

Creation and Exhibition, Art and Its Enemies: Liu Wei's New Project

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“Trilogy” is an exhibition project that brings together the past two years of work by the young and creatively flourishing artist Liu Wei. The exhibition responds to the immediate world in which the artist resides; at the same time, it is a process by which the artist attempts to locate his increasingly mature yet ever self-reflexive thinking process by confronting questions such as: Why is it that we make art today and in the way we do? How do we understand the relationship between thinking, life and art? And, most importantly, in a period when we are universally confronted with tumultuous political and cultural realities, what truly demands our attention? How can we come to an understanding of art as politics? (In reality, art has always been inadequate for establishing and independently fulfilling any political mission; we imbue it with existential and political meaning, but art is invariably manifested as an observation, an observation of observation, a loss, an error or even a forced distortion.) Art as a linguistic “installation” brings together different histories and narratives of identity into the same space that we inhabit to create feelings of “displacement,” “conflict” or of an even greater “mystery,” functioning as a response by the artist to a reality in which the logic of consumerism and the simplification of political attitudes manifest a poverty of thought and chaotic logic. Having lost its role as cultural mediator, contemporary art is characterized by a dilemma of thought and action. Therefore, the problem confronting artists is how to use insight and individual power to carefully examine and analyze the seemingly incomprehensible complexity and general cultural angst of reality during this moment. An artist’s thinking and creative work not only symbolically reference the real world, but carefully consider and critique the state and situation of contemporary knowledge to become a deconstructive and “interfering” force against the presupposed values and mainstream concepts that color our judgment and actions.

The notion of “spatial environment” that Liu Wei both proposes and intentionally creates in the exhibition “Trilogy” examines the meaning of art in the current context and the relationship between the artist and an unachievable utopian ideal. Imprinted with his personal psychological reality, Liu Wei’s installations appear specifically conceived as solutions to his own questions. Often in Liu Wei’s work, he transforms a slice of reality into a sensual aesthetic moment by way of mixing and fabricating visible and invisible realities. In the end, this instant of absolute beauty becomes an image of reality, part of the world Liu has constructed. He allows the content of his work to have a life of its own through self-critique and deconstruction. It is unrelated to the ethical entanglements of — and critical attitudes toward — mundane reality. From his artwork, Liu Wei extracts a refined and ironic ethos — and it is in this instant that he assiduously constructs a sense of the ideal realm of art. We seem to be able to pass through these instants of creation and to see, through the cutting apart of these plants, timbers and metals, how material things can be reconstructed and acquire new names; frequently these are images and

scenes that are manufactured in accordance with the mental constructs of the artist. Liu Wei's fabricated images are so saturated with the artist's complex and entangled emotions about issues of reality that they become transformative scenes of logical thought, providing political significance in a form that is rapidly consumed by time.

Is an exhibition the destination point and purpose of artistic creation, or an unfixed departure point for the artist's thoughts and actions? For Liu Wei, this is a question that must be asked. His approach towards artwork is that of a psychologically open and experimental mind; the exhibition functions as a laboratory for distinguishing deviations and differences, transforming balance into a new imbalance, the visible into the invisible, and popular language into the unfamiliar and essential. In this exhibition, Liu Wei uses an active mental process to infiltrate the links in the circulation of the production of images, at the same time making his own presence known. The exhibition becomes a process of political thought and rehearsal.

Is an artist able to understand this exhibition space as a "site of creation," a unique space to convincingly present the chaos and complexity of the quotidian life we exist in, and the turmoil and complexity of history silenced and concealed by conventional historical readings? In other words, can the artist take the amalgam of all knowledge, textual readings, streams of consciousness and the innumerable visual images that reside there and juxtapose, mingle and circulate them in order to bring art out of its independent and mysterious historical footprint and combine it together with the chaos of reality and image production, and any other thought, to become a real "power"? Liu Wei uses the immediacy and experiential sense of his artwork to collide head-on with the logic of universal consumerism and the society of the spectacle. In a direct and unfettered manner, he opposes the current system of art production. Thus does the exhibition become a process of curating his future exhibitions, an open (intellectual) posture and a negotiation with the associated value structures of an exhibition to become an action. Is this the meaning and significance of an exhibition? Does the artist dare to dissolve his identity and find from within the means to stimulate the external and to avoid naïve, linear and didactic modes of thinking? In this way, artistic creation draws closer to the limits of freedom found in action and space.

"'Materiality' is my understanding of art," writes Liu Wei. "Having something (in a space) is extremely physical, something you can feel. I am only the intermediary, to provoke thought. This is democratic, but if I start providing explanations, I become an entity of power, hegemonic power." Born in the 1970s, the artists of Liu Wei's generation have consolidated their own writings, micro-observations and critiques of their era, extricating them from an infatuation with the emotional details of meta-narrative and from the themes of relational aesthetics and cultural critique, so that self-immersive personal experience is brought into their art writing. When Liu Wei reconfigured his cement blocks and impressed his seals on them in *Property of L.W.* (2004) and *As Long As I See It* (2006),

was he already aware of the significance of an artist situating his thinking at the center of autocratic power? Did this signify that the artist was proposing a considered, rational and precise intervention in response to the idea of power, instead of the sort of inflammatory emotional pose or contrived meditation that is so often seen?

It can be said that the works of Liu Wei over these few years seek to develop this interwoven matrix of relationships in order to present limitations as knowledge and to devote an effort to rethinking and instigating aggregated dynamic structures supported by specific knowledge sets. At the same time that they acquire the power to strike back at the so-called intrinsic textual superstitions of art regarding a sense of stable value and the purity and unity of language, the works also manifest the shadow of their background genealogies of knowledge and power. Liu Wei, through his conjectured intellectual “installations,” shreds, provokes and logically analyzes art’s tired clichés, while seeking out and manufacturing the (age’s) intellectual chaos within them. He uses various media and materials to explicate his own attitudes regarding them, and re-acquires and activates art’s desire for freedom in order to further open up each possibility sought after.

Through his images, site installations and the presentation of his artistic thinking, Liu Wei presents micro-politics, the oppositions between the body and power, the limits of visual expression and power, and a number of abstruse and mysterious ideas. His observations extend to architecture, urban planning, commercial commodities, fashion, the silence and darkness at the interface of the urban and rural, as well as people and plants. At the same time, his work extends to such themes as the body and biology, living spaces and materiality, life’s sense of isolation and dark currents, as well as temporal anxieties, which he systematically places in experimental contexts. We can sense and experience this in such works as *Hard to Restrain* and *Looks like a Landscape* (2004), *Anti-Matter* (2006), *Seven Nights* and *The Outcast* (2007), *As Long as I See It* (2006), *Property of L.W.* (2004), *Love It, Bite It* (2006-2007) and the series *Purple Air*. These works all have a strong sense of their times and a hallucinatory and enigmatic quality; all are derived from the unintentional accuracy of the intellectual examination and intervention regarding issues of reality.

Set before us, how does this artistic creation serve as a way of motivating the artist’s thinking and his subsequent actions? Through exhibitions, artists remind us that careful thought forms the internal relationship between art and our sensory knowledge of reality; if life itself and everyday actions cannot be displayed and if the actual occurrence of events cannot be grasped, then creative work and artworks became the re-occurrence of experienced events and the process whereby we experience emotional details similarly constructed in our psychological world. Thus, exhibitions are not created for displaying artworks, because all true observation can only come from within us. Art activates our sensitivity, our receptivity, and internalizes thinking in our bodies: it is theory revealed through bodies and action.