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Spiritual ambiguity of Leung Mee ping

In 7th April, 2009, I interviewed Leung Mee ping in a morning with sunshine smiles outside. I met her in Mong Kok and sat in a restaurant for three hours. When she’s not smiling, she looks quite serious, like many of her works that delivers messages of social issues in a large scale which are spectacle and spiritual. Her well-known exhibition of thousands hair shoes in a large white solemn museum was very spectacle, and seems directed audience to kneel down as in a ritual; also “don’t blame the moon”, “dust”, “in search of insomniou sheep” can be categorized as spiritual works that make us think about religious, nationality, dreams and reality etc.

Although she doesn’t have a unified style for creating art works, undoubtedly, “spiritual” is one of the most important key words in her artistic life, at the same time “ambiguity” is another most important key word, which sometimes added playfulness to her works.

Firstly, the spiritual elements showed in her attempts to eliminate differences between people including cultures, races, sexes and sexualities. This reveals her alienated perspective that looks at the world with ‘god’ eyes sometimes, like stand a step
outside the society. Therefore, her works are not very emotional and personal, at least
not told explicitly. Even in some of her early works might contain a few personal
elements such as a work called ‘within’ (1998) is a double layers photo with her back
image in front overlaying an old family photo. However, the faces on the photo were
burnt to be unrecognizable and the visual effect is poetic instead of showing strong
emotions. In fact, such personal objects are more rare in her recently works. In
addition, sexual objects, which are usually used to represent personality or
individuality of women, are not common in her works. Actually, we can see an
attempt to reduce the emotional elements from the sexual objects, in her work ‘close
at a distance’ (2000), she made a pair naked man and woman by wax, but she is not
expressing emotions in sexual manner or concerning femininity. The sculptural bodies
are in perfect proportion and not touching each other apart from the sex objects. They
are used to represent sexual instinct of human beings can not be avoided even in
technological era indeed. In contrast, her works shows her concerns on society and
environment we living in such as ‘in search of insomnious sheep’ that introduced a
spiritual ocean journey to participants in metropolitan: Hong Kong; another work ‘so
near year so far’ (2001) recorded citizen’s conversations and put them inside
mailboxes; ‘memories the future’ made the differences between people unfamiliar;

1 Hong Kong university Faculty of Arts visual archive
‘made in Hong Kong’ exposed the consuming mode of Hong Kong tourism etc. As Eva Kitwah MAN (2000) said that her work are always a juxtaposition of family, country and personal emotions. They are mixed together instead of emphasis on one of them. In an interview in 2002, Leung Mee ping states that that from the earliest work ‘else where’ (1992) to ‘so near year so far’ (2001) and ‘memories the future’ (1998-2002) is a progress from individual or personal to Hong Kong and the world.

Making the daily material unrecognizable by changing their shapes, texture, quantity, forms, scales or location, is another feature contributing to the spiritual feeling. Since this reduced the influences of subjectivity and individuality under the artist power. For example, the work ‘ant running end’ exaggerated the size of the ants and project on the wall of galleries which are abnormal appearance of ants. It gave audience a feeling of not looking at any one ants but observing the process of how life run to end. Also, more recent work ‘Two sites’ (2007) enlarged a ‘delete’ button from Mac book into enormous size and place it outdoor like a monumental sign. Although the artist said the enormous size is for making it possible to have strong dialogue with the opposing huge architecture, it also changed the meaning or more precisely, increased the complexity of the ‘delete’ button and shows the authority and manipulation of the

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2 文潔華(2000).自主的族群—十位香港女性藝術家.中華書局,台灣
3 何慶基,郝大衛(2002). 他人的故事·我們的註腳 香港當代藝術研究(1990-1999),香港藝術中心
artist in a public space like many public sculpture did inevitably.

Those ambiguity and contradiction between extreme points are the funniest things to her as she said in the interview: “I like the contradictions in the art works. Work swing between two extreme points is the most interesting one” (我喜欢作品的矛盾性，我觉得作品在两极中间的摆动是最有趣的). That can be restated as her favor in searching a balance situation that is one of the most important traditional Chinese philosophy. The large presentation scale and her usages of small materials also contributed to the creation of ambiguity and solemn atmosphere. As I said before in the exhibition hall of ‘memories the future’ directed audience to kneel down as the installation are ground base and spectacle comparing to individuals; in additional, her latest work, that she planed to place 350000 RMB ten cents coins one by one on the floor, is an excellent example for the size contradiction between space and materials too.

Lastly, she rejected to have one strong political statement in her works, but still we can feel the seriousness in most of her works. Her early work “headless” seems very political but as stated herself: “political is not really her main concern”. Also, in our interview she clarifies that her inspiration for art works are generally base on her own
experience, perspective and attitude, knowledge, instead of political stand or theoretical support. Therefore, we can not categorized her in any exist art historical movement or archive, not feminism, not modernism or postmodernism etc. Although we can find some elements of those categories in her works, it is not obviously and deliberately introduced by the artist. As Eva Kitwah MAN (2000) said Leung Mee ping’s work are expecting a self-exploring process, instead of satisfying others’ expectation on a culture identity. As a result, she showed a quite strong authorship in her work, though the communication ability is also considered by the artist usually. For examples, the postcards art works: old ladies house (2001) and Hong Kong art museum (2003) are interested in the interactivity between the works, the exhibited space and the audiences.

During our interview, apart from some prepared questions, we had causal chats too. When she talked about interesting events in her life, she laughs like a little girl which is very different from her serious face. An impressive case is a mere trifle in her Paris life, that she marked a sign on the window to see the clock from her neighbor because her own clocks were always out of order. To me, this is very interesting art work full of playfulness and voyeuristic thinking. These years, her works are tended to be more liberating in the audience experience and move from museum or galleries to public
area. For example ‘two sites’ (2007), ‘in search on the insomnious sheep’ (2005),
interesting interactivity between art works and space and audience can be seen and
more playfulness elements may be added in the future.