

Liao Wen: Almost Collapsing Balance

Dates: 2021.09.11 – 10.23

Address: Capsule Shanghai, 1st Floor, Building 16, Anfu Lu 275 Nong, Xuhui District, Shanghai, China

All paths lead to the same goal: to convey to others what we are. And we must pass through solitude and difficulty, isolation and silence in order to reach forth to the enchanted place where we can dance our clumsy dance and sing our sorrowful song...

-- Pablo Neruda

Capsule Shanghai is pleased to present *Almost Collapsing Balance*, artist Liao Wen's first solo exhibition at the gallery, featuring her recent sculptural works.

In a recent conversation, Liao Wen mentioned a new understanding of her body: due to extensive woodwork, the skin on her fingers was peeling off. Gradually, her sense of tactility also faded, flattening her perception of surroundings, which allowed her to gain a new world experience once her sense of touch resumed. Puppets - a creative medium Liao Wen trained in - simplify the human body while exposing their embedded distortion. What the artist encountered and what the limewood and silicone have undergone with her seem to have been etched unadorned in the details of the artworks.

The Women's Festival in ancient Greece known as Thesmophoria, the Adonia in Athens, and therapy for hysteria in Victorian England engendered this series of works. Liao Wen's interest in these stories is partly rooted in the collective revelry of the present - an inescapable experience for the artist in a chaotic sea of information since the outbreak of the pandemic or perhaps an even earlier point in time, the emergence of which she was not necessarily aware of.

However, this is not exactly a criticism of revelry, for the artist is more concerned with the absence and vital importance of rituals. **As a transient transcendence of time and space, rituals present the discomfort of unfulfilled desires and the opposition between the ideal and the body, thus providing participants with an intense experience of being in the world.** These three stories exemplify the multidimensionality of rituals. They move away from mere self-soothing to an utter state of liminality by creating further anxiety and restlessness. In such a state, participants discover their limits through revelry, reach temporary balance through movement, and achieve transcendence that approaches eternity through pulsing balance.

In these rituals, the artist focuses on the female body, passages of rituals, mythological origins, and natural extracts. She digests and transforms these stories through a unique and proficient approach: a fig tree, a symbol of rebirth and purity, is buried in a wooden womb and ovaries; a silicon reproduction of decaying flesh customarily buried by Greek women a year prior to the ritual is half-covered and half-hidden in a hollow cavity; myrrh (allegedly transformed from tears of the goddess Maia and used as an aphrodisiac substance during Adonia) together with the torso on tiptoe forms *The Garden of Adonis*. These transformed creations are often placed in a system of dynamic balance. The bodies made of limewood still retain their human joints, which

suggest the limit of movement and reveal a tension of stillness. Like revels in the ritual, limitation becomes the focus in this "self-supporting" structure, providing a palpable physical and emotional experience at all times with all efforts and even with gritted teeth. During this process, the artist initiates and completes the ritual again and again. In this sense, **the exhibition and the artworks before us are simultaneously relics of ritual and its ongoing practice. Their existence implies the continuation of ritual and that we remain between eternal desire and impotence.**

However, even a viewer with no prior knowledge of the three above-mentioned stories can intuitively perceive that, in an equilibrium on the verge of collapse, the artist strives to find the courage and hope to counteract darkness through her own limits and an undercurrent of forces. The ritual, as "a state of collective liminality", is a manifestation of a certain "disorder". People rely on rituals because they witness the expression of disorder but fail to understand disorder per se. What is crucial here is not the stories and rituals themselves, but how the artist retells them, and why she persists to do so in this day and age when scientific positivism prevails. How can these rituals and myths, which are generally deemed futile or false, inspire a new outlook on ourselves and the world?

From the myth of Adonis, the oppressed ancient Greek women did not only learn about Adonis' tragedy; they also empathized with Maia, who was morally condemned to endless suffering. Through the king of Sefiroth's innocence, they came to understand that the world did not always abide by the law of causality or karma, which granted the myth and the rituals they performed complexity and vitality. The difference between a fable and a myth is that the former often has an ending, whereas the myths before "Death of God" never conveyed reasons but simply presented a diverse and dynamic world. The artworks in this exhibition should not be treated or interpreted as visual transformations of certain myths or rituals, for that would render them "heliosthetic art" with distinct outlines, just like all myths are crammed into an intellectual framework today. We are accustomed to the idea that any narrative can form an axis, just as we expect a "theme" and "meanings" from an artist's work or an art exhibition. Nevertheless, **what truly matters is how the forgotten understanding and episteme are rediscovered and re-emphasized through the artist's work and how our shared insecurity and hardship are transformed into a communal spirit of solidarity.**

On the eve of the exhibition, Liao Wen looks back on her creative process and says, " In these four gallery spaces, whether the works resorts to ritual or embodied experience, they all share an underlying primordial motive, which may be love and hurt in relationships, motherhood, survival instincts or passion." Perhaps, it can also be traced back to an indelible sense of truth, as myths once encouraged, and just like you regain perception from the details of constant creation.

...but in this dance, or this song, there are fulfilled the most ancient rites of our consciousness in the awareness of being human and of believing in a common destiny.

-- Pablo Neruda

Text: Chen Baiqi

廖雯：**接近坍塌的平衡**

展期：2021. 09. 11 - 10. 23

地址：胶囊上海，上海徐汇区安福路 275 弄 16 号 1 层

所有的路都通向一个目标：向他人讲述我们是什么。而为了向着这个令人喜悦的地方跋涉，我们必要经历孤寂和痛苦、隔绝、还有静默。在那里，我们可以笨拙的舞蹈，唱着我们忧伤的歌……

—— 巴勃罗·聂鲁达 (Pablo Neruda)

胶囊上海荣幸举办艺术家廖雯在画廊的首次个展“接近坍塌的平衡”，呈现她近期创作的雕塑作品。

廖雯在近期的对话中提到了关于自我身体的新领悟：由于做了大量的木工，手指层层褪去的皮肤和逐渐消失的触觉抹平了她对于周遭的感知，却又让她在重新找回触感之后获得了关于世界的崭新体验。木偶——作为廖雯饱受训练的创作媒介——虽然简化了人的肉身，却进一步暴露了它们深层的扭曲。艺术家遭遇过什么，这些椴木和硅胶与她一起经历了什么，近乎赤裸地印刻在作品的诸多细节中。

孕育这一系列作品诞生的是三个仪式：古希腊的妇女节、雅典的阿都尼亚节和英国维多利亚时期的歇斯底里症疗法。廖雯对这些故事的兴趣一部分来源于集体狂欢的当下，这是疫情以来或是连自己都意识不到的长时段里，艺术家在完全失序的信息汪洋中最无法回避的体会。但这并不尽然是对狂欢的批判，艺术家更多联想到的是仪式的缺失和重要性。**作为一种时空上的短暂超越，仪式呈现了那些欲望无法被实现的不适和理想与身体之间的对立，由此为参与者带来了一种存在于这个世界的强烈体验。**而在这三个故事中，我们还看到了仪式的更多面向。它们摆脱了单纯的自我安慰，而是通过进一步营造焦虑和不安去获得某种彻底的中介状态 (liminality)。在这样的状态里人们通过狂欢找到了极限，通过运动达到了暂时的平衡，又通过重复的平衡获得了迫近永恒的超脱。

在这些仪式中，艺术家着重关注女性的身体、仪式的仪轨、神话的溯源和自然提取物她用自己独特也擅长的方式将故事进行了消化和转换：象征着新生和纯洁的无花果树被包裹于木质的子宫和卵巢之内；硅胶仿造的、希腊妇女去年埋葬的腐肉半遮半掩地缩塞于空腔之间；梅亚女神的眼泪化成了阿都尼亚节中用来刺激性欲的没药，和踮起脚尖的身躯一起构成了《阿多尼斯的花园》。而这些转换而来的创造，往往又被艺术家放置于一套动态平衡的系统之中。椴木型塑而成的身体仍然保留了人的关节，它们意味着运动的极限，也呈现着静止的张力。极限，正如仪式当中的狂欢，在这个“自支撑”的结构中成为了真正的着力点，时刻竭尽全力地、甚至咬牙切齿地提供着可

感的身体和情感经验。这个过程中，艺术家一次又一次地发起并完成了仪式。在这种意义上，**展览及眼前的艺术品既是仪式的遗迹，又是持存的仪式本身。**它们的存在意味着仪式的延续，意味着我们仍然处于永恒的欲望和无能之间。

但哪怕是对上述三个故事毫无了解的观众，也可以直观地感知到，**在这些不知道哪一刻就会崩坏平衡中，艺术家通过力的暗流涌动，奋力尝试着依靠自身的极限去寻求抵消黑暗状况的勇气和希望。**作为“集体中介状态”的仪式，其实是某种“失序”的外显。而人们之所以不得不依赖仪式，是因为往往我们只能看到失序的表现，却始终无法理解失序本身。在这里，重要的不是艺术家讲了哪些故事中的仪式或哪些关于仪式的故事，而是艺术家如何讲、为什么在科学实证主义统治的今天仍然尝试着讲述和表达。这些被普遍认知为无效或假的仪式和神话，还能如何让我们重新认识自己和世界？

受到压迫的古希腊的女性，在那个关于阿多尼斯的神话当中所读到的不止是主人公阿多尼斯的悲惨命运，她们也与受到道德谴责而获得无尽痛苦的梅亚感同身受，她们亦从赛普洛斯的王的无罪中理解这个并非有因必有果的世界，由此神话和她们举办的仪式才产生了更强大的复杂性和生命力。寓言和神话的区别在于，寓言往往是有结局的，而“上帝之死”之前的神话从不讲述道理，仅仅是动态地呈现一个更多元的世界。展览中的这些作品，不应该被处理和理解为某些神话和仪式的视觉转换。倘若如此，它们将如今天被知识化之后的所有神话一样，成为一种轮廓分明的“日神艺术”。今天我们已经习惯了一切的叙事都能够形成主轴和表述，正如我们对一个艺术家的作品和一个展览都不禁要产生“主题”和“意义”的期待。可**真正重要的，是这些已经失落的理解和认识型，如何通过艺术家的工作被重新发现和强调起来，这些我们共享的不安和困顿，又如何转化为一种同舟共济的社群精神。**

展览前夕廖雯回顾自己的创作过程时说道：“在这四个展厅里，无论作品诉诸的是仪式还是具身体验，它们都拥有更深层的、共通的原始动机。或许是关系中的爱与伤害，或许是母性，或许是关于生存本能、或关于激情。”它们抑或是关于一种难以磨灭的真感，正如神话一度所鼓励的那样，正如你从不断创造的细节中重获知觉那样。

……但是，在这舞中，或这歌中，在我们觉察到自己成为人，并坚信于一个共同的命运之时，我们的良知完成了它最古老的仪式。

—— 巴勃罗·聂鲁达 (Pablo Neruda)

撰文：陈柏麒