:

Doesn't 'City well' by its literal meaning, point to the fact that each city has a well? In ancient times, not every household had tap water. Anyone who needed to use water had to fetch it at the well. Thus the locations of general wells are usually set at lively market centers, where the surrounding building space is also a place for tourists to travel. What's important about the location of the wells is that the marketplace symbolizes both a public space and a place of collective consciousness. It is beyond the limits of history and time, the

past, the present, the real, and the supposedly conceived. This gives it its unique charms, and constantly fascinates people.

Whenever an artist goes to an unfamiliar place as a traveler, he will always remember deeply the encounters and atmosphere that touched his heart, and will often take time to recount it in depth. When he returns home, he is usually not in a hurry to draw it out; instead, he indulges in the extension of time, and takes the opportunity to filter the information, re-integrate and even recall the unique emotions when he was present at the scene. Only then will he recreate the situation in the present through intertwining the perceptions and infiltrating its details together: The driving force of my paintings comes from responding to their call to me; they will tell me what to do and how to do it... well, it's like I'm possessed!

And it seems as if the pictures have already prepared themselves: Welcoming everyone to visit – and are extremely friendly in "inviting" keen individuals in the involvement of visual perception. This is a literal collapse of inner beliefs and external conditions!

Four.

Or, to be more precise, in addition to the extraordinary sensitivity towards people and things, Kong Yee also possesses qualities and intuition towards creation that other ordinary painters do not hold.

Kong Yee has always attempted to translate and communicate first-hand experience to his audience through his paintings. From a visual perspective, it is, honestly speaking, not very difficult to mechanically reproduce a similar "live image". The difficulty lies in the reconfiguration and "deep reprocessing" of our perceptions and consciousness, and how the artwork is able to reveal a kind of scalability - but at the same time must not be coordinated in terms of mood and color.

Reflected in works of the "Dancing With Shadows" series, from color matching to visual organization, from position to rhythmic change, it is stacked layers upon layers, both dynamic and climatic, thus continuously dazzling the audiences upon viewing. Nevertheless, in this batch of his recent works, although most of the pieces do greet its audiences with its

outstanding momentum, the details are also carved into the micro. Even the streetlights, window grilles, wilted trees; pedestrians, etc., are all painted with refined delicacy. From a holistic view and in regards to the completeness of the artwork in general, the traces of tourists and the gloominess of the night serves as vivid sensory impact, reflecting and developing practicality (practical sense) within the painting. In this way, allowing the real space and the concept space to collide and coincide, which is truly amazing!

In each painting, it is not difficult to notice that: the painter is working hard in an ongoing battle. For example, he wrestles with multiple perspectives, and it looks as if there is a sudden swirling visual form on the canvas; he wrestles with the logic of the content, flexibility behind co-construction of the picture/composition without a similar relationship structure; he wrestles with imaging technology, intensifying the graphic tension of architectural images due to external expansion and torsion gradient; he wrestles with rational negotiation, and never lets himself accidentally fall into the aesthetic black hole. However, he did not dualize the field in which the above-mentioned wrestling occurred, or the life-political history of publicity and struggle. In contrast, he worked hard to create a space of chance, expand the horizon of expectation to make multiple interpretations possible. In other words, wrestling and fighting the battle is also essential in the production relationship of painting. As the "Wrestling-Painting" goes on, positive and negative forces or more "faith systems" are also in the process of fighting. As Deleuze worded: "Everything is fighting and wrestling."

In fact, Chin Kong Yee's visual statement systematically sorts out the complex interrelationship of "multiple perceptions" and a resonance effect is produced through relationship reorganization – struggle and negotiation. Resonance is a very interesting phenomenon; that is, at a certain resonant frequency, the particles can vibrate together, the strings can be shook together, and everyone can shake their heads together; whatever it is, everyone can share the "common facts" together (6).

When one (or more) "common facts" appear in one painting at the same time it is even without confirmation: due to resonance/resonance. Obviously, through a series of relationships, the key conditions are closely related to the artist's dependence on the mind and the eye. The coordination of the hand and the elucidation of the painting is also crucial; as long as the frequency/willingness is consistent, (7) anyone can exchange each other's

"truth" in this perceptual space (this is when the heart is telepathically connected); suppose the "common fact" is an existing reality, it can be regarded as a mode of artistic expression, meaning configuration has been shaped.

Finally, coming back to it all, even if you have all the reasons, you cannot self-declare reality or even self-satisfaction, otherwise it will be a form of distortion, and it will be misleading.

- (1) After nine years, I am once again invited to write for Kong Yee's exhibition. It is definitely a mix of emotions: firstly comes the challenge, then comes the thought of encourage myself, that I should not repeat similar mistakes, like the old times. This is the third time I am reviewing the work of this old friend; the earliest review, specially focusing on his portrait creation, was published in the second issue of the "Art Corridor" in September 2002.
- (2) All variant texts are quoted from remarks coming from Kong Yee himself. Interview with the painter, July 6, 2018, in Kuala Lumpur
- (3) Philosopher and novelist Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) was very close to painter and sculptor Alberto Giacometti (1922-1962). "The Pursuit of Absoluteness" that he wrote, reveals this artist friend's unique creative thinking and method in detail. This article was first published in Modern magazine in 1948. Seen in Sartre's Art (Feng Liming, Yang Youquan/Translation), Shanghai: People's Fine Arts Publishing House, third print in August 1996; Pages 80-91.
- (4) W. J. T. Mitchell, eds. Landscape and Power (Yang Li, Fang Xinqiong/translation), Nanjing: Yilin Press, first edition, October 2014.
- (5) See Gilles Deleuze: "Communication Image and Triptych", Income "Francis Bacon: The Logic of Feeling" (Dong Qiang/translation), Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2007, September First edition of the month; Pages 78-87.
- (6) The "common facts" spoken by Deleuze. Same as Note 4.
- (7) Spoken from the perspective of aesthetic feedback, this process involves the participation of different perception subjects and their degree of involvement. As far as the specific practice is concerned, the interactions of the various tasks require the adjustment of the perception mechanisms such as individual consciousness and autonomy, and having similar "common will" can lead to related actions.