

Abstract Art and Academic Education – An international symposium

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Honoured guests and friends, ladies and gentlemen,
Good morning!

Today, my topic is "Painting without Title and Autonomy of Art Works".

Let me first talk about the framework of traditional painting.

The mainstream Western tradition of painting understands the closed two-dimensional surface of painting as a window through which an external image is depicted. The discourse about painting is directed towards the external world. Painting is narrowly understood as an art of reproduction and imitation. The basic approach is to construct an existing and presupposed illusory three-dimensional space.

The revolution of contemporary painting lies in limiting and leaving this very illusion of perspective-based three-dimensional space. The approach to "infer a painting from an illusory image" is being questioned. Being an important part of the 20th century contemporary painting, the approach to "reduce painting to its material physical properties" has found considerable attention.

Why no title?

Non-figurative paintings with visual presentation as its purpose often bear no titles.

There can be painting without title because the artist can place his work – in a unique way – in a context that is accessible for the visual sense, such as an adventurous form, a moderate colour patch, an image full of tension ... A painting can be named by anybody depending on the individual perception. Even the same viewer can perceive a painting differently at different points of time and under different circumstances. A painting stays a material existence made of colours. What it expresses, is not a specific event, but a realm that is not accessible to the language.

There can be painting without title because thinking about painting starts with visual elements that are intrinsic to painting. It takes us further to inquiries and answers to visual questions and ends up with the visual framework that are carried by materials. That is to say, painting follows its innate development dynamics and is self-inspecting. The inspection takes place in the present and in history. The object of painting is not the external world. In other words, painting no longer has an object. Painting is the object per se. It might become a link in the historical evolution of painting.

There can be painting without title because the painting as an artwork is a tangible matter, a substance that is tangible and complex. It is concentration of the artist's thinking about visual questions as well as the innate visual logic of an artwork. It guides us to penetrate through the physical surface, understand the artist's individual human condition and the cultural context in which the artwork lives.

Here, the nature of painting is defined as a process in which the artist revitalizes a pile of oil colours that per se do not have any aesthetic value. Artistic thinking has to be transformed into a systematic language to fully present the content and characteristics of an artwork. It is neither conceptual nor common sense, but a perspective of view and expression, the unity of visual sense and presentation.

Oil colours and canvas are in a constant process of confrontation and unity. During the course of artistic creation, the confrontation and synthesis between the artist's own experiences and the contemporary culture are again and again in focus and constitute the most exciting and amazing part of visual painting. In fact, painting in this sense no longer refers to an external world. It is a world by itself. Its very existence reveals the relationship between art and existence, and the human conditions of the contemporary age.

To regard artistic creation as establishing a world, an artwork has to be autonomous.

In the 20th. Century, the greatest achievement of Western art is to go abstract. The main concern of going abstract is the autonomy of art. Being a visual art that refers to the innate world of painting, non-figurative painting expresses a central statement: "art is autonomous."

An artwork is an autonomous entity, a world by itself and does not need to designate the objective world.

On the contrary, the main approach of free painting is by cutting the designation between the artwork and the objective world and turning from the designated to the designator. This enables a more flexible and precise way to present the complex inherent logic of a painting and let the painting regain autonomy. The establishment of an artwork as "world" and a part of social reality does not rely on its reference to any social reality, but on its unique visual presentation.

In the new millennium, we are facing an age of information and multiplicity. On the one hand, we are given opportunities to get to know the world and express ourselves. On the other hand, the fast pace of life and culture is constantly challenging the artist's judgement and thinking about art. Before we have time to respond to an avant-garde, it might already have become tradition. As an aesthetic form, abstract painting makes us think about the common principles between art and existence. It enables us to transcend the locality and culture, stay mindful about our perception of things in the present moment, and make sense of the world through our own existence. We start from our own life and focus on the commonality of art. We challenge ourselves and our time. The deeper meaning of art should be the continuous manifestation and transcendence of a culture of life.

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