

Frolic in City—Xiong Lijun and Her Paintings

By Yu Ke

Time flied into the 21st century, Chongqing, a metropolis in the southwest of China, does not change its obstinate dock culture handing down for uncountable years, due to the coming of a new century. People in Chongqing still take delight in talking about their self-sufficient culture. Fortunately, the roam brought by globalization occasionally makes the inland city experiences culture pleasure and frolic attitude of fashionable life more or less in the context. However, these mixed and faintly discernible outer cultures revealed not only visual but also aural uncertainty in a hazy city. Therefore it is hard to say which one is true or not. So artists living in this city are forced to leave their native place to seek for another habitat, or fulfill their variety of artistic conception on the rove.

As a result, when Xiong Lijun finished university study and brought her paintings to appear in some exhibitions in Shenzhen, Chongqing and Beijing, she indeed found a end-result for her paintings after a long and continuously roving. Perhaps it is not important that an American broker and one or two critics showed interesting in Xiong's paintings, but it is definite, from now on, that the artist will not have a feeling of absence any more for images different from the past, which created by herself. As she attempted to dissociate herself from connatural pattern and doctrine of academism, and go beyond other artists in a long time, she never knew that her experience would bring what kind of feelings to others. The artist who is keen on city life eventually had a possibility to link her paintings and her cognition to life until the time before and after she finished her postgraduate education, then a range of cartoon-like images were formed and a picture space belong to herself was set up.

Actually, in 1990s, some young artists in southern China began to use meaningful painting game to replace old painting archives. Due to a particular geographic relation, there are always some distinguish art in southern China comparing to art in northern China that centers in Beijing (here just a division in term of geography). As there is no obvious seasonal change and people adopt a nihilistic attitude to ideology in the south, artists living in here prefer to create comfortable images to acquire their pursuit and satisfaction of life through direct experience of modern city life. For this reason, popular culture in southern China, which is generated by great economic change, makes a positive impact on today's city culture life in China. But for some reason, the cartoon-generation that emerged in former century did

not achieve its culture expansion to a great extent. Someone said, cartoon-generation in southern China is not a pure cartoon-generation, it still remains some signs of traditional art more or less and keeps a lukewarm relationship with modern culture, so it is lack of a substantial energy.

Although we don't know if Xiong Lijun had consciousness to use the pattern of cartoon painting originally arised in Southern China for conference or not, we always have an impression that a few signs of cartoon painting still can be seen in her paintings. I cannot rule out this possibility either. After the change of life and transformation of culture, new generation artists might have a characteristic that they want to be different from the painting pattern in 1980-1990's consciously or unconsciously, and they are willing to walk on another track. Life will become easier for them and they can avoid suffering from a set of old dogmas. So some artists, such as Xiong Lijun, are different. She will not follow the feature of hybrid, but to take a simplified painting patter and playful attitude to structure her distinct painting style, thus to practice her various imaginations about culture and life. Xiong's paintings have a delicate, direct and exaggerated image expression. These images are seldom to be seen in past painting practice in China. Even today, many contemporaneous artists no matter in middle age or young, are still unable to get rid of some dull aesthetic ideology. While these artists are adhere stubbornly to their own ideas both in form and content again and again, Xiong Lijun found the possibility for generating real meaning to life by art evidently. Factors in Xiong Lijun's paintings, such as portraits with feelings of transparence, spray of water within virtual space, flat background, dazzling colors and perspective shape, are against the normal Chinese painting with over dependency on symbol, metaphor and scoff in last two decades. Beauty isn't a disagreeable word any more and becomes one of painting vocabulary reasonably. It let people, especially young people, feel amiable. In a very long time, critics accept one principle that ugliness is better than beautiful rubbish. Looking at traditional shape concept, this principle is much food for thought in terms of the change of time or art ecology. For this reason, we could see much displeasing visual images in a range of avant-garde easel paintings. As time goes on, we are immunized from these images to differentiate our art cognition. As a generally accepted point in fact, while modern life shows somewhat outdated, we certainly need new visual language to restructure relations between art and audience. In respect of Chinese modern art, if we said those famous and outdated artists dedicate on digging and expressing wound and grief, we should say new generation of artists have shifted to promote fashion style and relaxed

play attitude, so as to shake those old art doctrines.

Focusing on researching of new image no matter in ideal or artistic skill, Xiong Lijun delivers a playful, innocent and superficial image style to us. It predicts not only the impact of culture transformation to artist, but also a further simplification of art after a variety of experiences. Certainly, the principle of new isn't the only reason for all these results, it also because of the culture connotation. What we can affirm is that, Xiong Lijun who comes from the new artists generation of southwest China has walked away from characteristics of southwestern art in a very long time and set up a new way to extract nutrient from Pop art and Cartoon art. But She does not completely accept the explanation expression of Pop art, she is interesting in both plot and manual skill of painting, so we are difficult to clearly find out her produce track in terms of art history.

In fact, within a great-materialized social circumstance, the new generation of artists often cut off pictures from TV, fashion magazines, advertisements and cartoon films and they are out of ordinary to keep away from solemn theme and over dependence on art history. It is confused the region between painting and relative knowledge in certain degree. For this reason, we naturally take notice of composite elements that embodied in Xiong Lijun's *New Idol* and *In The Same Boat*. These composite elements not only meet her need of painting image, but also indicate her attitude to seek live event. Though we cannot completely understand her implication only from her uncertain art language that we need to figure out, the artist is insisting that the puerility and rhapsody in her paintings do not mean that she has a mind to cover up inanity under outward appearance by using beauty. Nowadays, it needs to be very smart to use existing image resources and make images to be inconceivable by taking the method of patching-up and borrowing. But one problem is that these composite images don't differentiate from relative live prototype, we are depressed to see the limit of easel painting. Though it is easy and smooth in outward appearance, there is no relevant feelings of strangeness, that makes us deeply understand her paintings.

In addition, we can still see a cartoon-like technique that is generally accepted by young people in Xiong Lijun's *Sprint 2008* and *Nightmare*. This technique is an ultimate expression method of extreme pop style, it produces a great impact on the artist and she develops a kind of meticulously decorated language with distinguishing characteristics in a short distance form and structure arrangement. The language actively influenced audiences' appreciation interest. It seems good to

make art popularized by using common art language and relaxed play attitude. It is also an effective approach to keep far away from stereotyped affectation of representationalism.

Recently, Xiong Lijun unusually produced a range of works that are similar to theme painting, such as *Don't Teach Me*. It is another thinking after the image of clear-cut, sporting and naughty young people. Glaring red, raffish green, colorful adornment and symbolic dashing spirit, all these elements not only further enhanced its readability, but also let us generate a free and plain wish in front of these revolutionary images, although it is still uproarious and noisy.

Looking at the works of modern young artist with traditional view, we might have a strange feeling and consider that their self-righteous behavior have deviated from those must-insist art doctrines. If we said Xiong Lijun's works partially represent unsteady emotion, color and action as well as infatuation to beauty that showed in works of modern young artists. It only goes to manifest that she brings aggressive energy to today's painting. As a new art without history, we could only say it is an outcome of 21st century's frantic art. From another point of view, these saucy and intrepid young artists might be really able to let art close to our life via popular culture, and created a meaningful thing that is different from the past. We can also find out why those contrived gaps within modern art are just filled by these young artists. To be honest, when I sit in front of Xiong Lijun's paintings, I will be at a loss sometimes, but I think the most important thing might be that there are so many people interested in her paintings, just like me.