

Chen Ping, Paint, Hope & Pain

Chen Ping is a classic example of a modern globalized Chinese. At least fluent in Chinese and English, he alternates his work and life between both Beijing and Australia, the country he migrated to. The artist is recognized and put on the international art-map by various institutions such as the Australian China Council, the Australian trade Commission or Art Equity, an "Australian company dedicated to bringing fine Australian art within the reach of ordinary art lovers and investors", as it promotes itself. On the path from "made in China" to "created by Chinese", Chen Ping is surely offering his share. He's a Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts graduate, with a completed higher art scholarship from the University of Tasmania. He is currently laboring on an intriguing series. It seems abstract, yet –according to the artist– it is far from it, "I see my works as realism, they are not abstract paintings. I am not dealing with any art form. I am dealing with what I want to say. If you have something to say you find a way to say it." He enforces his point of view when he claims "art by itself is insignificant. Art has to be life, hard life. There can never be art without the substance of life." The life he wishes to portray is one that is difficult to hold together. Deconstruction is dominant in his work as much as it is part of his life. For instance in the way his nationality is reengineered. By international dynamics of today's world he's now an Australian artist. Deconstruction, is a dynamic he refers to as "cracks", "melting" or "destruction". As such, his paintings are in motion, they create visual illusions. His work is not simply a copy of present-day Chinese artistic language nor another Pop Art rendition of a predominant Chinese leader dressed in an acrylic suit, neither does his work re-digest revolutionary art. Chen Ping's creations invite the viewers to participate and immerse into his initially inaccessible works. In this sense the works are more demanding. His artwork is undoubtedly expressing a very emotionally-loaded message on the human predicament and its endless layers of tensions. These range from fact versus dream and hope; liberty versus constraint; unity versus fragmentation, dilution versus contrast.

Peter Timms, an Australian art reviewer, makes a stronger observation when he writes that "they hint at something lost, something forsaken, something troubling about the times in which we live." Chen Ping transforms any person's picture who has been captured by our global media and that touches the artist in the core of his sensitive being: military commanders, such as General David Petraeus, African refugees, soldiers, etc. In fact the series began with Chen Ping seeing a picture of a girl found in Melbourne station abandoned by her father –who murdered the mother. The girl resembled Chen's own daughter –it made him cry, "I saw my daughter in the fate of this girl. Chen shares his deepest fear, "it was a reflection of my fear towards her. I took the newspaper, went back to my studio and started painting a structure of the [girl's] face. The paint dripping down is not simply a technique but is part of a symbolic gesture while we are in a struggle. It shows the process of destruction." Understanding Chen Ping, the dripping effect refers to the way the individuals –surrounded by an event– are subtly propagandized in the globalized media. He continues that, "the artistic language I use is a simple language [expressing a tension] between structure and destruction." The faces are turned into massively enlarged portraits torn out of their historic or political context. The oil on canvas paintings offer a representation of his view on a transcendental human condition. "My paintings always start with one [social] instance or one figure. Though I try to reveal the whole of humanity: its

suffering, its hope and what we face... I need to start from one instance. It is [however] not the purpose [of my work]. I like to visualize the human struggle... beyond one moment... a universal ideal, a human story [as a] witness of human history, that is humanity.”

His creations have character. They push and pull a patient viewer in and out of their poignant and evocative magnetism. The human faces or bodies are not seen within the first instances of a viewing. The works initially trick the eye into perceiving the thick earth-colored triangular shapes of paint in ultimate tension with thin layers and the painter's unique conceptual technique of paint dripping. With a bit of squinting, partials of a face appear. Chaos seems the main force yet a rationale and solid artistic structure undoubtedly supports each of the pieces.

The human beings in Chen Ping's work, symbolizing an unnerving and larger than life concept as “humanity”, show factual cracks in the veneer of their daily observed composure. The backgrounds or surroundings are empty mono-colored bleak spaces, "the emptiness is maybe more powerful than us... That's why we're cracking though we can still hold on, we are struggling to maintain ourselves... Hope is the one thing that keeps us going", supports the creator.

Some viewers described Chen Ping's works as scary. Than again, who wouldn't be, when confronted with a raw and honest message depleted from its decorative covering?

Jan Hauters "That's Beijing" Magazine, Sep 2008