CONVERSATIONS: What is on the mind of one of Beijing’s emerging artists?

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Art of Perception: Interview with Guo Hongwei by Katherine Don

Guo Hongwei (b. 1982, Chongqing) likes music, ink painting, poetry and listens to U2, Radiohead and the Velvet Underground. He is a young artist in living in Beijing starting to create a narrative of his life that is realized in his often clever and humorous paintings and sculptures.

Who are your biggest influences?
My first thought is of Tom Friedman and Erwin Wurm. Friedman allowed me to understand the world in ways that I found more interesting and important than expected. Seeing his work changed my way of viewing everyday objects (and makes you feel smarter!) A particular kind of approach towards, observation of, and understanding things combined with a new perspective leads to a new and interesting way of producing. And from this I started looking for a new focus on the outside world. I first saw the work by Erwin Wurm on the cover of an Art in America magazine. Wurm is also a big influence because he allowed me to understand what is full of wisdom and humor. His works are so funny. This kind of wisdom can influence your perception antennas to extend into particular details of everyday life and things. Some would suggest that this ability to perceive the richness of reality is the kind of perception that I am looking for.

What’s the most important thing in your studio? / What are your key ingredients for creativity?
My work!?!? Haha. perhaps it is just the general atmosphere of my studio itself filled with random things and piled books that I find my self immersed in another world, which all help me think about my work and ponder other important things. When creating work, a key ingredient is that I try to focus on emphasizing the ability to experience and perceive.

When did you start playing music? How does that interact with your art practice?
I LOVE music, but I am just a music fan. Music has the potential to influence, but for
now, it is just one thing that enriches my understanding of the outside world.

What is the top played song on your iPod?

What do you feel is the biggest difference between artists of your generation and the ones before?
This is a sensitive and fundamental question. It is really determined by an artist’s individual ways and means of resolving this issue, not from the outside world. (i.e. social and cultural factors).

What are you working on now?
My solo exhibition in New York. They are all very simple things that are funny or just aesthetically pleasing objects that allow me to discover the texture and details found on the surface. I want to call attention to the existence of the ability to perceive, to experience things, that way everyone can gradually possess this capacity in order to discover the depth of their own reality—just like the simple happiness I have found in my life.

What would the title of your autobiography be?
“The Ability to Perceive.” For me, art is something you experience. If you do not have the ability to perceive, you can’t understand what an artist is trying to do. The art work itself is not important, it is about having this ability that you can begin to touch and influence others.

(This interview was conducted over email and at a bowling alley in Beijing, March 2010)

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