

Artificial Water

By Rose Lejeune

A fleeting human shadow black against a paved road; an anonymous hotel corridor furnished with cigarette bin and fire extinguisher; a dirty cloth left to dry on top of a water dispenser; crows resting on a rock amongst trees; ballooning rubbish bags dumped on the side of the road.

These paintings are vignettes of quotidian occurrences: everyday materials and commonplace moments bathed in harsh pools of artificial light or under the squinting stare of an unseen sun. The scenes captured in the paintings of Liu Weijian have a queasy familiarity to them. In a series of eleven new paintings, each individual work is offered to us as a single quotation, a single frozen moment. Here are the kind of objects we don't notice; the chance encounters we choose not to notice; the daily characters in our lives we have walked past a thousand times without acknowledging. As viewers we encounter a collection of fragments and broken pieces that depict the familiar rendered still, strange and silent.

Through the series we encounter the detritus of urban life



In Hotel (detail)
2011 (p. 20-21)



Artificial Water (detail)
2011 (p. 17)

as still life studies. Materials, domestic and service objects, throwaway and plastic commodities are presented alongside the remnants of the natural world - both real and simulated - are snapshots of a convenient yet wasteful way of life. In *Hotel* is a composition of cigarette bin, fire extinguisher and fire extinguisher box, three ubiquitous objects, pushed up against a wall. Each had an original function, yet discarded against its backdrop appears adrift in space. Without anchor, each object floats. Liu has rendered them as props, emptied of their weight and purpose. Likewise, *Trash Bag* depicts the most everyday of urban objects - two black bin bags, fat with rubbish, left by the road-side. Here, the green of the grass is abruptly cut into by the matt grey of the concrete curb, the slick ebony shine of the bags insinuates itself between the two, blackening the grass with its shadow. Subtly, Liu portrays these materials as violent interruptions in the landscape.

Elsewhere, in *Artificial Water* a glimpse of grass can be seen through the window of a room otherwise dominated by a large plastic water container. The work's title, *Artificial Water*, emphasises the point: we have reached a moment when even that most basic of resources, water, can be manipulated, packaged and commodified.

Observing the effects of consumerism, Liu's eye roves back and forth between the past and the future - the old world and

the new. Three more works *Hometown - Chair and Mineral Water*, *Footbath Water* and *There are red flags here, too*, hone in again on water as a powerful symbol. In, *There are red flags here, too*, a brown rusting jetty juts out into a mountain lake, its weight bearing in on the image, obscuring and interrupting the view. An unmanned fishing boat forlornly sits in dock. Depicted as useless and seemingly tethered to the obstructing jetty, its back is turned away from the open water. *Footbath Water* is an elegant image of a water-filled ceramic bowl, captured apparently, moments after a washing ritual, small puddles of water around its edge.

Together the works develop into a demarcation of the



There are red flags here, too (detail)
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inexorable circumscription of nature, the lightening fast erosion of tradition and its replacement by its own simulacrum. The mechanistic march towards an automated form of life, divorced from human hand or organic process, seems complete. This old world is cut through with roads, with jetties, with steel and concrete. It is replicated, faked and fed back as novelty.

Worse, through the series we see Liu's world as one in which the human figure plays little or no part. In *Pregnant Woman* (the only work to directly depict a person) a young woman lies sleeping on a couch. She is impassive, enveloped by the red of the couch that surrounds her. If she is pregnant, the rug which covers her stomach hides this fact from the viewer. Asleep, and angular, dwarfed by her surroundings, she has no agency, no sense of expectation; she is in the scene but not

vital within it. Metaphorically, she appears to have no sense of expectation of a productive or meaningful future - she is pregnant but at the same time not.

In *The Two of Us* Liu has removed the protagonists even further from the ability to influence their world; they appear as shadows; hazy, wavy, mutable impressions against the sharp, regular lines of cool paving stones. Whereas, in *Trash Bag*, the inanimate plastic of the bin bag holds the pictorial frame, poised and full, the human figures appear reduced, alienated and redundant.

The works have a deliberate flatness that again serves to blur any differentiation between the natural and manmade, raw materials and their product. In *Trash Bag*, for example, the grass, the plastic bags, the concrete roadside are rendered in the same manner - only shape and colour serve to distinguish between forms. Likewise *The weather has gotten chilly*, depicts a solitary tent in a mountain scene. The bright orange dome of the tent hovers, alien, bulbous and intrusive, over flat green surface of grass and yet neither appears more or less natural, more or less real, more or less artificial. An ambiguous, jagged line cuts through the scene on the canvas - it could be a small river but it looks more likely to be a concrete path - nothing is pure nature. Camping, that leisure activity that lets us get back to nature, is, for Liu, a



Pregnant Woman (detail)
2011 (p. 22-23)



Trash Bag (detail)
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contradiction in terms; only necessary precisely because of our alienation from the natural world.

Materials and colour move across canvases so that the carmine red of the flag in *There are red flags here, too* is echoed by that of the fire extinguisher in *In Hotel*, and the bright softness of the sofa on which *Pregnant Woman* sleeps and the aluminum blue of *Steel Plate* matches the water container of *Artificial Water*. This limited palette serves to create a resonance across the series - a visual continuity and uniformity that further accentuates a mutability or lack of distinction between the natural and artificial worlds; water and steel; fabric and metal rendered similar - Liu's world is one in which the eye can no longer discriminate between the two.

We are told that every summer Liu Weijian spends nearly two months simply walking - though the streets of a random city, or down a new highway. Transposed through time and space, he is Baudelaire's gentleman stroller of the city streets of Paris, a contemporary flâneur, a detached observer who understands, participates in and portrays the city. He never chooses what to see, instead he allows icons and detritus to

make themselves apparent as he walks almost unconsciously through his chosen terrain. As he opens his eyes to the scenes around him as they occur, Liu is simply bent on experiencing something real and capturing and collecting evidence on the contemporary human condition with his camera, saving it for later reflection.

Thus, each image is offered as a highlighter of the unexceptional; evidence of that which is hidden in plain sight - an objective recording of the fact of the moment. The now, the object in its relation to its context - at once arbitrary and fixed - is presented to the viewer for analysis. However, where Baudelaire's walker was excited by his contemporary landscape, in love with the modern, entirely present, Liu's images build up to create a picture of melancholy and nostalgia for a past age and an apprehension towards the future.

Liu Weijian's photographic eye is incisive, impeccable in picking out the synecdochical - the specific for the general - so that together his observations of the unremarkable and familiar sights of every day build up to an unnerving composition of contemporary experience. Liu offers us no specific narrative, but this is not at the price of a story. Rather, the series reveals what the camouflage of progress hides.

As our guide through the landscape, Liu offers us a quiet provocation; to recognise the reality of that landscape. Where each individual image has its own internal muted beauty it is Liu's cinematographer's focus on the relations between the individual shots and groups of shots that make up his series that allows tension to develop and which together expose the viewer to Liu Weijian's sharp critical eye.

A painterly mosaic of urban life composed of short brushstrokes, awkward angles and undefined shapes - Liu Weijian's works move back and forth between an impressionistic abstraction and their photographic source. Shadow, shape, line and colour rather than a photographic realism define materials against one another and become qualitative measures both of the original object and the painting itself. Interrogating an object's materiality in his painting, Liu simultaneously interrogates that object's position, presence and place in the world. Through this approach he is able to propose that there is no useful distinction to be made between the thing and the way it is represented - the object, the photograph of the object, the painting of the photograph - the natural, the man-made, the simulacrum, the concrete and the abstract have become one and the same. This pragmatic and intuitive approach to

the painting's relationship to its photographic source and the relationship of representation itself to the contemporary world seduces and disarms as it serves to remind us that marks of the brush can often make a subject more real to us rather than less.

Liu's subject matter is steel; rock; fabric; human; grass; metal; mineral; plastic; animal; shadow; water: together they merge and build to create a silently screaming necropolis of contemporary life.

人工水

羅斯·樂旋

磚路上人的黑影，放置著煙灰缸與滅火器的某間酒店走廊，飲水機上待乾的一塊髒布，停留在林中岩石上的烏鴉，被扔在路邊的膨脹的垃圾袋。這些畫是日常事件的小插曲：日常材料與場景沐浴在刺目的人造光下，或沉浸在看不見的太陽的斜視中。劉唯艱畫作中所捕捉的場景，有著一種令人不安的相似性。在這個由11幅作品組成的新系列中，每幅作品都是一個獨特的引證、一個凝結的瞬間。這裡有我們所忽視的事物，有我們選擇漠視的偶遇場景，也有那些我們經過過無數次卻沒有注意到的日常人物。作為觀眾的我們，所面對的是一系列的碎片的集合，這些碎片描繪那些我們熟悉的事物，卻顯得陌生而靜默。

在這系列中，城市生活的碎屑如靜物般呈現在我們面前。原材料、家庭用品、一次性的塑膠商品，與自然界的殘留物—既有真實的也有仿造的—一起被展現，正是便利卻又充滿浪費的生活方式的寫照。《賓館裡》的畫面由煙灰缸、滅火器及滅火器箱組成。三個最普通不過的物件靠牆放著，每個都有其原本的功能，但去除背景後卻顯得似乎漂浮在空間中。失去了「錨」，每個物體都好像漂浮著。同樣，垃圾袋描繪出城市生活最為日常的一面：兩個黑色袋子裝滿了垃圾，被棄置



《賓館裡》(局部)
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在路旁。在這裡，青綠的草地突然被淺灰色的混凝土路緣阻斷，袋子光滑的黑亮色閃耀在兩者之間，在草地上投下暗黑的影子。在劉唯艱的筆下，這些事物被微妙地描繪成風景中的暴力干擾。

而在《人工水》中，窗外可以瞥見一抹綠色，房間的大部分空間則被一台塑料的飲水機所佔據。作品的名字：人工水，正強調了這樣一個觀點：我們的生活已經到了這樣一個程度，就連最基本的自然資源：水都可以被操控、被包裝與商品化。

觀察著消費主義的影響，劉唯艱的目光游移在過去與未來，對舊世界與新世界同時加以審視。另外三件作品：《家鄉一椅子與礦泉水》、《洗腳水》與《這裡也有紅旗》同樣把水作為重要的符號。在《這裡也有紅旗》中，棕色的、鏽跡斑斑的碼頭伸向山地湖中，它的重量感干擾並切斷了畫面。一艘無人駕駛的漁船孤零零地停泊在旁，似乎毫無用處地被拴在碼頭上，背朝水面。《洗腳水》則是對一個裝滿水的陶瓷盆的優美描繪，顯然，它捕捉到剛剛洗完腳後的瞬間，細小的水紋仍然留在盆邊。

所有的作品發展成一種對自然的無情界限、被如閃電般快速侵襲的傳統，以及作為替代品的傳統自身的擬像之間的劃分。擺脫人類的雙手和有機過程、向著自動化生活進發的機械進程似乎已經完成。那個舊世界被道路、碼頭、鋼鐵與混泥土所割裂，它被複製，被仿造，反而成為新奇的存在。

更糟糕的是，從這系列作品可以看出，人類在劉唯艱的世界中似乎無足輕重。在《孕婦》(唯一直接描繪人的作品)中，一個年輕女人在沙發上睡覺，不管她有沒有懷孕，蓋在她腹部上的毯子都遮掩了這個事實。這個在睡夢中的瘦削女人，在環境的映襯下顯更加得瘦小，她顯得沒有力量，也激不起你任何的期待，她雖在場景中卻並非至關重要的存在。打個比方說，她身上似乎沒有任何對生產與充滿意義的未來的期望—她懷孕了，同時也並非如此。

在《我們倆》中，劉唯艱進一步消解了人，而不僅僅是影響他們的世界。人以影子的形式出現，朦朧、扭曲、變形，與冰冷的石頭地板那鋒利而規律的線條形成鮮明對比。再而，在《垃圾袋》中，無生命的塑料袋保持著立體的形狀，平穩又飽滿，而人的形象則顯得弱化、疏離又多餘。這些作品中有種故意的平鋪直敘，再一次模糊了自然與人造、原材料和產品間的分別。舉例來說，在《垃圾袋》中，草地、塑料袋與混泥土路邊都用同一種方式呈現，只借助形狀和顏色來加



《這裡也有紅旗》(局部)
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以區別。同樣的特點也體現在《天漸漸變涼了》中。畫作描繪了山中孤零零的帳篷，那帳篷的鮮橙色圓頂盤旋在青草地上，顯得異質、鼓凸、具有侵入感，然而卻又並不顯得十分自然、十分真實，或是十分人工。一條模稜兩可的鋸齒形線條切入畫面，可能是一條小河，但看起來更像是一條混泥土小徑。在這裡，沒有什麼是完全自然的。就連露營，這試圖讓我們回歸自然的休閒活動，對於劉唯艱來說似乎都有著相反的意義，正因為我們早已與自然疏離。

材料與色彩跨越了畫布，所以《這裡也有紅旗》中旗幟的鮮紅色，與《賓館裡》的滅火器遙相呼應，也讓人想起《孕



《孕婦》(局部)
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婦》中沙發明亮而柔軟的色調。而《鋼地板》中的鋁藍色則呼應著《人造水》中的飲水機。這種有限的配色試圖在整個系列中營造一種共鳴，通過製造一種視覺上的連續性和均勻性，更加強調突變的存在，又或是自然與人工世界內的區隔模糊。水與鋼，織物與金屬都被相似地呈現，在劉唯艱的世界中，我們的眼睛再也難以清晰地區分這兩者。

每個夏天，劉唯艱都會花大約兩個月的時間，只是單純地散步，在任意一個城市的隨便一條街上，或是沿著一個新的高速公路走。穿越時空，他就像是波德萊爾筆下巴黎街道上的紳士看客，一個當代的「閒逛者」、一個超然的觀察者，理解、參與並描繪城市。他從不選擇看的對象，相反，當他無意識地在所選擇的地方閒逛時，他允許各種標誌和城市碎屑在他面前顯現自身。當他對發生在周圍的場景張開眼睛，會傾向於體驗真實的事物，並用照相機捕捉和收集體現當代人類現狀的種種證據，留下以待之後沉思。

所以，每個圖像都像是勾勒普通事物的亮光筆。因為日常生活的蛛絲馬跡往往隱藏在普通的場景中，而後者正是對某時某刻事實的客觀記錄。現在，事物被安置在其語境中，其意象馬上被專制地固定下來，並被呈現給觀眾自行分析。然而，波德萊爾筆下的漫遊者為當代景觀感到興奮，並愛上現代化的整個當下；劉唯艱的作品卻表現出一種對過往時代的憂鬱和懷舊，以及對未來的憂慮。

劉唯艱眼光是敏銳的，在舉偶法方面，他更是無懈可擊，擅



《垃圾袋》(局部)
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於從常規裡挑出特性。所以，他對於日常生活中那些人們熟悉卻不起眼的景色的觀察，逐步建立起一幅令人不安的關於當代經驗的圖景。他並不提供具體的論述，但這並不意味著故事的缺失，相反，該系列作品揭示出過程中被掩蓋的東西。作為帶領我們進入景象的嚮導，劉唯艱呈現給我們一種無聲的挑釁，激勵我們去辨認景色中的真實性。每個圖像都有自己內在無聲的美麗，但卻是劉唯艱如攝影師般精確的聚焦，以及對單個圖像與整組圖像間關係的強調，使得他的系列作品中張力可以不斷延展，最終使觀眾籠罩在他敏銳的批判性眼光的審視下。

由短促的筆觸所構成的關於城市生活的馬賽克繪畫，令人局促的角度、不明確的形狀-劉唯艱的作品游移在印象派作品的抽象感與它們的逼真來源之間。他用陰影、形狀、線條、顏色，而非一種逼真的現實主義來定義不同的材料，並成為對原本對象或是畫作本身的定性指標。劉唯艱在畫作中質疑某一對象的物質性，也同時質問該物件在世界中的存在位置。用這種方式，他成功地指出，在對象和對該對象的表現方式之間，難以作出有用的劃分：對象，對象的照片，照片的圖畫皆如是。自然、人造、擬像，具體的和抽象的都逐漸變成同一樣東西。這種實用主義的、由直覺出發的方式，揭示畫

作與其真實來源的關係，以及畫像與當代世界的關係，也被用來提醒我們，畫筆往往把一個對象表現得更真實，而非相反。劉唯艱的創作主題是鋼、石、織物、人類、草、金屬、礦物、塑料、動物、影子、水。所有這些合在一起，建構出一個沉默中隱含厲聲尖叫的當代生活的大墓園。

