

Guo Fengyi: Cosmic Meridians

Curated by Wang Huan
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Long March Space, Beijing

Introduction by Wang Huan

1. The Art of Naming

What is Guo Fengyi's Painting Called? What is the Meaning of Natural Superpower? What is the Human Numerical Code? From the Beginning up until Now, the Human Brain Has Passed through All of These Animals?

These contradictory and somewhat disparate questions stem from the artist Guo Fengyi's naming of her works. Perhaps, they can be considered as sorts of 'themes' of her practices, but they are rather Guo's awareness of problems when she was still in her early stage of enlightenment; and they are the innocence and impetus of still being able to question.

2. Ambient Religion

According to Guo, her ways of working consist of three steps: write down the question, start to paint, and let the images emerge. If Guo Fengyi, as she claims, 'I draw because I do not know, I draw to know', then WHO is the one she has longed for to give out an answer? This question almost summons back an ancient shamanic scene that connects the land and the heaven, making it possible to rewrite Guo's set of movements into 'place the request, launch the ritual, and let the divine response appear'. Such a rewriting somehow makes unusual the fact that Guo looks like an 'untimely' psychic; seemingly, those images are genuinely the answers she gave through divinations. Obviously, these images have failed in the corresponding relationship between 'words and things', with the sacred icons no longer sacred and the landscape no longer recognisable. To put it another way, Guo Fengyi's psychic-like painting practices do not remind beholders of the decent and manifestation of a deity, as experienced in many existing religions; instead, they constitute an atmosphere of self-religionisation, dispersed in the air and stimulating the senses continuously.

3. Qigong

Avoid not to talk about *qigong*'s influence on Guo Fengyi. In this case, however, *qigong* should not be merely identified as an exercise or a product of the history of science. Instead, it should be treated as a legacy of the history of thoughts—a modern medium of ideas loaded with ancient experiences—that inspires and impacts Guo Fengyi's painting.

4. Vipassana and Clairvoyance

The 'vipassana' and 'clairvoyance' are concepts and methods frequently referred to in Guo's painting. As the mind and the universe are often believed to be inherently connected, the former reveals the instinct and impulse of humans inwardly, while the latter concludes the existence and laws of the world outwardly. Both of them are concerned with humans' most primordial desire for knowledge. The employment of these two ways of seeing also explains why, in Guo's paintings, from embryos to the cosmos, from the meridians to *fengshui*, from images of ancient times to the ones of the land and heaven, all these entities can be summoned and gathered across consciousness, time-space and matters.

5. Lines

Using thin and dense lines to sketch repetitively and orderly is fundamental to Guo's painting, as if the

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capturing of figures depends on these delicate and lavish curves, and the figures do not have skins or actual bodily organs but merely body-like contours that are vaguely recognisable. For Guo Fengyi, a long-term *qigong* practitioner who reads extensively on ancient Chinese culture, she surely understands the idea that ‘the flow is the message’ and the wondrous experience engendered between ‘the cosmos and the body’, so that almost all of her paintings illustrate a spiritual magnetic field in constant flowing.

6. Numbers

Numbers are another crucial element appearing regularly in her paintings, and the way they are used is evidently not a result of any aesthetic strategy but rather an inheritance of the idea of ‘inner numbers’ derived from the system of ‘inner proof’ in ancient China. It is a mathematical system that is used to monitor and infer the origin of the universe, the natural evolution, and the historical changes, but Guo further incorporates it into her self-invented linguistic system. Different numbers bestow commands upon various actions, placed into divergent arrangements and ordered combinations. From this perspective, numbers are no longer mathematical counting but language itself for Guo.

7. The Ancient Cosmology

Although extant literature has ‘testified’ the relevance between Guo Fengyi’s works and the ancient cosmology, there remains an unarticulated point, that is, Guo is not ‘manifesting’ or ‘presenting’ the ancient cosmology but ‘utilising’ it to construct a new set of experience and logic. The sign of her construction does not depend on a certain kind of visual manifestation; its driving force is inherently and ultimately different from the latter.

8. Cosmic Meridians

Hetu and *Luoshu*, two mythical divination schemes from ancient China, appear recurrently as critical themes and references in Guo Fengyi’s practices. In fact, both images are systems of deduction derived from the pre-modern cosmology of ancient China concerning astrological changes in the universe, while Guo’s methodology is more like to observe and identify the logic and order of how the world works through self-constructed laws.

In this light, this exhibition borrows the divination rules of *Luoshu*. Using the actual orientation of Long March Space with its eight pillars zoning the exhibition space, it divides 45 pieces of paintings into nine groups according to the various key concepts embedded and locates them in nine positions. The nine key concepts are independent of but interpret each other, and the content of the paintings ranges from practicing *qigong* to cosmology, from *The Book of Changes* and Taoism to history and culture, and from the numbers of the human body to neurological points. Enlightenment, cognition, land, embryos...All these seemingly irrelevant objects return to a ‘question of perception’.

9. Coda

To paint like this, perhaps, is Guo Fengyi’s only and final self-expression. We must, however, realise that perception is the same as time in terms of restless changes. Folk art or art brut, modern art or contemporary art, Guo Fengyi is never a ‘reasonable experience’ that complies with one single system of rules. Notably, most of these paintings were created in the 1990s, when contemporary art discourse was still vague in China. In a time when every breath of air was still filled with the lingering fragrance of the socialist utopia, the answer given by Guo Fengyi was a marked discord of the time. Thereupon, to talk about Guo Fengyi’s paintings is not only to render a type of painting, a kind of method of reading, or the legitimacy of a sort of art; her paintings are also an accidental phenomenon that never leaves aside its many contextualisations, including the social background, historical context, political situation, and cultural wrestling. More importantly, her paintings inspire us to talk about the way to act in a world of constant conflicts and changes.