

# Interview with Liu Weijian

By Iona Witthaker

*What prompted you to begin representing these scenes and objects?*

For me, these scenes and objects are part of my life - some bear witness to it, and hold a special appeal for me. They are also effective vehicles for me to study individuality and sociality. Their state of being is a product of social change and development, as shown in *Moses in China* and *Rocket Sculpture*, for example. They present themselves at the intersection of individuality and sociality. Take, for instance, a chair at a station. Such a chair may arouse similar feelings in those who have been to the station, though they may have quite different stories. Taking the chair as a starting point, I can feel further sensations lying beyond it. One can distinctly feel certain ideals and desires from these things; the paintings *Playground* and *A Couple from the City* are vivid examples of this.



*Moses in China*  
2010 (p. 33)

*A Couple from the City*  
2012

*What governs your choice of subject matter for these paintings?*

First of all, it is dictated by fate. Individuality without a connection with the subject is not a part of my view. Secondly, it depends on whether the subject can inspire more profound thinking and deeper perception. Thirdly, the subject must be part of the world of my painting. Lastly, I must be able to depict it using my artistic language.

*"Rapid development" is a phrase constantly repeated in relation to China. But what does it really mean on an artistic level, as part of the wider creative ferment?*

As a matter of fact, I don't really understand the true meaning of the phrase "rapid development" as far as reality is concerned. I hear it all the time, though. Chinese art has witnessed in such a short period various movements and rapid changes in the form of artistic expression. Many things go out of fashion almost as quickly as they appeared. Rapid change upsets some people, making them feel anxious, but it also makes others reflect on their pursuit of art. Such rapidity makes it difficult for us to make judgments and define things. Everything is in its experimental phase. You can try virtually anything, and everything is possible.

*What happens to the societal ideals associated with development in the realm of your paintings?*

For me, societal ideals and practical development have merged into one - both have become part of my spiritual world. I can hardly distinguish subtle changes in its development, but I am aware of the gradual change in my ideals that has resulted from practical development - this brings those ideals closer and closer to authenticity.

*How would you describe your relationship with the appearance of reality, and how is it transposed in your work?*

Since my very being constitutes a part of reality, I like to position myself right inside it. In this way, it generates a collision of reality and the ideals of individuals, which results in an uncanny relationship between the two. It is either the ideals of reality or the reality of ideals. I like envisioning this sort of contradiction and coexistence in my work, and transposing it in my paintings thematically and through the language of painting.

*These paintings share a sense of calculated artificiality - how do you go about constructing this through lighting, for example?*

I take into consideration the composition of various elements in the environment - including lines, faces and colors - and then set up an appropriate light source between illusion and reality. As to the representational techniques I adopt for my paintings, there are hardly any rules because it's quite likely to be influenced by

the subject matter or even by my mindset as these paintings are being constructed; it can vary just as it can stay the same.

*Can you talk a little bit about form?*

There are two main sources of form in my work: one is to record with a camera what interests me, then make a selection and think about it in relation to my painting. The other is to go hiking somewhere every year, and conceive on the way the work that is to be created and capture those scenes that can help me to truthfully record my feelings and thoughts at the moment when these photographs were taken. For those objects I select, I will consider which elements shall remain and which to remove, because each element in the painting is able to speak for itself, and they speak their own languages when they collide with one another. I represent the quality and lighting of each element in its own environment in the manner I am most familiar with in order to depict its presence at a specific time.

*One has a sense less of exterior appearance than the interior life of objects and scenes - can you expand on this?*

The exterior appearance of objects and scenes is what we can see; the essence of these things can only be felt in our minds. But we have to feel and understand their essence through their appearance. Appearance provides an approach for study, and essence is our ultimate goal, so it is hard to say which is more important.

*How do these works insert themselves into the flow of time surrounding them - do you aim to create a moment of pause?*

As for a single piece of work, I tend to freeze it to a point where it can release its inner energy as much as possible. But the coordinates are constantly moving, and you can eventually sense through my paintings the timing of such movements and the changes that happen within diverse social groups. Thus, my work reflects invariance as well as the variability of objects and scenes.

*Would you say your works enact a reflexive relationship with the landscape, or are they simply responses to it?*

Since my works are rooted stylistically in the natural world, a reflexive relationship does exist - but this is not a major issue. What appears more important to me is that I can construct my own world in paint by way of this landscape representation; it also acts upon itself as a bridge to that ideal world. The natural landscape presents itself as an element in my paintings, and as a non-verbal carrier as well.

*These paintings have been described as "laden with anonymity" - yet they are instantly synonymous with accelerated development in China. Would you say you are sensitive to this paradox of identity in the contemporary environment?*

There are a lot of things that are not laden with anonymity; it is just that they appear out of nowhere under certain social circumstances, and vanish as suddenly as they had come. But as we look back, things have already taken on a different state. There are also many elements that enjoy quite different humanistic definitions at different times. It is difficult for us to make a judgment as to which one shall be its real definition, since it is undergoing constant change. We are made aware of these societal groups and this community by their contemporary situations.

*These scenes often feature verdant nature alongside industrial or man-made bodies; is this an engaging relationship for you?*

I don't know if there is any relationship there. When I was a child, the province of my hometown, Hunan, boasted picturesque natural scenery. I am quite impressed by scenery. Later I went to a bigger city to continue my education, and have been living in Shanghai since I graduated. I have witnessed the changes modern cities are undergoing, from a state of natural economy to industrialization, and I myself am also undergoing constant change. On one hand, I have to suffer a sense of loss caused by the vanishing of picturesque

scenery. On the other, I have to face new unfamiliarity.

Actually, men are quite adaptable creatures...

*You seem to share with other painters of your generation a tendency towards the uncanny in your depictions of objects.*

*Is this intentional?*

I don't think these objects look uncanny or mysterious. It is just that we rarely stop to read the other side of these objects. When you do, it is just the other side, and that is all. I never bother to think about which side to represent, however. I like to make observations from my own point of view.

*Many contemporary artists leave their works untitled so as to avoid the imposition of meaning. Your paintings, however, often have compelling titles; how do you envisage their effect on the impact of the work?*

When I decide to create a new piece of work, it has its own realm which is difficult to describe using language. Therefore, naming a work is a tough job. Sometimes I use a combination of words and paintings for my final works. I have names for them even at the time of conception, but it never goes so far as to affect my painting – rather, it only serves to make my conception clearer to my own mind. Sometimes, I use the name of the object itself. Although it sounds rather neutral, it never hinders my representation of the object, and can even play an emphatic role.

*Do you always consider your audience and how they will encounter your work?*

Certainly. I often put myself in my audience's shoes, and examine and reflect on my work from their perspective. When confronting my work, more often than not I will try to clear the thoughts that I had at the time of its creation so as to determine whether my painting conveys exactly what I am going out of my way to depict with it. I repeatedly change my role between that of painter and audience. I think that as a spectator, I am just a part of the audience - but as a creator, I am unique.

*How do you approach art as a cultural undertaking?*

I have not thought about it. It is a social undertaking that requires close collaboration between artists and professionals from other industries. I'll just do my part.

*How do you feel your practice has developed since your last exhibition?*

Exhibitions help me to make a summary of the past and reflect on my work, a means by which I can uncover more blind realms, broaden my vision and enhance my thinking capacity. In addition, creating art demands exploration and great patience; we can only move forward step by step. Painting is a slow process, after all.

*What would you say you are most loyal to in your work?*

I am most loyal to the true feelings of my heart that are shared only by me and through my paintings.

*What are your hopes for the future of your creative practice?*

I wish to have the energy to visit different places so as to have more to think about for my paintings, to have a more acute sense of objects and scenes, and to master more accurate painting skills with which to convey my ideas.

## 與劉唯艱對談 愛安阿著

甚麼驅使你繪畫這些場景和事物？

從我個體上來說這些場景和事物是我生活中的一部分，這其中有我個人的生活印證。這些場景和事物也是我研究個體與社會性的有效載體，這些場景與事物的存在狀態就是社會變化和發展的產物，如作品《摩西在中國》、《火箭雕塑》等。這些場景和事物也是個體與群體性的交匯點，如車站的一把椅子，每個去過車站的人在這類椅子上有類似的感受，有不同故事等等，從這把椅子作為起點，我可以體會更多椅子之外的事物。從這些場景和事物上可以清晰感受到人本身的某種理想和某種欲望，如《遊樂場》、《城裡來的一對夫婦》等等。還有這些場景和事物對我有某種吸引力。



《摩西在中國》  
2010 (p. 33)



《城裡來的一對夫婦》  
2012

你如何選擇作品題材？有一定的準則嗎？

對於題材的選擇：一是靠緣分，個人與它沒有相交的可能性也沒法進入我的視點。二、有沒有激發我更深的思考，從中能否看到更多的東西。三、是否是我要構造繪畫世界的組成部分。四、是否能用我的繪畫語言表達出來。

“高速發展”一詞與中國關係密切；但從藝術角度而言，它真正意義是甚麼呢？它又如何成為藝術創作中的養份？

其實“高速發展”結合現實我也不知真正意義，一直聽到這種說法。但在中國藝術上確實讓我們在很短的時間經歷了各種藝術思潮，各種藝術表達形式快速更替。

很多東西流行起來很快，消失地也很快。這種快速地變化讓有的人很焦慮，讓有的人安靜下來重新思考，審視自己的藝術之路。當然這種快速讓我們對事物不會輕易地做出判斷和定義。一切都走在實驗的路上，可以大膽地嘗試，什麼都有可能。

在你的畫中，社會理想與現實發展之間存在某種關聯，你認為這種關聯現在產生了甚麼變化？

社會理想與現實發展轉換到我身上時它合而為一了，兩者都是我精神上的一部分，我自己很難區分它在一個發展過程中的微妙變化，但我能體會到那種現實發展在一步步改變我原有的社會理想構造，讓社會理想越來越接近事物的真實性。

你會怎樣形容自己與現實的關係？這種關係如何在畫作中呈現？

我本來就是生活在現實中的一員，我也喜歡把自己置身於現實之中，這樣現實與個人理想會發生碰撞，這種碰撞讓兩種東西產生異樣的關係。要麼是現實中的理想，要麼是理想中的現實。我喜歡在作品中去體現這種矛盾和這種同時存在感，在畫面中還是得通過題材和自身的繪畫語言來完成。

這些畫作均予人一種經過精密計算的感覺。可舉例說明一下你是憑藉甚麼技法(如光暗運用)營造出這種感覺？

對於一張作品，我會考慮所要表達的元素在環境中的構成關係(包括點，線，面，色彩構成關係)，再給它設定一種特定的光源(介於個人想像與現實之間)。表現技法就很難說了，受選擇的題材影響也受繪畫時的狀態影響，有變化的一面也有常態的一面。

可分享你的創作及表現形式嗎？

主要來源於兩方面，一種是用相機去記錄生活中有意思的事物，再進行選擇重新構思創造。另一種是每年會選擇一個地方去徒步，在徒步的路上進行思考構思將要創作的作品方向，用相機有選擇性的拍一些素材，主要還是個人與被拍事物在當時的體念和思考，照片可以幫助我真實地去還原。對於所選擇的事物，我會考慮每個元素地去和留，因為每個

元素在繪畫裡它都有自身的說話能力，元素和元素之間相碰撞都有自己的語言。主要表現方式還是用自己最習慣的方式刻畫元素在它生存環境下的質量和光影性來反映它在特定時間的存在感。

相對於事物的外貌，有些人似乎更著重其內在本質。你如何進一步詮釋這個概念？

事物的外貌是我們能看的到的，事物的本質只能去感受在我的大腦意念之中。我們還是通過眼睛看到的外貌去體會事物的本質，外貌是途徑，本質是目的吧，很難說哪個更重要。

這些作品如何將自身植入於流動的時間之中？你是否以繪畫靜止的瞬間為創作目的？

作為單件作品而言，我習慣把它凝固起來，把它凝固到一個點去傳達盡可能更大的能量，但點與點之間是流動的，最終從我的大量作品裡來體現這種流動的時間性和變化的社會群體性，所以它既有事物的恆定性也有事物的變動性。

你的作品與自然景觀所存在的是一種反射關係，抑或是一種純粹的自然反應？

我作品的體裁來源於自然生活之中，應該存在這種反射關係，但這又不是主要的，更重要的我是通過對這種表象景觀的表達來構造我自己的繪畫世界，這也是我通往那種理想世界的橋梁。自然景觀是我繪畫裡的一種元素，也是某種不可言語的載體。

人們認為你的畫作中“滿載了現實中的無名狀況”，但亦有人將它們視為中國急速發展的像徵。你對存在於當今社會的這種矛盾是否格外敏感？

有很多東西它本來並不是無名狀況，只是在一種特定的社會背景下它誕生的比較突然，消失的也比較快，等我們回頭審視它時它已經處於另一種狀況了，還有很多事物在不同時期它有不同的人文定義，我們很難去評判哪種才是它的真實定義，而且這種變化還在繼續，從這些事物所處的這種境況裡我們可以體會到一些群體性和社會性。

在你的畫作中，工業化或人造物經常與大自然一併出現。這種取材方式與你自身之間有甚麼關係？

我不知是否有關係，我小時候生活的環境是一種自然經濟為主體的社會，湖南山清水秀，對這種自然經濟景觀還是很有感覺，後來讀書從小城市到大城市，畢業後在上海一直生活到現在，感覺自己能感受到從自然經濟發展到以工業化為主體的現代化都市的變化，而且自身也處於這種變化之中，一方面要承受那種消失帶來的失落感，另一方面要面對那種新的陌生感，最終人的適應能力還是很強的。

和其他同輩的畫家一樣，你似乎較傾向於描述事物神秘而另類的一面。你是有意這樣做的嗎？

我自己覺得這些事物並不另類神秘，只是我們很少靜下心來去體會事物的另一面，當你真實地去面對它時，它僅是事物存在地另一面而已，我沒有刻意去表達事物地哪個方面。我習慣用自己的角度觀察事物。

很多當代畫家喜將作品定為“無題”，以免為觀者設下一個框框，限制他們對作品的聯想。但你的作品則多有特定的畫題，你認為這些題目對作品有甚麼影響？

當決定創作一件作品開始，它就有它表達地疆域，這個疆域又是很難用語言概括。因此對作品命名是件很難的事。我有時的方式是運用文字與作品組合來完成最終創作。這類作品在構思的時候名字就想好了，但它不影響我對繪畫的創作，只會讓我思路更清晰。有時就用事物的本身來命名，它很中性，不影響作品的表達，還起了強調的作用。

你是否經常考慮到觀賞者，以及他們接觸作品時的感受？會考慮的，經常讓自己處於觀眾的角度對自己作品進行審視和反思。更多的是自己面對作品時，放空自己在繪畫時的所思所想，再去體會作品有沒有把那種要表達的東西用繪畫表達出來。自己反復在觀眾與作者之間轉換，我想作為觀眾我是群體中的一分子，作為創作身份我是唯一。

如何將藝術發展成一種文化產業？

這問題我還沒想過，這是藝術家與其他行業的人合作完成的社會性的事務，我就做好我自己的事吧。

自上次展覽後，你對自己的創作事業有甚麼體會？

確實展覽可以讓自己對一段時間的工作進行總結和反思，這樣可以打開更多的盲區，讓視野更開闊，思考問題更廣泛些，還有就是創作需要一點一點地 探索，一點一點地成長起來，繪畫畢竟是件慢活。

在你的作品中你最忠於、最堅持的是甚麼？

內心深處的真实感受，個人與畫面之間感同深受的體驗。

你對未來的創作實踐有甚麼期望？

有足夠的精力去不一樣的地方，在創作上讓思考的東西更廣闊，在內心裡能感受到事物更高的精微度，在作品技法上能更準確地傳達。



畫家在工作室  
Artist in studio