

Wang Zhongjie: Divine Melody

Curator: Dai Zhuoqun

2022.7.23 – 9.3

Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing 2nd space

Tang Contemporary Art is honored to represent Chinese artist Wang Zhongjie, whose solo exhibition "Devine Melody" will open on July 23rd at Beijing 2nd gallery space. The exhibition is curated by Dai Zhuoqun.

Venture on, Into the Myth — Wang Zhongjie Solo Show

Dai Zhuoqun

Wang Zhongjie's work is like a personal creation myth. Stepping into this mythical world sculpted from the tip of a paintbrush, I feel as if waking from the wildest dream of the darkest night, only to find myself strangled in the depth of a gloomy forest. The starless sky envelops the misty woods; not a soul in sight of this muted country where even the gods have veiled their presence. My vision struggled to pierce through this whimsical mist as my mind envisioned the likeness of the world concealed within.

Deeper into the parable, I found myself in a valley: dawn neared, and clarity returned. My heart is thrilled with joy. These moments of transient change between twilight and daybreak, between dark and light, hold within themselves all the unknowns of creation.

Sunrise imbued the valley with a golden tint, yet the expanse of green replenished all with reticence. Ready to leave this grim haze, I was cut off by a nimble leopard, a vicious lion and scrawny she-wolf, who pressed my staggering form to the boulders on the cliffedge. In this hour of doom, Wang Zhongjie became my savior. He recounted his life in these dense black woods, which added up to many a year. The only way out is through the path of Avidya, Samsara and Sukhavati. In between day and night, there is consciousness; like a flickering lamp guiding the senses. Wang Zhongjie leads me through his world. He ventures on. I follow.

1. Avidya

Halfway along our journey to life's end
I found myself astray in a dark wood,
Since the right way was nowhere to be found.
How hard a thing it is to express the horror
Of that wild wood, so difficult, so dense!
Even to think of it renews my terror.

— Excerpt from *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri¹

Into the deep woods once more, Zhongjie alerted me of this land's peril. The land of Avidya² it is called, for ten years it trapped him within, till his "heart" was found in the mist. Phantoms dance in my eyes as I was directed forward, eerie scenes emerged in turn. Skirting around a giant boulder, abhorrent openness appalled my soul. Icy cold bodies laid on the river banks as boundless spiderwebs dressed the Eastern sky. Scarlet clouds drifting above web-sheathed pines while winty streams flew beneath the souging wind. We stood transfixed to the ground, stunned by the anomaly in sight, all of existence dimmed by fading memory.

All at once, Zhongjie spoke hoarsely,

"I often enter this valley alone after midnight. The depth is my place to confront myself. Exposure is all I demand, of my fears, cowardice, grief and sin! Slowly I shed my fear of the dark, of the ignorance that lay within. My bewitched senses send a message, that the evil here leads to a better path. Avidya conceals a cipher, and darkness its projected specter. After the break of dawn, all may suffice the norms of day."

Into the void full of wonder, we saw on the other side of the river of rebirth filled with a death-like stillness. As we made the crossing, time froze, silvery ripples emanated from its mirroring surface; a flock of startled ravens fluttered to the air, shrouding the sky, only to perish in the depth of the dense green enshrouded by the steaming red. Ominous instincts hurried my steps, away from the scrawny she-wolf, away from this frightful decay.

Arriving at the vast ocean shore, emerged a lone figure on the reefs. Their soul is not of this world. Backed by sacred Sala trees and shielded by divine ashen butterflies, they raised their right arm, left hand resting on their abdomen, seemingly calling on us. We rushed forward to the rocky shore, facing the being full of grace. "Who art thou?" we queried, they are revealed to be Manjusri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, who once stayed with the Blessed One³ in the South Seas on the peaks of Lanka in a place adorned by countless jewels and flowers. At that time, the Blessed One had been preaching in the palace of the King of Sea-serpents⁴, achieving new heights of revelations. Thus have I heard.

"No ignorance or end of it, nor all that comes of ignorance; no withering, no death, no end of them. Nor is there pain, or cause of pain, or cease in pain, or noble path to lead from pain; not even wisdom to attain! Attainment too is emptiness..."⁵

Gazing into the distance, a monster sprang up from the ocean depth, shaped like a porcupine with a body above a hundred thousand feet long, opening

¹ Dante Alighieri, "Inferno", *The Divine Comedy* (translated by J.G.Nichols, Alma Classics Ltd, 2012), P5

² Sanskrit word whose literal meaning is "ignorance", "delusion", "unlearned", "unwise" and opposite of Vidya (Knowledge). It is used extensively in Hindu texts and also in Buddhism.

³ Bhagavan from Hindu sanskrit. Meaning "revered individual". A formal title for the Buddha in Buddhism.

⁴ Referenced from "Chapter One: King Ravana's Request", *The Lankavatara Sutra* (translation and commentary by Red Pine, COUNTERPOINT Berkeley, 2012)

⁵ Translation from the Triratna Buddhist Community. (https://thebuddhistcentre.com/system/files/groups/files/heart_sutra.pdf)

wide its covetous jaw. Riding the waves, it charged in from afar. As panic took course, we fled with great haste. Back to the roads, the roads in the woods.

2. Samsara

Emerging from the sea, now safe on shore,
Turns round to look at where he cheated death,
Just so inside my mind, which was still fleeing,
I turned to look again upon that pass
Which never left alive one human being.
When I'd rested my body for a time,
I made my way across deserted foothills,
Keeping my low foot always the more firm.
...
By then it was the first hour of the morning,
With the sun rising in the constellation ...

— Excerpt from *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri⁶

Returning to the trodden path, Zhongjie seemed dejected. He murmured to me,

“This world of Avidya is a box that frames us inside. Avidya specializes in illusions. It bewitches us, engulfs us in deceptions turned too real. Consciousness numbed and awareness dimmed. We who lost reality stray far from awakening.”

Moments of quiet brought sparks to his eyes. With vigor returned, he proceeded,

“Manjusri whom we met at the sea once told me, ‘Before you look at these flowers [of Nanzhen], they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy.’⁷ It took me ten years to understand. All worldly beings stay in the cycle of Samsara⁸: only by breaking the mirage of reality shall one come to the shores of awakening.

“When feelings from the outside dulled, ‘emptiness’ is all that’s left within consciousness. We reincarnate endlessly in ignorance, whose countenance we are unfortunate enough to glimpse ever and again. I have persisted through many a moon to eject these illusions from my conscious mind, breaking free from this weary sea of Samsara. Rejecting taketh a arduous road; letting go severs one’s very soul. Paradoxically, rejection solidified became inertia reborn, repudiation in truth became Samsara renewed. Emptiness is the antithesis of desolation.

“Have you seen the film ‘Truman’s World’? Yes. We are all trapped in the frame of life, even if all we can see is hollowness.”

3. Sukhavati

And then, just where the hill began to rise,
I saw a leopard, light upon its paws,
Covered all over in a spotted hide!
It would not move, but stood in front of me,
And so obstructed me upon my journey
I kept on turning round to turn and flee.
...
It did seem that the beast [lion] was drawing near,
With head held high, and so irate with hunger
The air itself seemed shivering in fear.
And then a she-wolf! Though she was so lean,
She looked about to burst, being crammed with cravings,
She who’d made many draw their breath in pain.
The pain she caused me was so terrible,
And such the terror coming from her sight,
I lost all hope of climbing up the hill.

— Excerpt from *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri⁹

The sun was setting and dusk approached. We stood on the cliffedge where we first met. Zhongjie portrayed his vision at the time of separation. It was Sukhavati¹⁰ from the Buddha’s cultivation.

Anxious and excited, his words came out tumbling over one another,

“Sukhavati is the way. It enabled my personal space inside this world of Avidya. A narrow door lays behind me, staying open but remaining exclusive. Entering the door is like landing on the moon. The door is dharma. Buddhahood exists in all mortal beings, so says Tathagata¹¹. Those words were like a flicker of light in the darkest of nights. Something shines in the pitch black of existence. Farewell, my friend. This is where I shall leave you. Some things

⁶ Dante Alighieri, “Inferno”, *The Divine Comedy*, P6

⁷ Wang Yangming, *Instructions for Practical Living* (translated with notes by Wing-tsit Chan, Columbia University Press, 1963), P222

⁸ Hindu term for concept of reincarnation; the endless cycle of birth and suffering and death and rebirth from Hinduism and Buddhism

⁹ Dante Alighieri, “Inferno”, *The Divine Comedy*, P6

¹⁰ Sukhavati is a domain where all wishes are fulfilled; it is not as a reward paradise, however, but rather a place where the practitioner experiences life more intensely within the Buddha’s field of influence and so arrives more quickly at complete liberation. A kind of last stop before enlightenment. See “What is Pure Land” (<https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/what-is-the-pure-land/>)

¹¹ Sanskrit term. An honorific title for Buddha.

remain to be found. To feel, to seek, to venture on.”

This daring journey came to an end. I expressed gratitude to Zhongjie’s aid. He was my guide in more ways than one. To separate ways we moved on.

In the twilight of day’s passing, leopard, lion and she-wolf appear once more. Peeking into the shades they hid, I find myself no longer afraid. To the sunset I stride ahead, in its golden rays I see a figure. In the light emerges Manjusri with all their solemn grace. In a voice heavenly sweet, a mighty tome they began to sing:

All appearances are illusory¹²,
So agony was fermented
By the heart’s impurity.
Perception projects
The effigy of Sukhavati,
Whose root traces back,
To the mind’s duty.
All reckon on the heart’s leaning.

About Artist

Wang Zhongjie, 1972 Born in Zhengzhou, Henan Province. Currently lives and works in Dengfeng, Henan.

Wang Zhongjie’s recent solo exhibitions include: “Out of Nothing and Nowhere: Wang Zhongjie” (Gallery MC, Shenzhen, 2022); “2016-9-28 ~ 2019-2-24: Wang Zhongjie,” (Magician Space, Beijing, 2019); “Not any Where” (Museum of Contemporary Art, Lisson, 2018); “Dark Clouds Blue Sky” (Spazio Kn, Trento,, 2017); “Wang Zhongjie” (Magician Space, Beijing,, 2016); “In The Need of Light,” (Moart Space, Zheng Zhou, 2016); “Dark Clouds Blue Sky” (Ex-chiesetta del Redentore, Vigolo Vattaro (TN), 2014); “Stalker and His Shadow” (Magician Space, Beijing,, 2012); “Dark Clouds Blue Sky” (Isolo 17, Verona, 2012); “Dark Clouds Blue Sky” (Baraccano, Bologna,, 2012) .etc.

About Curator

Dai Zhuoqun is an independent curator and art critic. He currently lives and works in Beijing. In 2007, he founded Contemporary Art magazine, where he served as chief editor and art director. He was also the executive director of White Box Museum of Art. In 2009, he launched and jointly curated the “Warm Winter” protest project in Beijing, one of the most important art events in recent years. He has since planned exhibitions and lectures with numerous art institutions, art academies, and museums. He has also published articles in international art magazines and other publications.

He has curated exhibitions such as “The Awakening of Things” (White Box Museum of Art, Beijing, 2011); “Superfluous Things” (Hive Center for Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2013); “Civilization” (White Box Museum of Art, Beijing, 2013; OCAT, Xi’an, 2014; Hubei Institute of Fine Arts Museum, Wuhan, 2015); “DISSENSUS AGITATION – The Painting To Language” (Today Art Museum, Beijing, 2016), “Brushwork and True Feeling” (Tang Contemporary Art, Bangkok, 2018); “Approach Spirits” (N3 Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2018); “New Expression of Beijing” (N3 Contemporary Art, Beijing, 2018); “Free Prism Video Wave” (Boxes Art Museum, Foshan, 2019), etc.

¹² from *The Diamond of Perfect Wisdom Sutra* (translated by Chung Tai Translation Committee, Chung Tai Chan Monastery, 2009), P4