

THE POLITICS OF IMAGES BY GUO FENGYI

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Beyond the “Long March” Guo Fengyi has created a discomfiting visual world, a world of mystery and terror that radiates like the eye of a python. These are works that one is not completely willing to lend use of the word “art” to describe, but still posses ability to awe and frighten. This power of awe comes from her supernatural and furtive drawings, which is strongly driven by the reality of her drawings that come to fore as the after the outrageousness subsides. The surface of her works are embedded with a frightening power like that of a curse – whose indeterminable veracity makes it ever more frightening. That is one type of unknowable possibility – another real appearance. This reality which she alone occupies cannot be penetrated or measured, it is like a dark and boundless labyrinth. The images by Guo Fengyi are some of the most complex things existent. Twisting and circuitous, they stimulate a feeling of confusion creating a system strung together with riddles for meditation and mystic contemplation whose location lies beyond our ability to cartograph. What for us appears to be an unreconcilable maze, for her is an answered Zen koan. To Guo Fengyi, drawing is an internal journey within a dark and mysterious world littered with divergences, mapped through the tip of her brush, ever drawing closer to its true center, but never arriving at it. Her drawings are a continual telling of unreadable narratives. These narratives may be mutually supportive or interrelated, or they could be contradictory and oppositional, just like the thick and intricate lines of her drawings, mutually connected and mutually inclusive. What these vast interrelationships simulate is a possible world which cannot be experienced. We are fortunate enough to find this tunnel to another reality, but the keys are not within our hands. It is only a momentary glimpse of a greater secret. However, even Guo Fengyi is not in possession of this secret which can only be expressed and happen in the course of “illustration”, and not centered on this reality. Whether Guo Fengyi views this is similar to the mysteries of planchette drawing, which arise from various wellsprings, we are not sure. What we can be sure of is that her “illustrations” are not dependent on the visual, even if it may be a type of spiritual vision. “I draw because I do not know, I draw to know.” The important thing for her is not to see, but to draw. There is no predetermined visual image, no conceptual image set forth. The subject of her drawing is manifested at the same time as the process of her drawing, and does not exist before hand. However, it is important to distinguish her drawings from those school of art philosophy which emphasize extemporaneousness, emotion, pointlessness, and non-expressionist viewpoints. To Guo Fengyi, drawing is a type of “realism”, a type of accurate “existent – image” that resides in our everyday lives and outside the world of our experiences. Because it is located within the everyday, it is extremely honest. Because it is outside the world of experiences, so it cannot be re-presented. In her own “simple” words, the process of drawing is a type of “viewing from afar.” However, the “viewing from afar” goes beyond the visual act of seeing, but more precisely should be described as a grasp of this event which has gone beyond the dimensions of time and its extension reminding us of the inherent difference between “mimesis” and “imitation” – which is a type of “performative history” and not a representation. It is for this reason that the process of drawing is a process of “release”, a medical remedy, and a visiting, it is also the process of events bursting forth. It is a seeing within a moment something she has never met before, as if drawing were a type of “capture” attempting to enter into a surgery. This is premonition and “foresight”, which is the original connotation of technique or art. And so, the feeling given off by drawings of Guo Fengyi is neither “abstract” nor “explicit”, neither “imitation” or “mimesis”, but rather “image”, a

different image, a difference from which we can see a frenetic growth of one event as well as its implosion. Guo Fengyi herself is unable to distinguish if what she is “illustrating” is a leaving behind an imprint or constructing something new. Writing the topic or name of her subject in the middle of the drawing is merely a ritual, a way to gather inspiration, the secret lever to enter into that passageway to mysterious world. All who have met her before are able to feel that the act of her drawing certainly contains a strong type of fortune-telling and divination (augur). Within these moments, the original power of the image seems to not have faded – the image seems to have a direct linkage to the “fortune” of what is being depicted. The drawings are regarding “fortune” and destiny, and in this process of drawing, what happens and what is touched upon come as on as an inescapable and unavoidable curse. Guo Fengyi: Within the “Long March” The “Long March” is a context and vision, it is a act of discovery and transplanted, and a re-distribution of resource. All events within and beyond art have found their way into the Long March, de-coded and then re-encoded to ultimately self-construct a difficult to name “Long March Event.” Therefore, in actuality, the Long March has already become a gigantic machine of cultural production and self-effacement. In this machine’s realm of production and consumption, the majority of the Long March’s products possesses two sites of creativity, but do not have a real author. Xi’an, 2002. Guo Fengyi encountered the Long March. In the life of Guo Fengyi, the act of creating images comes from her super-natural abilities; drawing to her is a type of reaction, remedy, and release. In 2002, the Long March invaded this world of historical myths from Western China, and bringing Guo Fengyi to a completely different realm. In the beginning, the Long March’s initial understanding of Guo Fengyi was to note the loss of words critical art discourse had in response to her works. Confronted with the Guo Fengyi, terms from this vocabulary such as inspiration, style, technique, form, and concept all lose their effectiveness. She resides outside of art history, and does not belong to the art world or artworks which have been colonized by technical terms and meanings. What she creates is something that resides outside of art history. The Long March has married Guo Fengyi’s mythical world to art history. Speaking more precisely, this is not a forced welding, rather a thorough and reasoned strategy, a short-circuit of meaning between both worlds. Through this, the Long March has formed another discursive training field. Within this training field, the Long March wants to “express the interactive relationships between social beings and artistic expression”, it wants to “illustrate that public space has a strong expressive power for people’s lives and identities”, as well as “grassroots art is able to directly contribute to contemporary art outside of the limits and the references to the institution...” However, the most important is that the Long March’s foremost reading of Guo Fengyi is that of un-meditated creation. She works without reference, because she operates outside of art history, this is the creative power that is outside of art history, a non-artistic creativity. Its existence is a questioning of the creative power which has been dominated by art for a long period. Compared to the rather “formalist” questioning and challenges to the mythical art narrative posed by modernist artists, Guo Fengyi’s work is even more subversive and disruptive because what the tip of her knife is pointing at is not the “definitions” and “boundaries” created from ideology, but rather a politics that covers itself with the name of art – the monopoly that artist and their works have on creativity. Here, it is important to note that this is a consistent tactic of the Long March. What Guo Fengyi means to drawing is similar to what Li Tianbing, another “Long March case” is to photography in that they are not regular type of relationship between author and artwork. Regardless from the perspective of life or meaning, these are both completely unrelated to art. The photographs by Li Tianbing seem to hide a type of sociology, the drawings of Guo Fengyi point to a type of mysteriousness. However, inherently speaking, both are regarding the most common and the most supernatural expressions of man. From this perspective, both encompass and connect a type of anthropology, a type knowledge structure for the undeterminable element of man. More importantly, the Guo Fengyi of the “Long March” has not necessarily turned from being non-artist into an artist, nor

are her works able to provide another conceptual framework regarding works and images. Where the Long March is concerned, Guo Fengyi is first a “pharmakon”, a poison that is used to frame contemporary art. At the same time, a medication that is able to remedy art history. The greatest result of modernism is to leave us with a belief in the discrepant creativity. But the prerequisite for this production of difference is a clear and concrete knowledge of a certain thing, as well as its progressivist and linear historical development. The sign of production of difference is dependent upon the confirmation by the linear historical narrative, therefore, creativity becomes daily more narrowly directed at the creation of art history. Through the drawings by Guo Fengyi, the Long March displays an alternative creativity. From the perspective of art history, this is a type of question, a type of re-evaluation, evidence of its subversiveness. Of even more importance is that through the drawings of Guo Fengyi, and through the Long March’s implantation, explanation, and re-creation, we are able to consider the social meaning of this type of creativity, and we are able to reconsider the existence of the creativity of the public realm, reconsider the mechanisms of rationalizing those things that we have already taken for granted. Here, the drawings by Guo Fengyi are no longer a surrogate for some type of mysterious power, rather it has become a political event involving the disintegration of the history of creativity and knowledge. Everything begins with politics and ends in mystery. Guo Fengyi seems to reverse this flow of event. Through her drawings, the mysterious reveals itself to this world, furthermore, she uses her lack of knowledge and myths to accomplish her own political destiny. This was all predetermined the moment she happened upon the Long March.

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