

ARTIST'S STATEMENT (2001)

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WHEN LIFE TAKES SHAPE

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Prints always remind me of the life giving genes DNA. DNA exists in life's plates, creating life bodies of the same codes. Prints are produced through DNA too, being created and brought to life in various media and forms. The human soul is the DNA of prints – abstract thinking manifested in all kind of media. Early woodcuts with their prominent lines and pictograms strike me as similar to a person's childhood, or should we say, the childhood of human thoughts – so simple, and so unrestrained. And then, the thinking process gradually becomes more cautious, developing finally into complicated rituals. The simple lines of the early Buddhist woodcut images and scriptures are purely devotional, and exemplify a religious purpose. They became specified messages that obliterate the artisan's personalities.

When it comes to the “Floating World” of 18th Century Japanese woodblock prints, ideal womanhood was presented by means of intricate styles – perfect femininity manifested through totally masculine lines, executed by the adept hands of superior artists. The main concerns of the messages here concentrated on the rendition of feminine beauty and the grace of landscapes. These are specific themes, but with the difference that the personalities of the artists are also quite distinct. The messages then, did not exist simply for the sake of the subject matter – personal styles were also considered. Names such as Utamaru and Hokusai had since become analogous to fine woodblock prints.

By the time Modernism reached its pinnacle, the art of prints had already matured into more sophisticated forms, and had become the vehicle of personal expressions. The prints of Picasso and Munch for example, are definitely confident and are direct presentation of their inner thoughts and feelings.

As of now, mixed usage of prints techniques, interchanged with computerized technologies have presented us with new facets in the art of prints, which are unprecedented in their diversity. All these enlighten us to the fact that same medium and technique executed by different individuals can result in very different outcomes. If we employ different techniques, and apply them to the mixture of various media, the effect will be even more prominent. And what constitutes such vastly dissimilar outcomes? The DNA of art of course.

New technologies can easily create the illusion that technology itself is the content of the medium. But then there had been numerous inventions and new technologies throughout the ages. When use of fire was first discovered in pre-historic time, it was a new and influential technology, not unlike the computer today. However if we were to travel a few thousand years into the future, would computers be just as commonplace as use of fire is to us today? As we are accustomed to the use of fire, it now becomes less innovative to us.

However, the use of fire is a great discovery. The same applies to computers and whatever that will be invented and discovered thousands of years from now. It is only natural that in every stage in the course of history, there will be inventions of novelty that cater to the need of that particular time frame. The fact that the human brain grows and evolves is a necessary adaptation for human survival.

So the argument over whether the medium carrying the DNA is an old or new concept is inconsequential to our appreciation of art. All new things will eventually become old.

As long as it performs as tool for expression, I have no preference as to what medium I should use. If I can achieve the desired effects with just one plate, I see no point in involving technology simply for the sake of technology. But if it requires a number of media in combination to bring out the desired effect, I will not hesitate to use them to their full effects. Furthermore, if I cannot achieve what I want to achieve with the latest technology, I will try to work out some yet to be invented tools to satiate my needs. This is, of course, more easily said than done, and it takes the DNA of the most superior brain to bring this about, but as the old Chinese saying goes, “the heart simply refuses to die until one reaches the Yellow River”. In other words, the quixotic quest to reach the highest goal is the spirit common to all artistic DNA of the highest caliber.

I have no specific criteria regarding subject contents either. The word content (or message for that matter) can easily lead to the misunderstanding that a particular subject matter, such as landscape, must be present in the pictorial representation in order to convey a theme. To some, pictures too must possess formal and verbal messages such as a news report with its story, a forum with its debates, a religious sermon with its morals, or social campaign with its objective. But contents and messages are not necessarily so restrictive. A human being is a conscious being, and consciousness is the content, the message. Even if it is only a vague sensory reaction, so ethereal and undefined like an unheard voice or an indistinguishable colour, it can become the content of a picture. Be it abstract or figurative, as long as it comes from the flow of human consciousness, the content will be there.

I have made prints out of traditional media such as lithograph, silkscreen, etching and woodblock, followed by the more technologically oriented offset printing, fax, photocopying, and even computer printout. This is not a case of jumping onto the technological band wagon, but a chance

encounter with technology since I live in an age of technology. Using these modern tools is simply a matter of convenience.

And the messages of my pictures are no more than renditions of insignificant, mundane objects. It occurred to me that simple things in our daily life are, to a great extent, the contents which give meanings to our lives. When you buy a stack of paper for example, you put the stack on the table, then you put one piece of paper onto the table and write on it, send it out by post, and then that piece of paper come to rest on your friend's desk, or got lost during transit, or maybe left folded in your own pocket, forgotten. All these objects involved, and many more that do not even make their appearances, come together to become a segment of your life. The thing is, paper may no longer exist after this present age.

Life exists in an eternal cycle in which ordinary objects come together to become ordinary happenings, and ordinary happenings come together to become life. Sometimes the happenings can expand into something of social significance, but mostly, they just limit themselves to the confines of the very personal. We live in the midst of constantly reviewed and designed utensils and environments that we adopted them as the codes of our lives, making contents out of them. A cup may register a particular moment in your life, and the more personal the object, the more expressive the scenario of how an individual lives. Depicting insignificant objects therefore, is my contemplation upon the meanings of their existence.

Images are undergoing constant changes around us throughout the course of history, and modified our concepts and behaviour along the way. Just look at the wall paintings left by prehistoric man in the cave dwellings, and you will know how they had lived. All the codes the ancients left behind: floras and faunas, weapons and amours, floating skirts of flying divinities and hands clasped in blessings and in prayers, are tracks of life imprinted in the path of time. But tangible images are not the only means of expression – spaces with only coloured patches, abstract representations devoid of tangible figurative images, are just as vivid a record of life as figurative images. That is why I am not insistent as to whether the images are figurative or abstract, as long as they are free images derived from life experiences, they will suit me.

Pictures exist in a two dimensional space, which is a limitation, but can also be the ground on which artistic creativity freely roams. That is why up till now, I still choose to work within this space – its limitations as well as its boundlessness fascinate me.

I like this matter of conjuring form. In the process of conceiving shapes into form, my life takes shape too.

生命得以逐漸成形

劉掬色

版畫令我想起生命的誕生，那些遺傳因子 DNA。DNA 存在於生命的版裏，於是有相同密碼的生物體給製造出來。版畫也藉 DNA 延綿生命，在載體裏存在並產生。版畫的 DNA 就是人的靈魂，是抽象思維，體現在各種類的媒介裏面。總覺得早期的木刻，那些以線條為主的文字或圖像，像人的童年，或者說人類思考上的童年，簡單樸拙，自由自在。後來，逐漸變得拘謹節制，成為繁瑣的儀禮。譬如線描的佛經佛像，完全是着眼於禮贊宗教的莊嚴，那是一種指定訊息，刻工的個性大都完全隱去。發展到日本的浮世繪，木刻變成粉雕玉琢的模樣，以陽剛的線條描畫出陰柔的形相，做出彼時男子心目中理想的女性形象。那訊息集中於女子的描容，風景的賞玩。主題是明確的，但裏面有了改變：其中的刻工，充份流露着作畫者的個性，於是訊息不再單一地只為命題存在，同時也存在着個人的創寫手法，好幾個出色的版畫家如哥磨、北齋等，都成了優質木刻版畫的代名詞。

到近代，版畫藝術的思維更見成熟，作品更側重於傳達作者的個性。像畢卡索、孟克等畫像的訊息完全是他們自己性格的呈現，強烈肯定，訴說內心感情。到今日，混合類型的版種交替使用，加上運用到電腦新科技，版畫面貌更產生了史無前例、複雜多端的變化。這使人認識到，方法若是一致，簡單如木版，同是用刀在木上刻，效果都可以很不同。方法若是不一樣，載體是混合類型，就更加有不同的結果。這裏面含有些什麼東西，令結果那麼地不同呢？可說就是那叫做藝術 DNA 的東西了。

新科技因為尖新，容易給人錯覺，以為科技本身就是訊息的內容，反而不問載體載的是什麼。其實每個時代都有尖新科技。火被發現及運用的遠古年代，火也曾是最新的科技，其地位可能跟今日的電腦相似，影響力的深遠也一樣。但不妨這樣想想：幾千年後的人，他日回過頭來，看我們這個剛起步的電腦年代，會不會覺得平平無奇呢？正如我們看遠祖的火，因為已經太習慣火這東西了，覺得火於今日又有什麼了不起呢？

其實，火的運用當然是了不起的，電腦的運用也是。幾千年後人類的甚麼新發明，也一樣了不起。各個年代都有各種適合他們需要的物事產生，這是自然不過的進程。人的思維永遠在長進之中；求新，是求生存的一種必要裝備。

所以讓裝載着 DNA 的媒體工具是新是舊之類的問題來左右我們對作品的觀賞，是大可不必的。樣樣媒體都曾新過，亦必會變舊。

我對媒介無偏見，認為什麼工具都可以用，只要能切合所需表達的內容。若然最簡單的一個版做出來已足夠，就沒有必要為科技而科技。同一理由，有需要運用不同媒介混合來呈現一種思維就該不厭其詳地用。又假如連現有的新科技用盡了也未能達到某一創作意念，則不妨把那未出現的工具也磨磨出來，直做到滿意為止。當然，後者說的容易做的難，非勁好頭腦的 DNA 不容易做得到。雖然常言道：不到黃河心不死，是所有優質藝術 DNA 共有的精神。

我對所載的訊息無偏見。說到載着的訊息，容易使人產生誤解，以為一定是有主題點明的如風景如人物，如故事之於新聞報告，如議論之於城市論壇，或道理之於向善的宗教，或行動之於社會的關懷等等，圖畫也須註明這些，才堪稱為有訊息。但其實，訊息又何止是這種樣子呢？上述各種講法固然是訊息的種種，但人生在世，無時無刻不在知覺之中，有知覺就有訊息。訊息也不過是平常生活，所思所感，也可以完全不必對應世事。不關現況，沒有故事，甚至也無風景也無人，只一些輕微的感念，輕得好像聽不見的聲音，看不清的顏色，一樣也可以入畫。它們或是抽象或是具象，只要是來自人生命的流動，就有可能成為圖畫裏的訊息。

我的畫使用過傳統的石版、絲印、銅版、木版來做，後來還運用商業印刷量很大的柯式機、傳真機、影印機、以至電腦打印機，並不是崇尚新科技，而只是因為，我適逢其會，活於這個可以提供這些器物的時代裏。這些媒體方便我記錄我的創作思維。

而我的畫要說的，又都是日常生活裏毫不起眼的事物，我把它們逐一來造型。我常常覺得所有圍繞在我們身邊的東西，很簡單的物品，很大程度是我們生活內容的組織成份。譬如你買紙，起先一疊紙放在桌上，後來一張紙放到桌上，後來又一張紙上寫了字，後來紙又寄了出去，放在你朋友的書桌上，或者遺失在路上，或者長留在衣袋裏。想想：上面說的東西：紙、桌、路、衣服，還有許多沒有在鏡頭裏出現的東西，不正在構成一個你的生活片段嗎？其中說的紙，過了這個時代，恐怕以後世上就再沒有紙這樣的東西了。平常物件構成平常事件，平常事件構成平常生活，生活永遠在這種流動之中，有時事件變得大，擴及社會，但更多時事件只屬小小的個人。我們活在長久經過篩選和設計的器物環境之中，我們採用了它們作為生活的符記，構造我們自己的內容。一隻杯就都記下了某一刻的生活，越私人的物件越見出人存活的處境。拿不起眼的物件來造型，是我對它們存在的反思。

從古到今，物象形體在我們身邊不斷地變，同時改變着我們的想法與行為。只要看看祖輩在山洞裏的壁畫，就可知道他們曾怎樣活過，藉着他們畫下來的符記：牛羊弓箭、花果戰袍、飛天裙裾、合拾身形。但也不一定非有物象不可，生命感念許多時也不靠物形啓動，離開物象的抽象思維，純然只見形塊色幅的空間，也一樣是記載着鮮活的生命訊息。是以我對圖像是抽象是具象全無執着，只要是自由的，只要是來自生活感受的，就好。

圖畫規律有它完全屬於平面空間的一種存在方式，這個空間既是限制，也是自由得以產生和確立的所在地。所以我至今還是喜歡在平面的空間裏遊玩，覺得它同時是有限又是無限的。

我喜歡這個造型的遊戲。在繪畫、思考，從而產生美好形狀的時候，我的生命亦得以逐漸成形。

註：此文寫於 2001 年，應香港文化博物館之邀，特為「拉濶印象 — 版畫藝術變奏」展覽而作。展覽於 2001 年 5 月 18 日至 8 月 31 日於沙田香港文化博物館舉行。