

Q: Li Zhenhua
A: Ding Shiwei

Translation / ChatGPT

1. Why do you want to do an exhibition?

The exhibition *What We Talk About When We Talk About Sea Horizon & Moon* is a two-year project that originates from a question. The question is “What we talk about when we talk about sea horizon & moon?”, which is also the English title of the exhibition. I asked a hypothetical question rhetorically in the exhibition and posed more questions for viewers to think about and imagine.

2. What are the questions you are interested in? If you can be self-consistent, what do viewers need to respond to? Will your presupposition intersect with viewers? Sea horizon and the moon, is it just like looking up at the stars?

There are too many questions that I’m interested in, and there are too many mysteries in this world. For example:

- “When we gaze at the sea horizon and the moon, what are we gazing at?”
- “Why do we view the square and the circle as the perfect shapes?”
- “When the traces of modern architecture and industry gradually disappeared from our horizons, when a piece of virgin forest or grassland outside the window, or the horizon gradually disappeared, is what we see now similar to the scenery in the agrarian age or even the prehistoric age?”
- “When the earliest East African Homo sapiens made a simple raft and sailed to the boundless sea horizon, what was his motivation?”
- “What was the first Homo sapiens Lucy thinking about when he stared at the moon in the night sky after he hunted for a whole day?”
- “If the moon is an irregular polygon (polyhedron), can this shape be the perfect one in the modern social cognition?”
- “What is the relationship between the black monolith in Stanley Kubrick’s *2001 Space Odyssey* and Malevich’s *Black Square*? Do they both indicate the ‘knowledge’ that humans extract from nature? Is ‘knowledge’ more known or unknown?”

In fact, viewers are constantly responding to the questions in the exhibition in real life. For example, when we come to the beach, we will unconsciously stare at the sea horizon. When the blood moon and the super moon appear, many people post the images of the moon on WeChat Moments. The cups we use have a perfect circular arc. Using a 3D software, you will find straight lines, squares and circles are the basic graphics to construct a virtual world.

3. Will these questions be answered by the images? What’s hidden under the images are usually different psychological activities. How do you express these psychological activities beyond your images?

This is also a difficulty in this exhibition. I find that the attributes the images present during the narrative process is a double-edged sword. What viewers get from the images is a piece of information related to their own personal experience, and this information or psychological activity can overlap with my exhibition narrative, or they can even be irrelevant. Therefore, the Chinese and English titles of the works can indicate something. I use one Chinese character in combination with a set of English words as a title group, to serve

as a supplement and hint for the image, which can guide viewers in some way. Viewers will be able to have their own psychological activities, and also have an understanding of my exhibition narrative, deep or shallow.

4. Is that sympathy or consciousness overlay?

The role of “I” between the exhibition and viewers is very subtle. I want viewers to have the ability to read the narratives I have set, and I hope they have a stronger self-understanding and interpretation. Therefore, in the work *Relational Aesthetics*, I assume that the entire exhibition hall is a whole. The work on the wall is only my narrative clue, or what you call “sympathy”. I hope the white walls around can stand for viewers’ imagination beyond “sympathy”.

5. Your works span from 2017 to 2019. How did you keep the time and materials of these works consistent?

I have been thinking about creating with “projects”. What’s important is to always center on the theme. In the repeated construction and deconstruction of thinking and narrative, the “body”, medium and state of the work are gradually formed. Time helps me understand many questions, and it also poses more questions. The insomnia at night is always accompanied by the adhesion between the works.

This time, I used many media such as transparent screen, magnetic levitation, wireless charging, programming Raspberry Pi and UV printing, but I don’t want viewers to pay too much attention to the media. The media and materials of the works help me to complete the exhibition narrative better, and make the expression of ideas more accurate.

6. The medium is the message. Besides the direct attributes of communication, the medium also has the closeness or strangeness of daily life. The interface of perception has also been opened by the medium.

Yes, some friends gave me their opinions about the media in the exhibition. For example, about the suspension of the cube and the sphere, it is a game and balance between powers, which makes the cube and the sphere (in *Emerging Knowledge*) resonate with Stanley Kubrick’s black monolith. There is a kind of synesthesia between “knowledge” and “suspension”, that is, both of them are stable yet fragile.

In the work *The Edge of the Earth*, the real water surface and the virtual image overlap each other through a deep transparent screen with a water tank, giving viewers a sense of ecstasy and illusion. Many of them have stayed for the whole 8 minutes to feel the passage of time and the romantic scenery. This coincides with our behavior of unconsciously gazing at the sea horizon on the beach.

7. It is in images and media that art lies.

Yes. As a symbolic emotional space, images have replaced the memories of physical experience. Meanwhile, it is also semiotics based on forms. The medium is information, which controls the degree of abstraction or stylization of the images. The two complement each other.

8. Your entire exhibition can be viewed as an integral work. What do you think of the differences between the individual works and their integration?

This is my latest attempt and it is related to the use of space. With “project” as a working method, I have been considering the significance of classifying all works into a “project”. Therefore, in this project, I used the incomplete narrative of each single piece of work, and made use of the space structures, so that each piece

is corresponding to others in space, medium, and meaning. The entire exhibition hall has a symmetrical central axis structure. The size, form, projection direction and physical location of each piece echo the overall narrative. This can bring viewers a unique viewing experience. They need to break the routine of visiting an exhibition, and feel it after seeing the whole exhibition. They might be at a loss seeing a single piece.

In general, when a single piece can be created and presented independently, it is 100 percent of the narrative. In my exhibition, each single piece might be 80% of the narrative.

9. If a viewer concentrates too much on a single piece, will it affect the overall feeling? Or is this single piece also an overall presentation?

Of course. Viewers tend to be interested in a certain work, instead of the whole. To an artist, it's uncontrollable but viewers are allowed to have this freedom. I'm very pleased that my 80%-narrative works have also interested viewers, and they may have created the rest 20%. I don't think this will affect the overall feeling. I hope that every viewer has his own standard of wholeness. The names used are also an important part of the works. Viewers might ignore them due to their small sizes on the wall. They have unique insights into the images, which might deviate from my narrative, but add more imagination to the works. This is also the charm of art.

10. What is contemporary?

I think in the context of contemporary art, "contemporaneity" indicates our cultural situation, characteristics of the times, and the reality we face. It is based on the universal values of human beings. Moreover, "contemporaneity" is advancing with the times, and the redefinition of art has become the standard of some "successful" contemporary art.

The contemporary soon becomes the past, just a second ago.

We are made up of countless instants.

Coherent, or fragmentary.

And also close, or accompanying.