

Luo Qing: Modernism in the Postmodern Abyss

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The only self-consciousness which can be conveyed in Luo Qing's painting is the moment when desperation turns into aesthetic judgment. Luo Qing's painting is permeated with a sense of desperation completely trapped in miserable mire, struggling, fragile but poetic.

What else can painting help? Luo Qing seems to look for the existing significance of painting as such and his own. As the contemporary painting tends to prefer the postmodern appropriation of photos and well-known figures and marries itself to popular images, Luo Qing has taken the road back by attempting to remove the public tendency from pictorial images and to turn to a more individual one.

In Luo Qing's picture, an individual self is never a happy one but an injured, fatigue, depressed, and even desperate subject powerlessly lost in a jungle society. He climbs upon a gigantic branchy withered tree, or lies in a canoe-like bathtub, or flies towards a huge skull as in fantasy, or huddles up in a cage for animals, which signifies a jungle image of human society, symbolizes a relationship between the maltreater and the maltreated, and produces a desperate metaphor between the subject and the impasse.

In his description of individual situation, Luo Qing adopts many a subjective metaphor of jungle society such as the absolutely gloomy and completely dark sky color without any spiritual light. Thus, he transforms the spiritual darkness into environmental images and approaches the modernist thematic characteristics in pictorialized psychology: an individual self is desperate; the

existence is absurd; the world is hopeless; and the subject is insignificant and frail.

For the subjective condition and psychological tone, Luo Qing has not simply repeated the modernist traits in his picture plane. In his painting, modernism does not end yet. It is not only the termination of the desperation and nihilism happening in the early 20th century, and what's more, the sense of desperation has further intensified. It seems that Luo Qing's contemporaries all have escaped from the modern abyss by taking the postmodern express train and merely Luo Qing has been left sinking more and more deeply into the modernist abyss.



Thereby, Luo Qing has never represented the postmodern merry face in his tableau but his abyss and desperation still embody a sort of synchronism. The abyss into which Luo Qing has fallen is equal to a deep well and the subject with his spirit imprisoned deeply underground feels more hopeless of redemption on account of the worldly revelry. The dark sky in the artist's picture does not mean the actual space of modern allegory but the darkness in the postmodern deep well which appears in the temporal reality rather than exists metaphysically.



Some pictures depict an individual self who hopelessly lies prone in a canoe stranded on the horizon. However in much more pictures, the canoe is often replaced by a

bathtub, a household carrier without any navigating possibilities but with tap running and water splashing in all directions. In Luo Qing's painting, this is the image closest to everyday life.

Maybe as a more miserable abyss, the artist's deep-well-desperation stands for a kind of modernism in the postmodern context. Driven by his life and free will, the subject still looks upward but what he can see is a metaphor of personal abyss. Objective as the metaphor is, it seems like an individual self, a waste and lonely world, boundless and outletless.

The theme of Luo Qing's painting seems more desperate than that of early modernism because of the outletless and empty world and the hardly-self-redeemed subject. The subject under the artist's brush neither fiercely struggles as in early modernism nor vigorously resists desperation. It looks as if he just ponders over desperation and experiences the death-like imprisonment and suffering. It can probably change an unbearable situation into self-viewing and even into illusion-like meditation.

Sometimes, he supposes himself to squat down before a pile of dead birds to watch their dead state for a long time while wandering in a trance. Sometimes, he indulges in an assumed illusion as if he becomes numerous flying men floating towards an enormous skull on which he lies as lying across on a huge withered tree. Sometimes, he seems to kneel down with thousands of his other forms under the sky to be tried by gods as the demon-like supernatural birds hover above them. To a certain extent, it is a kind of maltreatment of poetic quality or a magnificent and pleasant fantasy just like the aesthetics hold by the Italian director Pier Paolo Pasolini.

The ultimate of human desperation and maltreatedness lies in the pleasure resulting from extreme suffering and in the imagination produced by abnormal corporeal experience. In the reality of one's own, desperation has changed into a sort of aesthetics or a poetic illusion and the suffering has been transformed and redeemed so that both the corporeal and spiritual agony disappears. That is to say, it is the coincidence of the pleasure of extreme suffering with the free corporeal image that can result in the surreal pleasure of sheer viewing.



Some of the artist's experience-like paintings are closer to real images, for example, in one he lies on Mary's legs, or in another he is maltreated by U.S. Army as what the Islamic prisoners in Guantanamo have experienced. It demonstrates that Luo Qing's painting still relates to a redemption theme in the social and political field but it expresses the political and social encroachment on the individual realm rather than a direct relationship between art and politics. In this relationship chain, the individual self serves as a medium between art and political society.

Some of his works directly represent the political domain such as the prison in Guantanamo. Anyhow, these pictures can never really embody the poetic significance hidden in the depth of imagined agony, likely in the ultimate of desperation. In the ultimate land, he holds neither consciousness of redemption nor imagination of hope. The only spiritual awareness left in his subject is to face desperation.

Such “facing” signifies self-facing in an absolute and sheer sense, not for redemption but for experiencing the desperation of redemption and its forms. In the artist’s tableau, the poetic significance originates from the factors of hope and redemption totally stripped off the picture plane and from the corporeal property to which desperation attaches itself. As desperation turns into a complete suffering form, it possesses the poetic trait.

Seemingly as an extreme example of the theme of modernity, Luo Qing’s painting retreats into an actual self realm. In the painting of early modernism, the subject standing on the cliff edge observes the abyss and experiences nihilism and terror. As for Luo Qing, he has already fallen into the abyss and feared nothing in the bottomless well of desperation. This is a kind of modernism in the postmodern abyss.









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