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'Is There a there there? An interview with Yuan Yuan' by Riccardo Barluzzi

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Paris - Interviews

Is There a there there? An interview with Yuan Yuan

11 HOURS AGO

During my stay in Paris for **FIAC 2015** I had the chance to have a talk with **Yuan Yuan** who was there in occasion of his latest solo show "There is no there there" at **Malingue Gallery**.

Riccardo Barluzzi: Your works take inspiration from Gertrude Stein's impression on her return home to California after living in Paris for 30 years and discovering a changed reality, where everything she used to know was not there anymore. What are your thoughts and feelings about the theme of loss?

Yuan Yuan: As an interfeerer, I try to maintain a neutral attitude in observing how individuals deal with bygone people and things. Thus I need an extremely figurative image whilst trying not to infuse its composition, colours and brushstrokes with personal emotions. I want to confront loss and the first thing I need to do is stay calm. I like the sense of space evoked by Stein's quote – it's not only about constructing a space to satiate the visuals; it is an attempt to conceive, through the visuals, a space for meditation and reflection. This vague, detached and overlapping dimension is what I experience through the sentence, 'There is no there there'; it balances the very figurative, claustrophobic and trivial work that I engage with. I try to render the scenes as realistic as possible, as though they were actual photographs taken from a walk. In a sense, these deliberate settings are, indeed, fantastical installation shots.

RB: From your artworks it looks like the theme of change is conceived in a way such that everything that we used to know leaves behind an emptiness as soon as it disappears. Don't you think that often when there's a loss, there's also a replacement?

YY: I have an immense interest in this replacement, in particular the way architectures alternate amongst social and political transformations. At first, like most artists, I was inclined to taking a certain fragment of history as a departure point for comparison and a sense of erroneous familiarity, exploring through a historical perspective art's position in contemporary society. Gradually, I grew accustomed to hiding behind the figurative object with the hope that my paintings would conjure a lasting interpretation. Employing the Romantic practice, I confront scenes and try to refer to past images in doing so. Contrary to Eugène Delacroix's concern with recovering natural or societal catastrophes and documenting them through paintings, I emphasise the paintings' independence from the events. I approach the canvas like an installation artist, adding, removing, transforming and creating a particular setting, for I want to confront the issues pertaining to a deathward loss and ultimacy. What we need is so much more than courage.

RB: The recurrent symbol of the mirror can be seen as an access to a different reality. Could it be that reality has taken the place of being the dimension that doesn't exist anymore?

YY: The mirage brought up the mirror confounds one's sense of reality and dimension, a state that reflects my family's adrift and tempestuous circumstances. Weaving work and everyday life together, I can no longer tell which dimension of reality is life.

RB: Do you think that the China you used to know is not there anymore?

YY: Indeed I have lived through Chinese urbanisation first-hand. Sometimes, the momentum with which the country transforms into a semblance of America confuses one's sense of place. Yet, the normative behaviour and consciousness remain the same. Under such full-scale urbanisation, the divergence between cities and their habitants wipes out and reconstructs the bottom line of one's logic, rendering one an individual without a home to speak of. When I was young, moving home or abroad seemed incredible. Now, however, the only thought one can entertain is departure, for home is a long lost notion.

Riccardo Barluzzi





Yuan Yuan. Photo: Riccardo Barluzzi.
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Yuan Yuan, exhibition view at
Malingue, Paris, 2015. Photo:
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