

On 1st December 2021, we interviewed the Chinese artist Xiao Se (E & X hereafter). Xiao reflected on social issues in postsocialist Chinese society and recalled the development of his artistic career. Besides, the artist shared stories about his paintings that will be shown at his mid-career retrospective solo exhibition “Flying Over the Cotton Field” at Lechbinska Gallery.

E: Can you please tell us about yourself?

X: I was born in the 1970s, the living condition of my generation resembles the social reality depicted in the movie *In the Heat of the Sun* (1994). I grew up in that kind of political climate, and then, came the “reform” and “open,” and the country has developed into what it is now. My experience resonates with the times depicted in Wang Shuo’s novels and their film adaptations. I am the only child in my family. I didn’t have any friends my age throughout my childhood. Most playmates were much older than me, or they were newly born babies. My grandpa belonged to the so-called *chengfen bijiaogao* (literally “higher classes”; it includes bourgeoisie and landlord class, which was the target of class struggle during the

于2021年12月1日，ESCAPEMENT ART与中国艺术家萧瑟（以下简称 E & X）进行一次对话。萧瑟反思了后社会主义时期中国社会中的问题，并回顾他成为职业艺术家的历程。同时，萧瑟和我们分享近期创作的故事。这些近作也将呈现在ESCAPEMENT ART画廊主办的萧瑟职业生涯中期回顾个人展“飞越棉花田”。

E: 可以请您做自我介绍吗？

X: 我是1970年生人。我们这代人经历了类似电影《阳光灿烂的日子》所描绘的社会现实。我在那样的政治气氛里度过我的童年和少年时代，接着经历了“改革开放”，再后来，中国成了今天这般模样。我的经历让我对王朔小说和电影里呈现的时代感同身受。我是家中独生子。童年时期，我并没有同龄的朋友。绝大多数玩伴都比我大得多，又或者是初生婴儿。我的外公属于（按当时文革好听点的叫法）“成分比较高”。他定是有个罪名，被送去改造。因此，我没法儿交朋友。文革刚开始的时候就类似于纳粹反犹主义刚兴起的情形。我感觉自己是个另类，跟别人不一样。当时家庭都物质匮乏。孩子们没有游戏，也没有玩具，只是有什么就玩什么。我父母会从单位带回一沓沓信纸，我就在那瞎画着玩。后来

Cultural Revolution [1966-1976]). He must have had a charge, which sent him to “transformation.”¹ Therefore, I couldn’t make friends. The beginning of the Cultural Revolution was similar to the rise of Nazi anti-Semitism. I felt like a weirdo. I wasn’t treated fairly like everybody else. In those days, families were faced with material deprivation. Children didn’t have games or toys. We played with what we had. My parents always brought home a pile of letterhead from their working units. I started drawing on letterhead for fun. This story went around the neighborhood. It happened that one neighbor was a fine-art teacher, so I began studying art at his home.

E: What medium did your teacher use in his lessons?

X: My teacher was specialized in oil painting. Back then, he secretly taught a few students at his home. He would pull curtains together to protect our painting lessons from being seen by the public and he would turn the lights on. I didn’t prepare for my first lesson. Nor did my teacher have tools for me to make a sketch or watercolor painting. He gave me a small piece of oil-painting paper. I pressed it

这事就传到邻居那儿，就说这地方有个小孩老在家画画。这邻居恰巧是教美术的，就去他家画画。等于说让邻居教我画画。

E: 当时您的老师用什么媒介教学呢？

X: 这老师专长画油画。但是他也偷偷带几个学生，拉上窗帘，不被外面看到里面开灯上课。我记得我去的第一天，我没有作准备，他也没有准备画素描和水彩的工具。他给了我一张很小的油画纸，就按在画板上，就这么开始画着玩。等于说我很早就接触油画了。

¹ There were many state projects to transform “class enemies” into the people of Socialist China during the Cultural Revolution.

on a drawing board and started painting. I was introduced to oil painting at a very young age.

E: Did you continue with oil paintings from then on? How did your education in Environmental Art Design and your job at the China National Symphony Orchestra influence your artistic expression?

X: It may sound a bit odd. I studied fine arts in middle school, but I turned to design in my undergraduate studies. My middle school was the first-art school in Beijing. It has now become a university (i.e., Central Academy of Fine Arts) with an affiliated middle school. I enrolled at the Central Academy of Fine Arts and Design. Liu Ye and Zhan Wang were then senior students in my academy. Although my discipline was called “environmental design,” I made sculptures throughout these four years. I thought this is interesting, I can study arts and design simultaneously. The design program was then aimed to teach the concepts and methods of design. Students did not need to spend much time mastering computer-based design technologies. Instead, painting courses were given higher priority. It was cool because the fine-art students may not even know about the

E: 您自那时就一直画油画么？环境艺术设计教育背景和国家乐团的工作对您艺术表达产生过怎样的影响？

X: 说也奇怪，我从中学开始学美术，但大学读的是设计。我中学时北京最早的工艺美术学校，它现在已经是大学了，办了美院附中。我当时上的是工艺美院。刘野和展望都是我的师哥。虽然我读的叫“环境艺术设计”，其实我干了四年雕塑。我觉得这是很有意思的事情吧，等于说我继续修绘画，同时学设计。那时中国的设计课程重点教设计思想和一些设计手段，学生并不需要花很长时间学习计算机上的设计手段。实际上绘画的比重很大。这在当时很酷，因为纯艺的学生在他们的课程中可能不大会接触包豪斯的设计风格，但是我们早就接触到了这些元素。

而今回想起来，我当年深受美国作家欧文·斯通的小说《梵高传》影响。它激励少年时期的我保有对绘画的热忱，走上了绘画这条道路。音乐对我绘画也有影响，但这种影响是很微妙和抽象的，集中在精神层面。

Bauhaus style in their program, but we had long been exposed to these elements. In retrospect, I was deeply affected by the American author Irving Stone's work *Lust for Life*. It encouraged me to devote my life to painting since my adolescence. Music also affected my creations, but I suppose its influence is quite subtle and abstract, on a spiritual level.

E: Many art critics noted a rupture of contemporary Chinese art between the 1980s and the 1990s. It was caused by the state suppression of student campaigns for democracy. In popular art historical narratives, the '80s Chinese new art is seasoned with an Enlightenment spirit. By contrast, the post-1989 art practices, as exemplified by the works by Fang Lijun, Yue Minjun, Liu Xiaodong, and Yu Hong, turned towards sarcastic, playful, or apolitical expressions. Some critics lamented your absence of significant art events in contemporary Chinese art history. What is your memory about the 1980s and the 1990s?

X: I enrolled in the academy in the 1980s. I was at the age of eighteen or nineteen in 1989. You can imagine how I felt. My home and academy were in Beijing, so I was almost involved in the entire

E: 许多艺评家曾谈到80和90年代间的中国当代艺术断层，而这断层起因为政府镇压学生民主运动。在主流艺术史叙事中，80年代艺术新潮具有启蒙主义色彩，而后89艺术实践以方力钧、岳敏君、刘晓东、喻红为例，转向讽刺调侃式，又或者完全不涉及政治内容的艺术表达。您记忆中80和90年代是怎样的？

X: 80年代我上大学了。1989年我正好十八九岁。可想而知我是怎样的感受。我的家和学校都在北京，我几乎就是全程参与了六四学运。它是个分水岭。从前所有中国青年学生像传统青年一般，抱有家国情怀。我们实际上生活在一个很奇怪的现实里。这奇怪就在于没有人觉得它奇怪。文革76年结束，那时我6岁了。每个人都需要非常政治正确，没有人知道政治不正确也是件可以发生的事。大家当时都有那个情怀，为了国家将来着想。六四学运起因大家对惩治腐败抱有期望，希望获得政治上的自由，包括言论自由和新闻自由。当时，我们刚接触到西方文化，才知道比如说孟德斯鸠的理论。大家并不是要求把这个政府赶下台，或者要求颠覆国

course of the June Fourth movement. It was a watershed. Earlier, I would say, all China's young students committed themselves to serving family and China, like traditional Chinese youth. We were living in a bizarre state. It was so odd that no one was at odds with it. The Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, and I was then six. Every person had to be politically correct. No one knew that being politically incorrect is also an alternative. University students in the June Fourth movement were children my age. We were then passionate about the country's future. The June Fourth movement started because we wanted to crack down on corruption and appeal for political freedom, including the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press. At that time, we had just started learning about western culture, for instance, Montesquieu's theory. We didn't mean to oust the government nor subvert the country. However, the movement ended in military suppression. The message was clear: we cannot fight such a country that is fully armed and that is both a sovereign state and a party. It is nothing like a western country that has a multi-party system. Instead, our country belongs to the party; the military is subject to the party. Therefore, it only serves the ruling clique's interests. In this respect, many artists turned to an ironic and amusing art expression – we cannot really wage a tit-for-

家。真不是。但最后六四以军队镇压方式结束。意思便是：你根本都不过这个有枪有军队的国家。这国家又是党国。它不像西方多党体制的国家。我们这种国是党的，军队也是党的，只维护了统治集团利益。这样很多艺术家就以调侃的形式表达，也没法针锋相对地谈。如果我们直接描述自己想画的东西，或许我们就会进入非常危险的境地。

tat struggle. If we express ourselves in a bold and direct way, this can put us in a considerably dangerous state.

E: We also notice that you were selected as one of the emerging talents by the official art magazine titled *Art Research* in 2000. How do you negotiate between your personal interest, the official system's requirements for art, and the commercial need and reach an equilibrium?

X: Apart from *Art Research*, *Art Observation* also introduced my paintings. It was a journal issued by the Ministry of Culture of the PRC. I suppose that the official system does not simply represent the governmental criteria. It also acknowledged the academic criteria. In the old days, a person that is mentioned in these magazines can reach the rank of an associate professor. This can suggest that the system recognizes my painting skills, but it does not mean that the system approves the content of my works. The criteria are not clear. The aesthetic evaluation system encompasses various works. It also aims to cultivate the "Hundred Flowers Blossom" phenomenon. For instance, we can create paintings about

E: 我们注意到您曾在2000年被官方艺术杂志《美术研究》选入“中国油画新锐画家”。您如何在艺术表达上协调您个人兴趣、官方体制对艺术提出的要求，以及商业需求，从中找到平衡点？

X: 除了《美术研究》之外，《美术观察》也曾介绍我的绘画。它是文化部主办的杂志。官方体系并不简单等于政府标准。它也认可学术标准。按过去的说法，谁能上这些杂志谁就能评副教授。也许这只说明它认可我的绘画技法，但不等于它认同我创作的内容。标准并不那样泾渭分明，也彼此交错。这审美体系可以包含各种类型的创作。它也追求“百花齐放”的现象。比如说我们可以画些社会底层的東西。这并不妨碍他们对我艺术表达的认可。

grassroots. This does not interfere with their recognition of my expression.

E: In her article “Von Fliegenden Fischer & Schielenden Karinälen,” the director of Galerie Shanghai in München Jinyan Ge wrote that you hope to evoke the European audiences to reflect on “philosophical questions of Confucianism, Taoism or Buddhism.” What messages would you like to pass on to the Swiss locals and the European audiences in your mid-career respective solo exhibition at Escapement Art?

X: I have another goal for this exhibition. Speaking of culture, it does not manifest itself as an “advanced” or “outdated” phenomenon. You can use these terms to describe a society or a country – for instance, China is advanced in certain technologies – but we are all equal in terms of culture, including religious beliefs. As you see, my paintings involve the Xinjiang topic. It happens that I was in Xinjiang when the incident took place. We received a task, that is the Xinjiang Biennale.

E: 慕尼黑上海花画廊的主理人 Jinyan Ge 写过一篇文章，叫《一切始于飞鱼与小喇嘛》。她在文中提到您希望以您的作品能够带领欧洲观众去思考儒家、道家和佛学提出的哲学问题。在职业生涯中期回顾个人展上，您希望对瑞士本地和欧洲观众传达什么信息？

X: 这次我有另一个目的。就文化而谈，文化并不分“先进”或“落后”。你可以用这些词语表述一个社会或者一个国家，比方说，中国在某些技术领域很先进，但大家在文化上是平等的，这也包括宗教信仰平等。你看我的作品涉及了新疆题材。新疆出事的时候，我刚好在新疆。我们当时接受一个任务，叫“新疆双年展”，有个“中国青年艺术家画新疆”的艺术项目，后来这展览在中国国家美术馆展出。我们到新疆以后马上就出事了。大街上全是架着机枪的警察，看起来非常恐怖。我们没地方去，因为我们参加的是个国家的项目，所以地下接待的相关部门就不敢接待我们了，怕出大事情。他们就把我们搁到一个相对安全的地方，叫“塔城”。因为塔城都是塔吉克人，而不是维吾尔族。当时闹事的是维吾尔族人，

There was an art project titled “Chinese youth paint Xinjiang,” which then became an exhibition at the National Museum of China. As soon as we arrived in Xinjiang, the incident happened. Streets were occupied by armed police. It looked scary. We didn’t have a place to stay, because we were members of the national project and the institutions that catered for our visit were concerned – they feared the tension escalated and terrible things can happen to us. Therefore, they transfer us to a relatively safer place called Tacheng. The locals were mostly the Tajiks, rather than the Uyghurs. At that time, it was the Uyghurs that stirred up trouble, fighting and killing Han people. I wonder why the western countries bring up the Xinjiang topic in recent years, but it was then when real serious problems occurred.

E: It has already been a decade, right?

X: Yes. It happened a long time ago. I don’t know why it is now remembered by the world as “we exterminate Xinjiang locals”. It wasn’t that horrible, as they said. I was there. As the old saying goes, “one hand cannot clap.” It also relates to an error in decision-making made by the communist party a long time ago. It is similar to the

打打杀杀那种。我也觉得奇怪，西方国家不知道为什么在近几年突然提新疆了，但真正出事是在那个年代。

E: 已经是十年前的事了，对吧？

X: 对。很多年前的事，不知道为什么现在突然被全世界提起来说咱们灭绝新疆人。实际上没有他们说得那么恐怖。我当时就在那儿。像老话说，“一个巴掌拍不响”，双方的事。当然这也涉及到共产党多年前的失误，就有点像多年前的西藏。你看现在的西藏，党用一种经济手段让西藏人变得很有钱，我的意思不是说他们大富大贵了，而是说他们相比以前挣的钱多了，所以你就没有听说现在西藏还闹独立什么的，他们就不闹了。实际上，这招相当狠。现在新疆发展了旅游业，搞这儿搞那儿的，让他们挣钱。谁一挣到钱，就都不愿意折腾了。你懂这意思吗？这招来得忒狠。它要让西藏和新疆人被汉族同化。你知道吧，这等于让西藏和新疆的年轻人也去追求一种所谓的时尚生活，让他们也买得起名牌。这一下子大家就都不折腾了。

Tibetan issues years ago. Look at today's Tibet, however, the party uses an economic tactic to make the Tibetans rich – I don't mean that they become very wealthy, but they make more money than before – so they don't cause issues or protest for independence. In fact, this tactic is rather ruthless. Nowadays Xinjiang develops the tourism industry, using different kinds of business to help people make money – so long as a person makes money, he/she will not make trouble. Do you get this? It's ruthless. It wants the Tibetans and the Uyghurs to become well integrated into the Han. You know, it means to incentivize the Tibetan and the Uyghur youth to pursue a so-called fashionable life. The masses desire this lifestyle. When you render them aid to purchase luxuries, they would stop making trouble.

E: *Xinjiang Cotton* express your impression of Xinjiang a decade ago?

X: Yes. It was a small number of people who were interested in launching a terrorist attack. I believe that all religions, no matter the teachings of the Catholic church, Christianity, Protestantism, Islam, or Buddhism, encourage their followers to be kind to other humans. Everyone prays for a good life. I believe these religions are

alike, they are primarily concerned with human beings. I don't think we should assume that the Islamic church naturally opposes the Catholic church or the Buddhist temple, or we portray these religions as natural enemies. These assumptions do not reflect reality. I made my acquaintance with followers of different religions in Xinjiang. The Tajiks also believe in Islam. We build a close and harmonious relationship. For example, I met a Guru many years ago. His name is Danzhen Jue-mei. He grew up in India, but he is a Tibetan. I met him by accident in the room in which he practices Buddhism, namely: his home. Buddhists build their private residential rooms around the temple. I stayed in his home for one week. One day, I drove him to Chengdu. On the way, he wholeheartedly talked to me that all his good friends are the Han people and this disturbs him. I asked, "Why?" He said that the Han people killed many Tibetans. I replied, "Have you heard of the June Fourth?" He woke up to realization in no time. Regarding the Xinjiang issues, it was not anything like a hostile situation in many Westerners' eyes. There are many tactics involved in the solution of Xinjiang issues. If you say, concentration camp. No, there hasn't been any. They aren't called concentration camps, but education camps. These camps aren't aimed at the Uyghurs. You can't even

E: 《新疆棉花》实际上表达了您对十年前新疆的印象?

X: 对, 当时那些搞恐怖的人很少。我相信不管是天主教、基督教、新教、伊斯兰教, 或是佛教, 他们都鼓励信徒与人为善。大家都祈祷过上美好的生活。我相信这些宗教都是相通的, 都把人排在第一位。我认为我们不该认为伊斯兰教跟天主教或佛教的关系是天生对立的, 或者把他们描述成你死我活的情况。这些并不反映真实的现实。当我在新疆时, 我跟不同宗教的信徒都接触过。塔吉克人也信仰伊斯兰教。我们当时的关系很和睦。比如说, 我多年前遇到一位上师。他叫丹真绝美。他在印度长大, 但他是个西藏人。一个很偶然的机, 我在他修行的道场与他相遇。他修行的道场就是他的家。他们围绕着寺院, 在外围盖一圈一圈的房子。我在他家住了一周。有一天, 我载他到成都。途中他特别推心置腹地跟我讲, 他所有好朋友都是汉人。他说他心里过不去。我问: "为什么?" 他说, 汉族人杀了很多藏族人。我说: "听说过六四没有?" 他一下子就释怀了。包括这新疆问题, 并不是西方人想象的敌对状态。定是有很多方法和手段用在处理新

imagine, as a matter of fact, that many Han officials were also sent into these camps. It was heavily guarded, and the tension was high. It was not simply a conflict between two ethnic groups.

The tool in my painting, as you see, is a hook, a shape created by me. It softens the cotton. The figure is a representation of the Uyghurs. This Uyghur man also pursues this. When I was young, I went to Tibet by driving a car. Tibet was like that. In fact, you can't imagine that many Tibetans used to live a "primitive" life. When I traveled to Xinjiang and other remote areas, they looked alike. What has created such a "primitive" impression? This country. In other words, the matter is not whether someone wants to eliminate the traditional culture in Xinjiang. Instead, the real problem is that this country and this system have created such a situation, in which the Uyghurs, their culture and beliefs become "outdated" and "obsolete." Namely, this political system and the ruling class have occasioned economic disparity and conflicts.

E: The economic disparity between the coastal metropolis and hinterland has become more and more critical in recent years. How do you perceive the expansion of Neoliberal capitalism

疆问题上。如果你说建集中营什么的，没有，那里并没有。那也不叫集中营，叫学习营。这些学习营也不针对维吾尔族人。实际上你根本无法想象，好多汉族官员都被抓进去了。当时是十分严苛的状态，非常高压，不是简单的敌我矛盾。

你看我画的那个工具，实际上是个钩子。我画这么个形状，它用于捣棉花，把棉花捣松软了。你看我画的人物是个维吾尔族的形象。他也追求这件事。我年轻的时候自己开车去西藏。西藏也曾经如此。你根本无法想象西藏人“原始”的生存状况。我去新疆以及其他偏远地区都是这种“原始”的图景。我们要问这种“原始”的状态是谁造成的？是这个国家。换句话说，问题的关键不在于是否有人想要消灭新疆的传统文化，而是这个国家、这个社会把维吾尔族的面貌和他们的文化、信仰变得“落后”和“过时”。即：这个体制和统治集团导致了悬殊的经济差异和矛盾。

accompanying the rapid growth of poverty alleviation programs in the PRC?

X: I don't think capitalism exists in China. The country fought against America after its foundation in 1949. Then the government introduced Public-Private Partnership and, later on, the so-called Socialist Rural Cooperatives and the Cultural Revolution. Until now, the Cultural Revolution has not come to a closure. The truth is that the communist party has changed its tactic to govern with higher technologies. But what will this lead us to? I assume that only several persons control the world, and we – the leftovers, will become zombie-like animals. We will live without culture or spirituality. We simply live every day, gradually becoming machines.

E: What you just said is evocative of the prevailing term *shechu* (the Chinese translation of the Japanese term “shachiku,” which literally means “slaves of corporates”). To let culture serves the capital.

X: Yes, all things work in this manner, from the education system to public opinion. It's a terrible direction. Everybody swipes the mobile screen, watches short-video social apps such TikTok, and

E: 沿海城市和边疆地区之间悬殊的经济差异在近几年更为突出。您怎么看新自由资本主义经济在中国的扩张，以及随之激增的扶贫项目？

X: 我并不认为中国存在资本主义。自新中国1949年成立以来，咱们立即与美国打仗，后来政府推行“公私合营”，然后是所谓的“社会主义农村合作社”和文化大革命。至今文化大革命并没有结束，只是共产党换了另一种形式，运用高科技管理而已。但最后我们会变成怎么样？我认为只有几个人在控制这个世界，而我们这些剩余的人就会变成一种像僵尸一样的动物。我们将活着，然而失去文化和精神的滋养。我们只是每天活着，逐渐变成机械。

E: 您谈到的意象令人想起“社畜”这个词语：文化为资本服务。

X: 对，一切都是这样，从教育体系到公共舆论都如此。这是很恶劣的导向。大家都在刷手机，看“抖音”这样的短视

consumes information like fast food. Snakification is a phenomenon, but its influence on culture is horrible.

E: It seems that you are worried about current governance techniques that accelerates alienation of human relationships.

X: Yes. However, my point is more about individual responses to these techniques. I have been thinking about the relationship between people and government: why China would have created such a strange government. Something is missing in Chinese culture, or there is a loophole that gives birth to this kind of government. It is not a simple suppression of minority ethnic groups by the ruling clique. It is not a war, as American movies would describe that the Germans fought for the Germans and the Americans fought for the Americans, one against another. No, the Westerners have simplified the problems. There are many complex things involved and sometimes, the tactic targets the officials within the communist party. You can't imagine that I am discussing these issues in Beijing. If I were in Xingjiang, however, I would have already been blocked. As soon as this word appears, the system activates censorship. The computer can detect the words, and it can

频，速食文化。这也是一种现象，但是它在文化上影响很恶劣。

E: 您似乎担忧的是当下统治手段加速异化人与人之间的关系。

X: 对。我关注的点在于人对这个手段的回应。我也思考人和政府的关系：为什么中国会产生一个这么奇怪的政府？我认为中国文化中肯定缺失了某种东西，或者有一个很大的漏洞导致了这样的政府。这不是简单一个统治集团对某个少数民族的压迫，不是美国电影所描绘的战争：德国人为德国人而战，美国人为美国人而战，双方打来打去。不。西方人把这个问题想得太简单了。个中许多复杂的情况，有时策略针对的是共产党的内部官员。你根本无法想象我现在在北京跟你谈这事儿。如果我在新疆，可能我马上就被屏蔽了。只要出现这个词，系统就启动审查。现在电脑能自动识别词语，而且它能拦截你的设备。有时你就发不出信息。我们在新疆试验过，你知道我们一下飞机，当地的官员跟我们说千

block your devices. Sometimes, you are not able to send messages. We tested this in Xinjiang, you know, we got off the airplane and the local government officials told us that we should be careful with our words, do not bring up issues, otherwise, we can get involved in danger. It is a political purge within the ruling class. The terrorist attack had happened, if it hadn't, then the government wouldn't have taken such measures. In other words, it uses this tactic to solve all kinds of problems.

E: We also noticed that your early paintings featured red curtains before a dark background. However, your recent paintings such as the *Yellow* series, the *Xinjiang Cotton*, and other works about the seaside turned to the use of lighter colors and this adds a mysterious touch. What encouraged you to make these changes?

X: In my early paintings, I applied black color to the background and drew the red curtains, because I want to suggest the lack of transparency in the Chinese political system. Everything is manipulated behind the scenes; they are situated inside a "black box" and behind the "red curtains". The lack of transparency is not determined by the person who is in power. This ethos has already

万别瞎说八道，在这，就别提这事。提了，就容易出危险。它是统治阶级内部的清洗。确实新疆恐怖袭击发生在先，如果没有发生，那政府也不会采取这样措施。换言之，它用这策略解决各种矛盾。

E: 我们也注意到您早期绘画特征为深色背景跟前有俩块红色窗帘布。然而您近期的画作，譬如说《黄色》系列，《新疆棉花》和还有其他关于海边的作品都大量使用浅色。这也给您的创作增添了神秘感。是什么促使您做出这些改变？

X: 我早期绘画作品里画黑背景、红帘子，因为我仍然暗喻中国不透明的政治体制。一切尽在这黑色暗箱里，红帘子后面。这种政治不透明并不是某个当权者所决定的。这种风气已经从上至下蔓延至全社会。早些时候我更关注社会问题，但我在2020年（又或者是2019年？我忘记了）生了场大病。病好了，我更关注人类文明的话题。这也让我的技法产生了变化。你看那《黄色》系列的作品，比如那幅亚当（亚当的模特儿是德国人）拿着苹果和一个身子倾倒在桌上的女孩，

penetrated the whole society, from top to bottom. Earlier I pay more attention to social issues, but I was taken ill in 2020 – Or is it 2019? I can't remember. After recovering from a serious disease, I have become more interested in the topic of human civilization. This also affects my techniques. Regarding the yellowish works, for instance, the painting that shows Adam – he is a German model – holds an apple and a girl who leans her body on the table, it reflects my near-death experience in a hospital. At that time, I had a hallucination. The yellowish tint can be seen as an extension of my hallucination. I was obsessed with the sensations when I was about to die. I felt comfortable. I had a blurry image of a tunnel. It was extremely attractive. It was colored by a yellowish light, just like the tone of the sunset. It gave me warmth and I feel so relaxed. I was then critically ill, so I no longer suffered from body aches. Instead, it had turned into agony. The process exhausted and appeal to me. I supposed, I could have been relieved of my pain, if I had walked through the tunnel.

它反映了我在医院濒死经历。那时我已经产生了幻觉。这泛黄的色调可以说是我幻觉的延伸。在我生命快要结束的时候，我非常迷恋这些感受。它让我感到很舒服。我看到一条非常模糊的通道。它十分吸引人，带点类似夕阳的黄光。它带给我温暖，让我感到特别放松。当时我病情危急，病痛的折磨已超出肉体疼痛，痛苦至极。这过程使我十分疲惫，然而它也使我着迷。我猜假如走过这通道，我就从痛苦中解脱出来。

E: How does this near-death experience relate to the story of Adam and Eve?

X: They are not really related. I only use these figures to actualize my obsession with that yellowish tint. The color deeply moved me. I want to depict that situation, but I am not able to change my expression radically. Thus, I use concrete elements, for instance, the grayish cotton to gradually develop a new expression out of the classicism. It is as if a boulder had split in two, and I suddenly found myself there. Today, I no longer use my concepts to cleave a reality. Instead, I dispose myself to perceive nature.

My studio is forced to be demolished again. I plan to create more paintings and focus on cultural issues, so my works will not be just about natural landscapes. One interest of the ruling clique is to transform the locals in Xinjiang into the mainstream. They want to destroy the uniqueness of this region. They cultivate and meet the locals' desire for material abundance, so the region will lose its culture. There is no shortage of labor in the service of the material civilization.

E: 这种濒死体验跟亚当和夏娃的故事有着怎样的关系?

X: 他们并不发生关联。我只是需要这些形象来表达我对这种黄色调的迷恋。这颜色深深打动了。我渴望再现那种情形，但是我也不能一下子彻底改变我的艺术语言。因此我通过这些具体的元素，比如说灰色的棉花，来逐渐创造一种新的艺术语言。这就好比劈开巨石那瞬间，我看到了自己。今天我不再用自己的思想去劈开一种现实，反而用心体验自然。

现在我的工作室再次被强拆了。我计划创作更多关注边疆文化问题的绘画，而不仅表现自然风光。统治集团其中一个目的就是把新疆人变成主流大众。他们想要打掉这地区的独特性。他们要培养并且满足当地人的物欲。这样以来，这地区就会失去它的文化。因为物质文明并不缺乏为之兢兢业业、前赴后继的劳动力。

E: If flying fish is symbolic of freedom, can you please describe how freedom can be made available in the domestic sphere, religious what does a flying fish mean? What you don't believe at this sphere, and the material "ocean" governed by state ideology and capitalism?

X: I created "flying fish" and have used it as an important symbol in my early paintings. Let me give you an example, so that you will understand the motif of a flying fish. Let me tell you a story about *tongxinglian* (homosexuality). The term "homosexuality" describes two men or two women living together. I learned about this term for the first time, when I was in primary or middle school. This term appeared in our textbooks, and it refers to Capitalist corruption. So I still didn't understand what *tongxinglian* is. It hadn't formed an image in my head. It only means a juxtaposition of three characters, *tongxinglian*. Then the country entered the period of "reform" and "open". The western culture and arts flow into China and I vaguely know what homosexuality is about. However, I couldn't imagine how two men can live together. I couldn't understand how they manage to have sex. Around the late 1990s and the early 2000s, I finally got a friend who is a homosexual. He and his boyfriend invited us to dinner and announced they are together. Everyone was

E: 如果说“飞鱼”象征着自由，请您谈谈我们将如何从家庭空间、宗教信仰，以及被国家意识形态和资本主义经济统治下的物欲海洋中获得这种自由？

X: 我创作了“飞鱼”这个符号，它也是我早期绘画里重要符号。我给你切入到具体的情形中，你就能明白“飞鱼”的意义了。我给你举同性恋的例子。“同性恋”这个词语指两个女人或者两个男人在一起生活。在小学或者初中时期，我第一次听说这个词语。它出现在我们的课本上，含义为“资本主义腐败”。我当时并不知道“同性恋”是什么，脑海里并没有对应的形象，只把它当作三个字，“同性恋”。后来中国“改革开放”，西方文化和艺术开始流入中国，我才隐约知道“同性恋”是什么。但我无法想象两个男人如何生活，不能理解他们怎么过夫妻生活。直到1990年底和2000年初，我终于有个朋友。他是同性恋者。他和他男友请大家吃饭，宣布他俩在一起，大伙儿都很高兴。那时我完全明白同性恋是怎么一回事了。那么“飞鱼”是什么呢？此时此刻你认为不可能发生的事情，它下一秒就发生了，就像是一条“飞鱼”。咱们都认为鱼离了水

happy for them. It was on this occasion that I completely understand what homosexuality stands for and how it works. So what does a flying fish mean? What you don't believe at this moment can happen in the next second. It is as if a flying fish. We believe that fishes can't live without water and this thought has already become a stereotype, but we witness a fish that does no longer swim in the water. Instead, it grows wings and flies in the air. At first, we are astonished or terrified by the "flying fish". Then we become curious about it and, later on, we communicate with it. China's economy has developed so speedily. It has already reached the current state of western countries and China even surpassed the West in certain areas. Nevertheless, our culture has not caught up with the economic and technological development. It is very terrible. China's culture has turned into segmented, jumpy, and fragmented stuff. The ocean is a metaphor for fear in Chinese culture. Fishermen who live by the sea fear the ocean. It is my generation that develops a love for the ocean.

Interview and translation by Diyi Mergenthaler

不能活。这已成为一种惯性思维。然而我们正目击一条鱼从此不在水里游了，它长出了翅膀，飞至半空。刚开始我们对它感到好奇，后来我们跟它交流。中国经济已经迅速发展起来了。它已可以跟西方国家相媲美，而且中国在某些领域还超过了西方。尽管如此，我们的文化并没有跟上经济和科技发展水平。这是件十分可怕的事。中国文化已经变成一种割裂式的，跳跃式的，碎片化的东西。海洋在中国文化中是恐惧的隐喻。海边生活的渔民对大海怀有怯意。开始喜欢大海的是我们这代人。

采访&翻译：Diyi Mergenthaler