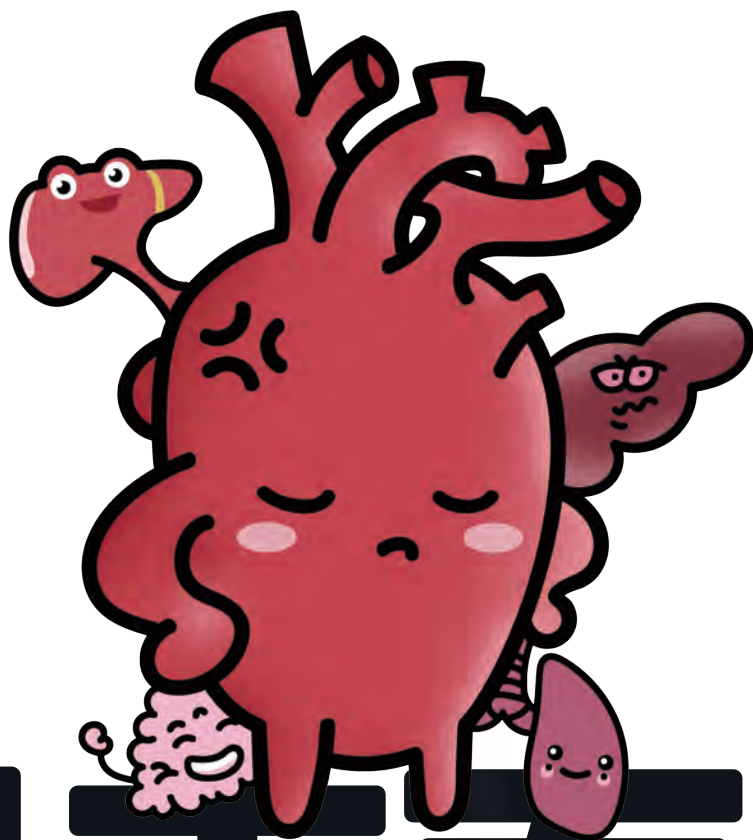


艺术界
LEAP

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平滑表面

Sleek

Surfaces



溯源陆平原—— 在整个世界的消息里 Traces of Lu Pingyuan: In the Messages of the Whole World

↑
《故事》，2013 年
行为，尺寸可变
图片致谢艺术家

Story, 2013
Performance, Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

撰文：聂小依
Text by Nie Xiaoyi

一、叱石成羊

黄初平者，丹溪人也。年十五，家使牧羊。有道士见其有良谨，便将至金华山石室中，四十余年，不复念家。其兄初起，行山寻索初平，历年不得。后见市中有一道士，初起召问之曰：“吾有弟名初平，因令牧羊，失之四十余年，莫知生死所在，愿道君为占之。”道士曰：“金华山中，有一牧羊儿姓黄，字初平，是卿弟非疑。”初起闻之，即随道士去求弟，遂得相见，悲喜语毕，问初平羊何在，曰：“近在山东耳。”初起往视之不见，但见白石而还。谓初平曰：“山东无羊也。”初平曰：“羊在耳，兄但自不见之。”初平与初起俱往看之，初平乃叱曰：“羊起！”于是白石皆变为羊数万头。

——葛洪《神仙传》

1984 年，有一男孩陆平原在金华出生。从小他就喜欢绘画、漫画、讲故事。他父母都是医生，儿时暑假，他常常要独自待在家里。改革开放之后，浙江有许多轻工业塑料厂，盛产塑料玩具。小男孩家里也有许多。他会拿着这些来自工厂、来自不知名故事中的角色，讲它们遨游世界的历险故事，视它们为玩伴。

黄初平和陆平原的故事都发生在浙江金华。前者显然是传说——东晋时期的黄初平日后被尊称为普济劝善的“黄大仙”，驰名粤港，“叱石成羊”是他流传最广的神迹。后者听起来是个回溯艺术家创作轨迹时的常见逸事——陆平原日后成为了一名住在上海的职业艺术家，展览中会出现硕大玩具和膨化食品。二者更强烈的区别在于，对着石头喊，“羊”，是指向等待实证的未来，若有回应便举世称奇；对着塑料玩偶讲，“你曾遨游太空”，是不可验证的杜撰想象。但两个故事之间仍奇妙共振着——人类为无生命的事物注入动态，靠言说和词语赋予其生命遭遇。而究竟石头和羊是否都是人的想象，经历是确凿还是一场虚空，都无法确知。这么讲，陆平原的创作也可以算是“叱石成羊”，只不过是另辟一方虚构时空，生命存寓其中。

陆平原在松江的工作室像个无限拓展的容器，物件纷杂而包罗万象，常常某个角落也堆出一片假山假海：往年做的“巴巴伯”雕塑，最近在画的人工智能错误阶段的六指手，旧杂志、新玩具、瓶瓶罐罐……但最引人注目的是那些现代艺术里要被称为“现成品”的脸状饼干、托马斯小火车、MM 豆小人。这些毫无性格的拟人形象最容易被陆平原看到。它们的虚拟也带着明显矛盾：它们肖似人类，言说自我，同时又不被当真。在咬下饼干时，大多数人不会在意那张脸，

侧写
Profile

陆平原
Lu Pingyuan

仅仅把它们当作徒有脸孔而没有生命感受的物体而已。注意，这里所谈的不是迪士尼动画中已有传记和标志性脸孔、声音的动画人物，而是流水线上生产出来，只是被加了人形的廉价形态。比如陆平原常提到，电视机播到医药广告时，就会跳出来长着嘴巴眼睛、双手双手的器官，黄色、粉色、蓝色种种。无人会想这些肾和心脏姓甚名谁，但它们能让疼痛瞬时变得平均，感受一并消失。

在 2022 年的“画廊一夜”展览里，陆平原调取了两种不同的动画参照。一种是上海美术电影制片厂 1978 年完成的动画片《画廊一夜》：政治意识形态审查者“棒子”“帽子”二君毁坏、关停儿童画展览后，画中的孩子、公鸡、大象活了过来，联手洗掉了作品上的墨水，打倒了敌人。这些形象都具有自己的性格、性别、来历。另一种动画则是动态图形（Motion Graphic），主要用于公共场景下的信息传达，例如前述的医药广告，和新观大流行中被反复播放的如何洗手、戴口罩的科教视频。这其中的形象毫无性格，动画背景也往往只有一片纯色。两者虽然都拟人，但存在状态却迥然不同——一种有自主意志，另一种则近乎徒有脸孔的色块。陆平原的绘画和雕塑常借用这些不同的动画和卡通形象。展场铺天盖地出一片橘黄、一片粉红，与美术馆外现实隔绝。

↓
“故事”系列，2012 年至今
文本、雕塑等，尺寸可变
图片致谢艺术家

“Story” Series, 2012 to present
Text and installation, Dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist



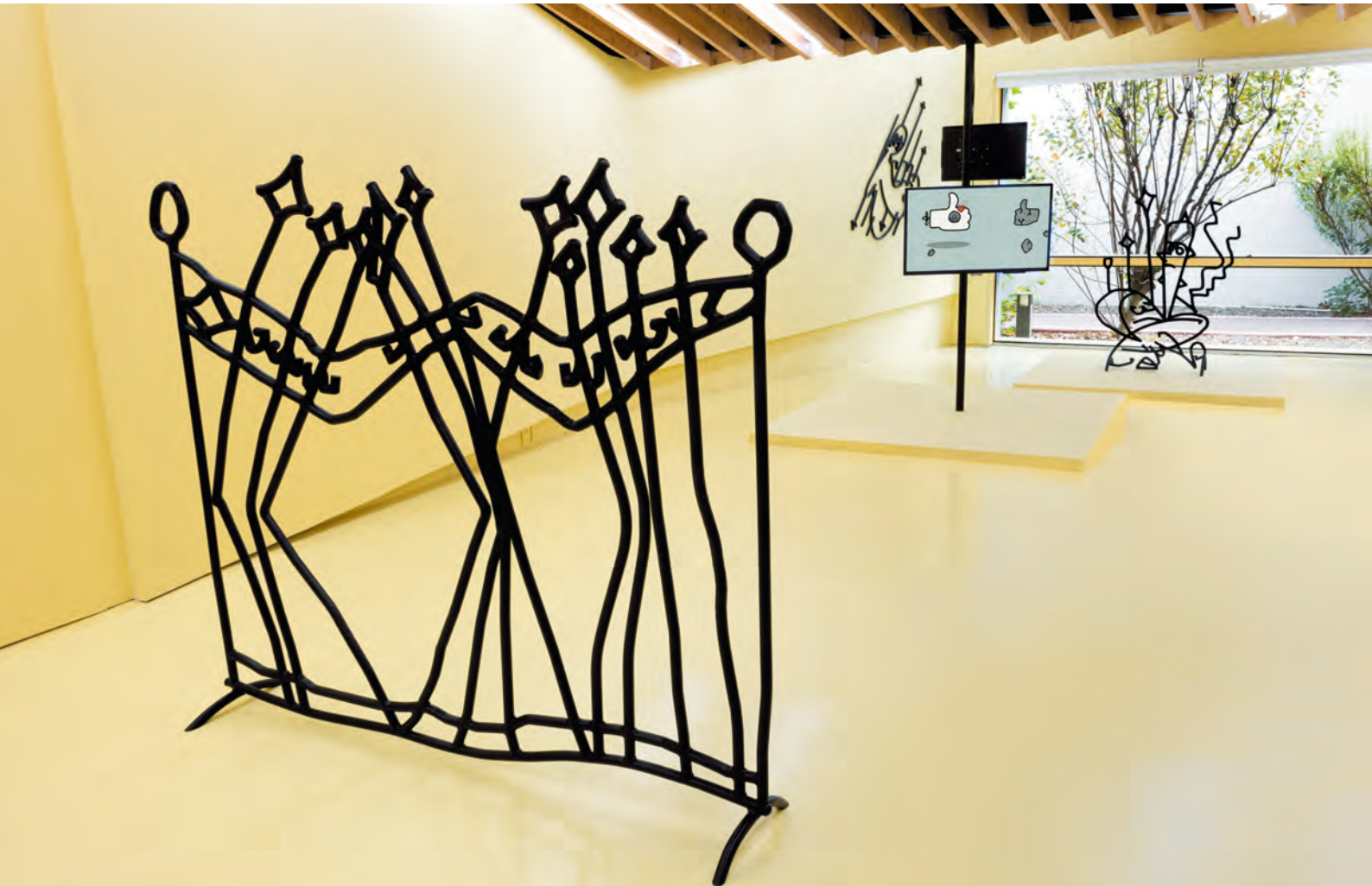
踏入这里，仿佛就是扁平的广告和动画被拉成 3D，被切换至不真实的悬空状态。

看陆平原的近年创作，有时会想这些缤纷造物是否仅仅是对大众视觉文化的移植和模拟。无限分裂的形象、大量的雕塑显示出艺术家劳作、捏合形象时的快感，但不同作品之间在媒介材料、美学特征和创作思路，难掩重复。已经身为模拟的商品拟人形象，被放大、重组、再次模拟，或者仅仅挪移到美术馆中。绚烂夸张适合潮流品牌和网红打卡，活灵活现、能说会道的卡通形象与流行文化消费合拍。陆平原究竟要言说什么，是讽刺、狂欢还是救赎，细究者很难找到答案。“画廊一夜”在这些项目中更加特别，因为其援引的动画本身有明确时空（即文革时期的美术馆），被挑选出的元素——铁栅栏——不仅在星星画会展览时是中国美术馆小花园外绘画和雕塑作品的支撑物，也是近年来疫情中人们最熟悉的东西之一。这样真实生活中的沉重事物进入动画般的展览现场，虽然没有双眼或嘴巴，但它们在展览中成为主角，甚至人物。它们的身前或身后再没有需要拦截的人或事物。它们被悬置了。

形状的无尽变化以及事物更真切的本质是否存在，令人想起塑料在二十世纪承载的双重投射。一面，它是如今最最

“画廊一夜”展览现场
星美术馆，上海，2022 年

“One Night at a Gallery”, installation view
START MUSEUM, Shanghai, 2022



廉价低等、无穷无尽的速成速弃人造物。人们痛恨它造成土壤和水体污染，害怕塑料微粒进入肠道和血液，同时也为它赋予低微的阶级属性。但曾经，塑料是魔法的代名词。1957 年，罗兰·巴特称塑料为“奇迹般的物质”，他写到，“塑料正是无限转化这一理念本身 [……] 与其说它是物品，不如说是运动的痕迹。”（plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation [……] it is less a thing than the trace of a movement.）19 世纪起，从如橡胶、棉花、石油等自然材料，人们发明出赛璐珞、人造丝、尼龙、泡沫……从自然物到人造物，塑料软硬皆可，能变成世间任何事物的形状，替代珍珠、象牙和木头，变作梳子、衣料和血管支架。人们相信它将保护地球，促进民主。无限变形的特质让塑料与科幻小说联袂，成为永生和未来的代名词。在这一点上，塑料之于科幻小说，就如法术之于道人。奥妙不在于法术结果，而是变化过程。塑料究竟不值一文还是世间奇迹，这其中的模糊、欺骗、可疑、变化，就和生命的面目一样。

二十世纪最后二十年，手握塑料玩具的陆平原沉浸在未来幻想中。当时的科幻杂志《奥秘》和《科幻世界》就像电影《宇宙探索编辑部》里的那本杂志一样，穿插着天文望远镜的广告，封面则是爆裂的美式漫画。后来出现的日本和欧美动画则震撼了陆平原的眼睛。对他来说，日本漫画就是他的《芥子园画谱》（他还临摹过《尼罗河的女儿》，一部原名《王家的纹章》的日本少女漫画）。只是，转过千禧年，大陆的文化喷薄逐渐变为规模化、流水线的生产。被生产出来的脸孔不可计数，形象亦不再珍贵。或许我们和陆平原都需要回到牧羊儿黄初平叱石成羊的那一刻，不断幻化的生命运动之中，重要的究竟是什么？

二、逃逸之所

有个艺术家梦到自己走进一座很大的庙，庙里坐着一排佛像，仔细看这些佛像，都是毕加索，莫奈，达利，博伊斯这些大艺术家，前面放了张桌子，桌子上有本书，叫《未来三百年艺术史》，艺术家迫不及待地去翻查里面有没有他，翻了半天发现没有，很沮丧，这些大艺术家嘻嘻哈哈地笑起来，说：“没关系，这里面没有很正常，你可以去边上那个庙看看，他们管地区的。”这个艺术家离开了，来到边上一个稍微小点的庙，庙里也坐着一排佛像，仔细一看，都是齐白石，张大千，徐悲鸿，黄宾虹这些大艺术家，前面桌子上也有本书，叫《中国未来三百年艺术史》，艺术家迫不及待地去翻查里面有没有他，翻了半天也没有，这些艺术家也笑嘻嘻地说：“这里面没有很正常，这儿也不是一般人能进来的，

你要是不死心，可以去外面路口一个小庙看看。”于是他离开了这个庙，走到路口，在草丛后面看见一个半人多高的小庙，低下头去看，好像里面坐着个很小的佛，他就弯腰钻进去，一看，就是自己。

—— 陆平原，《艺王庙》，2016

陆平原小时候想做漫画家。大学他去学了平面设计。他进入当代艺术时，正是市场泡沫破灭前后，高歌猛进逐渐被怀疑、犬儒和失望取代。当代艺术的系统到底如何运转，美术馆的游戏规则是什么，艺术家与策展人该如何工作，如何评判什么才是好的艺术和艺术家？种种问题萦绕年轻艺术从业者。与逐渐出现的清晰策展人意识并行，艺术家开始成立小组，“自我机构化”，参与到机构批判之中，重新考量与外部系统的艺术行业的距离。他们也开始前往世界各地参加驻地，看看那里的艺术家过着何种生活。

陆平原在这种情形里参与过 guest 小组，共同发起过电子杂志《PDF》，逮过画廊里的虫子充当动物园，给画廊装配充电线让朋友来充电，让美术馆保安看管自己的钱包。最出名的此类作品或许是他 在 2011 年的一个行为。在人群注视下，他手脚并用、努力攀爬与他身高相等、身材相似的展台，屡败屡战，最终登顶。这个行为《一个现成品》重新激活了意大利艺术家皮埃罗·曼佐尼（Piero Manzoni）在 1961 年的作品《神奇的基座—活雕塑》（Base Magica - Scultura Vivente）。只不过曼佐尼站上去的那个台子只有大概 60 公分，陆平原的基座有 170 公分；曼佐尼气定神闲，陆平原狼狈气喘、汗流浹背——正写照了当时年轻艺术家的焦灼。

如果陆平原在 2011 年“胶囊”展览展出被自己否定的方案，是因为他觉得这些方案即便做成了作品，也不够格进入美术史和美术馆；2013 年“等待一个艺术家”中美术馆员工不断洗涤艺术家的衣服，保持这些衣服一直要被悬挂晾干的状态，则挑明了艺术家身体的缺席。美术馆的化身从胶囊被替换为衣服，等待人类肉身的进入，扮演起“艺

术家”角色。在 2021 年展览“第一个艺术家”里，陆平原指认了一位失败艺术家的成功之处。1990 年代法国动画片《巴巴爸爸》(Les Barbapapa) 描画了一个角色巴巴伯 (Barbabeau)。巴巴伯是位艺术家，手中总是拿着素描本或者调色盘。在陆平原看来，巴巴伯画画、写生、做雕塑，都只是在重复既有的艺术方法、素材和风格，是个注定无法写入艺术史的失败者。但巴巴伯毛绒绒的黑色身体，就像巴巴爸爸一样可以变为任何形状。身体形态的无限变化，被陆平原认为可以超越和颠覆既有艺术史，让巴巴伯成为“第一个艺术家”。显然，虽然离开了明面上直接拆解艺术和美术馆系统，陆平原仍然在透过其他语境去讨论谁有权力和标准指认艺术。陆平原对现实机制——尤其是艺术系统——的疑问，并未消散，只是从对抗变为了逃逸。甚至，他似乎有种解放者的愿望：让巴巴伯，或者说任何人，从这一套既有的艺术观念里蹦出来，意识到自己没必要契合任何范式。

2014 年，陆平原说自己梦到刚刚过世的河原温 (On Kawara) 请他替自己继续“今天”(Today) 系列的日期绘画。许多人当然不买账这样的叙述——这个“梦”或许只是让他与大艺术家发生联系，浪漫化地继续生产已经被系统和市场验证过的产品。“梦”，或者说无法证伪的宣告、讲述，不是第一次进入到陆平原的创作。再早几年，他已经开始写一些故事和无法实现的方案。这些故事往往无头无尾、莫名其妙。虽然有神鬼精怪，但是并未有聊斋般的浓烈情感或者格林童话的寓言性质。它们欠缺叙事技巧、文字风格或者主旨，甚至是反叙事的。它们并不试图改变读者，大多冷静描述一种变化。从某种程度上说，陆平原的故事，本身就是在逃离作者性、风格化，逃离成为一眼即可判断作者的事物。虽然“故事”在一纸文字的形式上可以联系到早期观念主义艺术家把方案作为作品，以及对收藏和市场恋物癖的抵抗，但这种暂时化归文字更像是让故事与作为讲述者的他拉开一定距离。故事能离开言说者，离开固定的文字排列，存在于转述之中，被不同人激活，以不同口吻、方式和细节展开。这种指向个体内部和不同化身的方式，让作品的生命形态变为信息的流通、转化和复活。

“第一个艺术家”展览现场
没顶画廊，上海，2021 年

“The First Artist”, installation view
Madeln Gallery, Shanghai, 2021

史铁生曾在《务虚笔记》描述了无数消息在宇宙中飘荡的场景，它们会化作生命、心情和事物之间微微震颤的关联。他以消息的第一人称，喃喃发出呼唤：“你快来呀听我说，我不光在我的身体之中，我还在这整个世界所有的消息里，在所有的已知和所有的未知里，在所有的人所有的欲望里，因而那是不灭不死的呀……”在某种意义上，陆平原的故事也是这样的消息。但作为艺术家的陆平原和自己创作的位置，并不纯然轻盈。或许，在编织故事的过程里，艺术家本想后撤。他自己想成为的便是那个千变万化、不拘泥于任何形态的故事——与其做登顶的现成品艺术家，不如做永远在现身之中的信息。正像陆平原最近说到的，“突然会有一个瞬间，让我感觉自己是一个很临时的东西，一个状态。我们都太习惯自己作为一个完整的‘人’存在了，‘我’其实是数万亿个不同个体临时组成的一个花园，当‘人’的生命消失时，身体中的各个元素只是回到它们原来的位置而已。”然而，在实际运作的艺术系统里，陆平原仍然是一个个体艺术家。他会被标签化，他的创作也仍然需要作为实体流动，逐渐化为



具体的不断生产的雕塑和绘画。说到底，故事是否只是让产品的生产合理化的道具；或者，它是让陆平原制造自己的语境，缓解现实存在焦虑的方式？

三、有情世界

“我恨不得有一只大船，尽载了石门湾及世间一切众生，开到永远太平的地方。”

——丰子恺，1939

陆平原 2020 年个展的名字“有情世界”取自丰子恺的一幅画。那张画的题款是“缘缘堂画笺”。1933 年，丰子恺在故乡石门湾修筑了缘缘堂。但在有形体之前，缘缘堂“本来是灵的存在”，存在于丰子恺的想象之中。从房屋设计到一草一木，丰子恺都精心设计，以期“形式朴素”“灵肉调和”。《有情世界》描画的或许就是丰子恺在缘缘堂的书桌。桌子上摆着笔筒、茶壶、杯子、闹钟、钢笔、墨水、蒲扇……花瓶里还插了几朵花。丰氏漫画虽然是白描，但很传神生动。这张画里，他把“神”也画了出来——里面的每个事物都有一张脸，表情各不相同，有的微笑颌首，有的怒目圆睁。“有情”本来是佛教里的概念，说的是有心识、感情的事物，当然也包括人。后来丰子恺在桂林教书时说，“画家对于静物，常把它们看作活物”，将事物想象为“同画家自己一样有生命有情感的人”。这幅《有情世界》直接体现了这一点。然而，1937 年，日军逼近石门湾，丰子恺全家十人仓皇乘船逃难，缘缘堂之后也全部毁于战火。《有情世界》里的那方书桌当然也灰飞烟灭。丰子恺如此痛惜惨遭屠戮的众生事物，幻想能有“一只大船”载着他所爱的人与物渡劫。

陆平原的“故事”和展览，就像是这样的“一只大船”，载有情众生离开惨淡现实。他说，“算是妖怪或者奇幻的生物，在今天已经没有生存余地了，其实我的很多作品也是在发明空间，让它们生存。”而他创作的矛盾之处在于，他甚至最关切的不是那些得道的妖怪，而且那些最卑微且毫无灵性的生命。若是真把那些动态图形图画、被画了眼睛嘴巴的饼干等等和迪士尼动画里的主角相比，前者犹如只能为功能服役

的贱民，后者则被资本赋予了许多资源、人力去虚拟一段生平际遇。与其说前者并非生命，倒不如它们根本没有机会生长，只得“无情”。当神明、鬼魂、妖怪、精灵从当下日常全面撤退，还在扮演生命的角色常常是这些商品和广告。陆平原近乎在“回收”这些被轻易创造出的生命形象，工作室和展览因此如收容所，堆叠的是无处可逃、已被弃毁的难民。如果有时间去细看它们的浅薄、速朽、虚假，或许在嫌弃之余会感到它们的脆弱并为其哀伤。无情的不是卑微生命，而是充满镇压、暴力、逐利的现实。现实之外、评判之外的感知，只能在虚构的时空里暂时栖息。

法国艺术家皮埃尔·于热（Pierre Huyghe）和菲利普·帕雷诺（Philippe Parreno）曾经从日本动画公司的无名角色库低价购买了一个女性动画形象，为她取名“Ann-Lee”。她的形象很简单，最明显的就是那双动漫眼睛。后来两位艺术家也邀请了很多朋友加入创作，并把这一项目命名为“No Ghost Just A Shell”（正是日本动画《攻壳机动队》英文名“Ghost in the Shell”的变体）。AnnLee 进入了不同艺术家的创作，成为站立的雕塑，在录像中自白，悬空跳舞，脸孔在夜空中被烟火描画。这一创作其实和陆平原的实践一样，都在解救那些被创造出来、只有躯壳的无名氏。不过陆平原的解救没那么浪漫，同情没有转化为对其形态的过多介入。他行动中依然充满怀疑，倒是有种与被解救者更平等的状态。

“第一个艺术家”的新闻稿提到《巴巴爸爸》动画时，以“艺术家记忆中的”作为定语。一个广为流传的动画，便这样被拉入艺术家的内部语境，和动画自身的流传轨迹拉开距离。如果陆平原的“故事”在任何意义上是真实的，或许是其从现实逃离的动作。对他而言，“一只大船”有时是回忆，有时是梦，有时是故事。它们平行甚至隔绝于现实，能被反复演绎、复述。或许现在正是陆平原打通实在造型与无形消息之间界限的时刻——人与物与故事与梦境与记忆，都是不断变形的容器，可以解救和收容彼此，让他们从艺术系统、社会现实暂时走远，与激烈复杂的政治现场拉开距离。向内，向远，向幻想，向混沌。不过，是否会在某个时刻，一种绝对的触动会穿过虚构和现实的界面？



↑
《黑色自然 - 21901》，2021 年
布上丙烯和油画，185 × 220 厘米

Nature Noir-21901, 2021
Oil and acrylic on canvas, 185 × 220 cm

Part 1
Turning Stones into Sheep

Huang Chuping was a native of Danxi. At the age of fifteen he was made to tend sheep for his family. There was a master of the Dao who, noting his goodness and attentiveness, took him to a cave in Goldflower Mountain. For more than forty years Chuping did not miss his family. Meanwhile, his older brother, Chuqi, searched for him without success. Then one day there was a master of the Dao who excelled at divinations, performing in the market nearby. Chuqi approached and requested a divination [of his brother’s whereabouts]. The master said, “There is a shepherd lad on Goldflower Mountain. I wonder if it might be your brother?” So Chuqi followed the master [to the mountain], where he searched for and [at last] found his brother. They had mixed feelings of joy and sorrow on seeing each other. Chuqi

then asked where the sheep were. Chuping replied, “They’re close by, on the eastern side of the mountain.” Chuqi went to look, but he saw no sheep there, only countless white rocks, so he returned and said that there were no sheep. “The sheep are there, it’s just that you didn’t see them,” Chuping responded, and so they went together to have another look. “Sheep, get up!” Chuping shouted, and at this the white rocks all stood up and turned into several myriad head of sheep.¹

— Ge Hong, *Shenxian Zhuan*

In 1984, a boy named Lu Pingyuan was born in Jinhua, Zhejiang. From a young age, he had a passion for drawing, comics, and storytelling. Both of his parents were doctors; during his childhood summers, he often spent time at home by himself. After the Chinese economic reform, Zhejiang became home to many light industrial plastic factories that produced a plethora of plastic toys. At the little boy’s home, too, there were a lot of them. He would hold these figures that came from factories and unknown tales, tell stories of their adventure around the world, and regard them as his sincere companions.

The stories of Huang Chuping and Lu Pingyuan both take place in Jinhua, Zhejiang. The former is clearly a legend — Huang was later regarded as the benevolent “Huang Daxian”, who was famous throughout the Cantonese region. “Turning Stones into Sheep” is his best known miracle. The latter seems to be a commonly told anecdote when you trace an artist’s creative trajectory — Lu went on becoming a professional artist based in Shanghai; his exhibitions were to display giant toys and puffed snacks. The essential difference between the two

lies in the fact that when Huang shouted “Sheep” at a stone, it pointed to a future that awaited for its substantiation; in this case any response would be quite an astonishing occurrence. By contrast, saying “you have once traveled through space” to plastic toys is an unverifiable fabrication of imagination. However, these two stories still resonate in a marvelous way — in both, humans animated lifeless things and endowed life’s encounters upon objects through narratives and words. Yet as for whether the stones and the sheep are merely products of human imagination, and whether experiences are concrete or merely a mirage, the answers remain uncertain. In this sense, Lu can also be considered someone who “turns stones into sheep,” except he opens another realm, a different fictional space-time where life resides.

Lu Pingyuan’s studio in Songjiang District, Shanghai resembles an infinitely expanding container, filled with heterogeneous items that amounts to a micro universe: the Barbabeau sculptures from the previous years, a series of drawings of a six-fingered hand generated by an AI glitch, old magazines, new toys, and bottles and jars can be found scattered throughout. However, the most striking are those that would be called the ‘readymades’ in modern art: smiley face biscuits, Thomas the Tank Engine, and M&M characters. These humanoid figures devoid of personalities are what Lu easily notices. Their virtual existence carries obvious contradictions: they look like humans, speak for themselves, but are at the sametime not taken seriously. When biting into the biscuits, most people do not pay attention to

the faces but consider them objects that, despite resembling faces, lack sentience. It is important to note that here I am not talking about animated characters in Disney movies who may already have their biographies as well as iconic faces and voices; instead, what is concerned are the cheap, mass-produced figures who happen to have a humanlike shape. For example, Lu often mentions that when medicine commercials show up on television, organs with mouths, eyes, and two hands would pop out in yellow, pink, blue, and other colors. No one cares about the names of these kidneys and hearts, but these characters can instantly even out the pain and make sensations disappear altogether.

In the 2022 exhibition, “One Night at a Gallery”, Lu Pingyuan drew upon two different frames of references in animation. The first genre, produced in 1978 by Shanghai Animation Film Studio, is the animated film *Hualang Yiye (One Night at a Gallery)*, in which two personified figures representing political ideologies’ censorship, a stick and a hat, vandalize and shut down a children’s art exhibition. Subsequently, the children, a rooster, and an elephant depicted in the exhibited paintings come alive, unite together to clean up the black inks that destroyed artworks and defeat the enemies. These figures and humanoid characters all have their own personalities, genders and backgrounds. The other genre, motion graphics such as the aforementioned medical advertisement and educational videos that were repeatedly played during the pandemic to instruct on handwashing and mask-wearing, serves primarily to convey information in public settings. In this genre, characters lack distinct individualities, and the backgrounds in the animated works, too, are often blank color fields. Despite the two traditions’ shared use of humanoid characters, these figures exist in drastically different modes — one has free will, the other merely color blocks with a semblance of life. Lu often incorporates these animation and cartoon characters into his paintings and sculptures. His exhibition space is covered in shades of orange and pink, creating a stark contrast to the reality outside the art museum. Stepping into this space feels like entering a three-dimensional space turned from television



↑
《护身符 201001》，2020 年
装置，金属配件、树脂，390 × 140 × 60 厘米

Amulet 201001, 2020
Installation, metal accessories, resin, 390 × 140 × 60 cm



“第一个艺术家” 展览现场
没顶画廊, 上海, 2021 年

“The First Artist”, installation view
Madeln Gallery, Shanghai, 2021

advertisements; one is being transported into a suspended state of unreality.

Looking at Lu Pingyuan's recent creations, one might wonder if these vibrant creations are merely transplants and simulations of popular visual culture. The infinitely splitting images and numerous sculptures reveal the artist's pleasure in laboring and molding figures, but there is a hard-to-conceal repetition in the media materials, aesthetic features, and creative ideas among different works. These commodified humanoid characters, already a sort of simulation themselves, are enlarged, reconfigured, and simulated once again, or simply relocated into the gallery. The dazzling and exaggerated visuals appeal to trendy brands and lend to their internet fame, while the lively and communicative cartoon characters also align with popular cultural consumption. What exactly is Lu Pingyuan trying to say? Whether it is satire, carni-

val, or redemption, it is difficult for researchers to find the answer. “One Night at a Gallery” is especially unique among these projects, because the animation it cites has a clear time and space (that is, the museums during the Cultural Revolution). The selected element in Lu's exhibition — fences — not only supported the paintings and sculptures outside the China Art Museum during the Star Art Exhibition, but they were also one of the things people are most familiar with in life during the recent pandemic. These heavy and sharp objects in real life enter the animation-like exhibition site and obtain freedom, despite these fences do not have eyes or mouths, they become protagonists in the exhibition, or even characters. Before and behind them, there are no longer people or things to prevent or to protect. They are suspended.

The endless transformation of shapes and the question of whether the true essence of things

exists reminds one of the dual projections carried by plastic in the 20th century. On the one hand, it is now the cheapest, most disposable, and seemingly inexhaustible synthetic material, despised for its contribution to soil and water pollution, feared for plastic particles entering our digestive systems and bloodstream, and associated with lower class. On the other hand, there was a time when plastic was synonymous with magic. In 1957, Roland Barthes referred to plastic as a “miraculous substance”, writing that “plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation [...] it is less a thing than the trace of a movement.” From the nineteenth century onwards, materials like celluloid, synthetic silk, nylon, and foam were invented using raw materials such as rubber, cotton, and petroleum, etc. Turned from natural substances into a fabricated material, plastic can be soft and firm and can take on the shape of anything in the world. It can replace pearls, ivory, and wood and transform into combs, fabrics, and vascular stents. People believed that plastic would protect the Earth and promote democracy. The quality of plastic's infinite transformation made it a close sibling of science fiction, both becoming synonymous with immortality and the future. In this regard, plastic and science fiction are like sorcery to a sorcerer. The magic lies not in the result of a spell but in the transformative process. Whether plastic is worthless or a worldwide marvel? The ambiguity, deception, suspicion, and metamorphosis it entails are akin to the essence of life itself.

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, Lu Pingyuan, with plastic toys in his hands, also immersed himself in imaginations of the future.

Science fiction magazines then, *Omni (ao mi)* and *Science Fiction World (kehuan shijie)*, are interspersed with advertisements for astronomical telescopes, as seen in the magazines in the film *Journey to the West* (2021), while striking American-style comics dominate their covers. The emergence of Japanese and western animations later blew Lu's eyes and mind. To him, Japanese manga was his *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden (jiezi yuan huapu)*, a foundation book for traditional Chinese painting). (Lu has also copied *Pipi Dawang and Crest of the Royal Family*.) However, after the turn of the millennium, the outpour of cultural creativity was gradually transformed into a scaled-up and assembly-line production. Countless faces are produced, and images are no longer precious. Perhaps both we and Lu Pingyuan need to return to the moment when the shepherd boy Huang Chuping turned the stones into sheep, which makes us wonder: within the constant metamorphosis of life, what truly matters?

Part 2 The Place of Escape

An artist dreamt of entering a large temple. Inside the temple, there were rows of Buddha statues, but upon closer inspection, the statues were all of great artists like Picasso, Monet, Dali, and Beuys. In front of them, there was a table with a book titled *Art History of the Next 300 Years*. The artist couldn't wait to flip through the pages to see if he was mentioned. After searching for a while, he was disappointed to find that his name was not in it. The great artists laughed and said, "It's okay, it's normal not to be in here. You can go to the temple next door; they oversee the regional artists." The artist left and arrived at a slightly smaller temple nearby. Inside this temple, there were also rows of Buddha statues, but upon closer inspection, they were all of great Chinese artists like Qi Baishi, Zhang Daqian, Xu Beihong, and Huang Binhong. There was also a book on the table titled *Art History of the Next 300 Years in China*. The artist eagerly searched through the pages to see if they were mentioned but again found nothing. These artists also smiled and said, "It's normal not to be in here. This place is not for ordinary people. If you still would like to try, you can go to a small temple at the intersection outside." So the artist left that temple and arrived at the intersection, where he saw a small temple behind the bushes, about half a person's height. He lowered his head to take a look and saw a very small Buddha sitting inside. He bent down and entered the temple, and upon looking closely, he realized it was himself.

— Lu Pingyuan, "The Temple of the Art King"
(*yi wang miao*), 2016

When Lu Pingyuan was young, he dreamed of becoming a cartoonist. In college, he studied graphic design. As he entered the realm of contemporary art, it was a time marked by the bursting of the market bubble, where the once triumphant march forward was gradually replaced by doubt, cynicism, and disappointment. Amidst this labyrinthine landscape, young practitioners of contempo-

rary art grappled with a myriad of questions: How does the system of contemporary art truly operate? What are the rules of the game within the art gallery? How should artists and curators collaborate? How do we judge what constitutes good art and a good artist? These questions haunted the young artists in their artistic endeavors. Parallel to the emerging consciousness of curating in mainland China, artists began to orchestrate their own movements, seeking solace in the sanctuary of collectives, engendering an "institutionalization of self", and actively engaging in institutional criticism, reevaluating their relationship with the external systems of the art industry. They also began venturing to different corners of the world, eager to glean insights from fellow artists, sought residencies far and wide, yearning to find what kinds of lives artists in foreign lands were living.

In this captivating tableau, Lu Pingyuan participated in the group GUEST and co-founded the digital magazine *PDF*. He captured the elusive creatures of galleries, turning the gallery into an impromptu menagerie. He skillfully installed charging cables within the sanctuaries of art, created a whimsical spectacle by inviting friends to charge their equipment. He also entrusted his very own wallet to a security guard of the gallery. Perhaps the most renowned of his works in this vein was a performance in 2011. With the gaze of the crowd upon him, he fervently used his hands and feet, struggling to climb a pedestal of equal height and build to himself, engaging in repeated battles until he reached the pinnacle. This performance, titled *A Readymade*, reinvigorated the spirit of Piero Manzoni, an Italian artist, and his 1961 work, *Base Magica – Scultura Vivente* (Magic Base – Living Sculpture). However, Manzoni's pedestal stood at approximately 60 centimeters, while Lu Pingyuan's towering base reached 170 centimeters. Manzoni exuded an air of serene composure, while Lu's ascent was accompanied by a sense of breathlessness and drenched in sweat. This arduous endeavor vividly depicted the anguish experienced by young artists of that era.

In the "Capsule" exhibition in 2011, Lu Pingyuan presented self-rejected proposals. He believed that even if these ideas were materialized into artworks,

they would not be worthy of entering art history or art museums. In the exhibition "Waiting for an Artist" in 2013, gallery staff continuously washed the artist's clothes, ensuring that they were constantly hung and left to dry, emphasizing the absence of the artist's physical presence. Here, the incarnation of the gallery shifted from a capsule to clothing, awaiting the entry of human flesh to assume the role of the "artist". In the exhibition "The First Artist" in 2021, Lu points out the success of a failed artist. The French animated series Barbapapa from the 1990s depicted a character named Barbabeau, an artist who always carried a sketchbook or a palette. In Lu's perspective, Barbabeau's drawings, sketches and sculptures merely repeated existing artistic methods, materials and styles, rendering him a destined failure excluded from art history. However, Barbabeau's black plush body, like Barbapapa, could transform into any shape. Lu envisions this boundless metamorphosis of physical form as an avenue for transcending and subverting the established order of art history, allowing Barbabeau to transcend his perceived limitations and emerge as the "first artist". Clearly, despite moving away from directly deconstructing the art and museum systems, Lu Pingyuan continues to discuss who holds the power and standards to recognize art through alternative contexts. His quest to the intricate mechanisms of reality, particularly within the art system, remains ongoing, albeit in a shift from confrontation to an embrace of escapism. Furthermore, he seems to possess a desire for liberation, urging Barbabeau, or anyone for that matter, to break free from existing artistic notions and realize their own freedom without conforming to any paradigm.

In 2014, Lu Pingyuan claimed to have encountered the just deceased On Kawara in his dream.

《一个现成品》，2011年，行为
“占领舞台之‘回放’”展览现场，外滩十八号，上海，2011年
图片致谢艺术家

Ready-made, 2011, performance
"Taking The Stage Over, Re-Performing History", installation view, Bund18, Shanghai, 2011
Courtesy the artist



The spirit of Kawara implored Lu to undertake the continuation of his “Today” series, a collection of date paintings that transcended the mere passage of time. Many people, of course, don’t buy into such a narrative — this “dream” might just be a way for him to connect with great artists, romantically continuing to produce products that have already been validated by the system and the market. Dreams, or rather untouchable proclamations and narratives, held a particular allure within Lu’s artistic praxis. Several years prior, he had already begun writing stories or proposing unrealizable ideas. These brief stories often appear to be inexplicable. Their origins and resolutions shroud in enigma. Although they possessed an air of whimsy, they resisted the archetypal emotional crescendos found in the ghost stories written by Pu Songling or the allegorical nature of Grimms’ fairy tales. These stories lack technique, style, or explicit messaging, veering away from conventional storytelling tropes. Their purpose did not lie in transforming the reader, but rather in capturing the ephemeral essence of metamorphosis. In some way, the intangible stories of Lu Pingyuan sought liberation from the shackles of authorship and stylization, evading easy classification. While the written “stories” could be formally connected to the early conceptual artists who treated proposals as artworks, resisting the fetishism of collecting and the market, the transient nature of the written form was more akin to creating distance between the stories and the narrator. He yearned for these stories to depart from fixed textual arrangements, exist within retelling, and be activated by diverse individuals in different tones, manners, and idiosyncratic details. This approach of directing towards the individual’s interior and different embodiments transformed the life forms of artworks into the fluid circulation, magic transformation, and ceaseless interplay of information.

Writer Shi Tiesheng once depicted in his *Notes on Principles* the scene of countless messages drifting through the universe, taking form as faint vibrations connecting life, emotions, and objects. Speaking in the first person of these messages, he softly calls out, “Come, listen to me. I exist not only

→
《成长的烦恼》，2017年，装置，尺寸可变
没顶画廊展览现场，上海，2017年
图片致谢艺术家

HOME ALONE, 2017, installation, dimensions variable
Exhibition view at Madeln Gallery, Shanghai, 2017
Courtesy the artist

within my own body but also within all the messages of this entire world, within all that is known and unknown, within the desires of all people. Thus, it is eternal and immortal...” In a certain sense, the story of Lu Pingyuan is also such a message. However, as an artist, Lu Pingyuan’s position in his own creation is not entirely light. In the process of weaving stories, the artist himself would like to recede, or rather, he aspires to become the ever-changing and unrestricted story — instead of being an artist of ready-made artworks, he preferred to be an ever-present incarnation of information. In a conversation, Lu Pingyuan expressed, “I have instances where I feel as if I am a transient entity, a phase. We are so used to being a whole ‘person’. The ‘I’ is actually a lush garden, composed of countless billions of temporary individuals. When the ‘person’ ceases to be, the components within the body merely revert to their original places.” However, in the actual operating art system, Lu Pingyuan is **an** artist, he is still labeled, and his creations still need to circulate as entities, gradually turning into continuously produced sculptures and paintings. Ultimately, are the stories just props to rationalize the production of works? Or, are they a way for Lu Pingyuan to create his own context and ease the anxieties in reality?

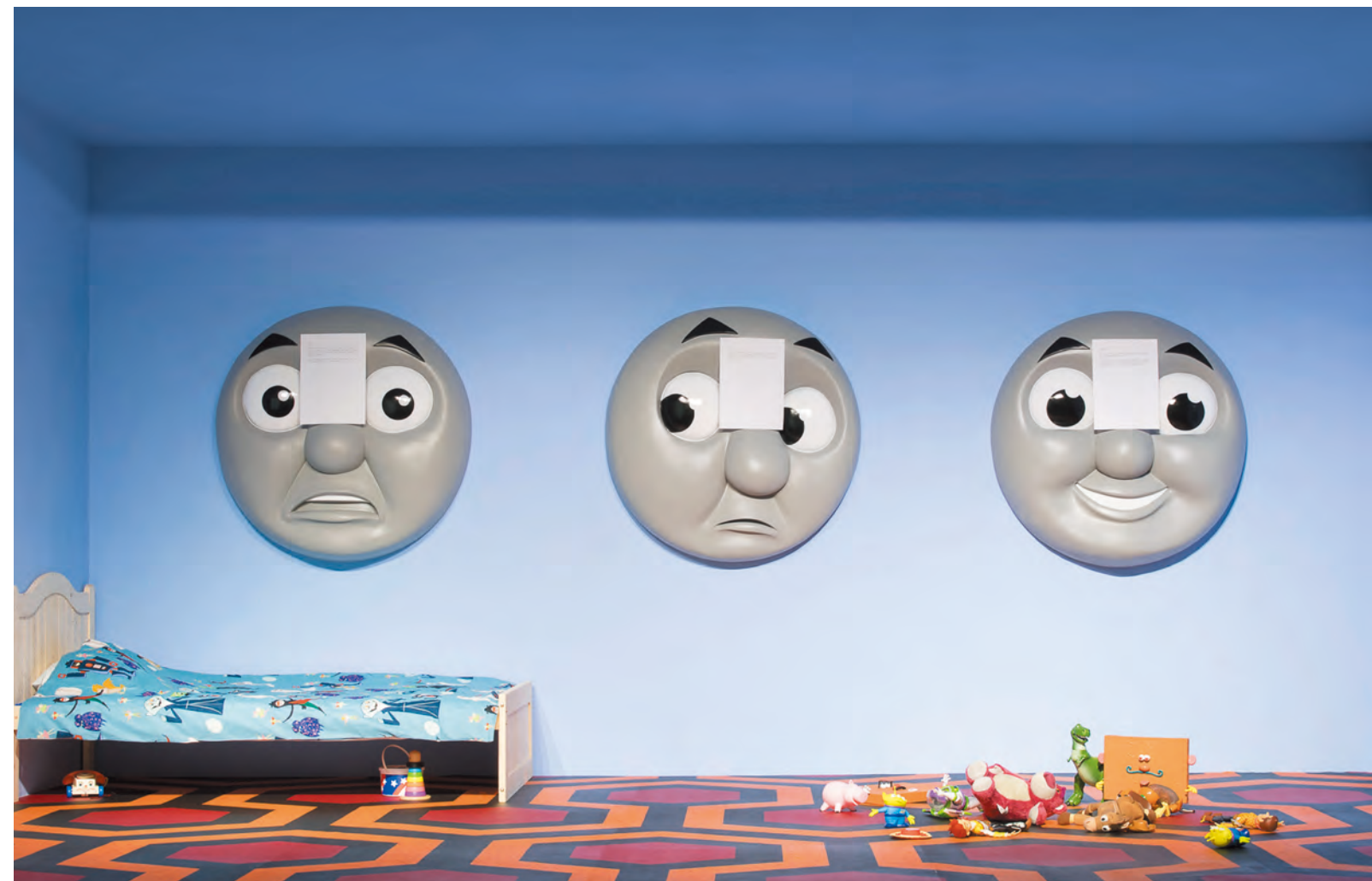
Part 3 The World of Sentience

I wish to have a large ship that can carry all beings from Shimen-wan and the world, sailing to a place of eternal peace.

— Feng Zikai, 1939

The title of Lu Pingyuan’s solo exhibition in 2020, “Imperishable Affection”, takes its Chinese name “A World of Sentience” from an eponymous work by Feng Zikai. The inscription on that painting reads “Yuan-yuan Tang Painting Scroll”. Constructed in 1933 in Feng’s hometown, Shimen-wan, Yuan-yuan Tang existed as more than a mere physical structure. Before taking physical form, Yuan-yuan Tang “originally existed as a spiritual entity”, dwelling within Feng Zikai’s imagination. From the architectural design down to the tiniest details of nature, Feng meticulously crafted a space that sought a harmonious interplay between form and spirit,

embracing an aesthetic of unadorned simplicity. *The World of Sentience* perhaps portrays Feng Zikai’s work desk, which brims with penholders, teapots, cups, alarm clocks, pens, ink, and folding fans... A vase even holds several flowers. Despite the simplicity of Feng’s drawings, they exude a remarkable vitality. Within this painting, he bestows each object with a sentient quality, endowing them with individual faces and unique expressions. Smiles and nods grace some, while others emanate fierce, wide-eyed gazes of fury. “Sentience” finds its roots in Buddhist philosophy, referring to things that possess consciousness and emotions, including humans. During his time as an educator in Guilin, Feng Zikai shared his belief that still life, often perceived as inanimate objects, could be seen by painters as living entities. He imagined these objects as having emotions and a life akin to that of the artist’s own. Such a notion finds direct embodiment in his painting *The World of Sentience*. However, the year 1937 brought the encroaching presence of the Japanese army upon Shimen-wan, prompting Feng Zikai and his entire





《不含防腐剂「201017」》(局部), 2020 年
装置, 树脂、漆, 1800 × 600 × 70 厘米
图片致谢艺术家

Preservative-Free [201017] (detail), 2020
Installation, resin, paints, 1800 × 600 × 70 cm
Courtesy the artist

family of ten to hastily escape on a boat, leaving Yuan-yuan Tang to succumb to the ravages of war. The book desk portrayed in *The World of Sentience* undoubtedly met the same fate, reduced to ashes. In the aftermath, Feng Zikai mourned deeply for the countless sentient beings that fell victim to the brutal carnage, holding onto the hope that a “large ship” could carry his beloved ones and cherished possessions through the harrowing ordeals they faced.

Lu Pingyuan’s “story” and exhibition are like such a “large ship”, carrying sentient beings away from the bleak reality. He states, “Considered as monsters or fantastical creatures, there is no place for them to exist in today’s world. In fact, many of my works are an invention of space, allowing them to survive.” However, the paradox of his creations lies in the fact that he is most concerned not with those enlightened spirits but with the most humble and spiritless lives. In comparison to the protagonists within the enchanting realms of Disney animations, where resources and narratives abound because of their status as selling goods in capitalism, those Motion Graphics, the cookies adorned with eyes and mouths, and other similar creations seem resigned to a fate of servitude, like a marginalized class of functional objects. It is not so much that the latter lacks life, but rather they never had the opportunity to grow and therefore, remain “sentience-less”. As deities, ghosts, monsters, and spirits gradually recede from our everyday life, their roles are supplanted by commodities and advertisements, masquerading as living beings. Lu almost “recycles” these easily created life images,

turning his studio and exhibitions into shelters that house the refugees who have nowhere else to go, discarded and abandoned. Their superficiality and falsehood as ephemera, when contemplated, evoke a sense of fragility, inviting us to grieve their plight. It is not the meager lives themselves that lack sentiment, but rather the merciless reality, rife with oppression, violence, and relentless pursuit of profit. It is within the realm of fiction, where judgments are suspended, that perception finds respite, albeit fleetingly.

French artists Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno once made a low-cost purchase from a Japanese animation company’s repository of unnamed characters, acquiring a female animated figure whom they named “AnnLee”. Subsequently, they extended invitations to numerous friends to participate in the creative process. The resulting project was titled “No Ghost Just A Shell”, echoing the renowned Japanese anime series “Ghost in the Shell”. AnnLee became an integral part of various artists’ works, assuming the form of a standing sculpture, confessing her story in video recordings, gracefully dancing in mid-air, and even being captured amidst the night sky by the brushstrokes of fireworks. This artistic endeavor bears striking resemblance to Lu Pingyuan’s own practice, both striving to emancipate those who have been brought into existence solely as nameless shells. However, Lu’s approach to rescue is less embellished, exhibiting a restrained sympathy and avoiding excessive manipulation of their physical manifestations. His actions are imbued with a sense of doubt, fostering

an environment of equal footing between the rescuer and the rescued.

The press release for “The First Artist” mentions the animated series “Barbapapa” as “artist’s memory” modifier. A widely known animation, through memory, is thus brought into the artist’s internal context, diverging itself from the animation’s dissemination. If Lu Pingyuan’s stories are real in any sense, it might be the act of escaping from reality. For Lu, “the large ship” alternates sometimes as a memory, sometimes a dream, sometimes a story. These concepts coexist parallel to, and even separated from, reality, holding the capacity to be shaped, enacted, and re-narrated indefinitely. If there is any reliance, it is on himself, perhaps even a not-so-clear self. Perhaps now is the moment when Lu Pingyuan is breaking down the boundaries between tangible forms and intangible messages — people, objects, stories, dreams, and memories, are all containers in constant transformation, capable of rescuing and sheltering one another, temporarily detaches Lu from the art ecosystem and societal reality, momentarily stepping away from the heated and intricate political landscape. His journey spans inward, outward, towards imagination, towards turmoil. However, might there be a moment, where an absolute touch can penetrate the interface between fiction and reality?

Translated by Nie Xiaoyi and Jiang Yuwen
(with the help of ChatGPT)

侧写
Profile

陆平原
Lu Pingyuan

《星期六 - 花脸雪糕》, 2019 年
“降临：发明风景，制作大地” 展览现场, 上海崇明前哨湾, 2019 年
图片致谢艺术家

Saturday-Face Ice Cream, 2019
“Advent: Inventing Landscape, Producing the Earth”, installation view
Qianshao Bay, Chongming, Shanghai, 2019
Courtesy the artist



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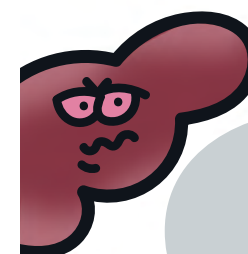
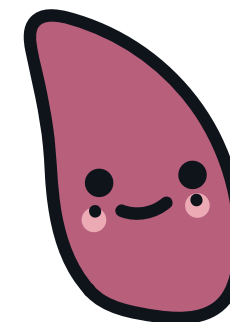
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