

Curatorial Statement

He Duoling and I started to plan the Hong Kong May exhibition in last November in the sunny Qunming. Next to the Dian Lake, we drank under the setting sun, without realizing any upcoming threats. At present, Covid-19 has put us through situation we once thought impossible. We could not have imagined things like these could have happened - the cease of our familiar operations; lockdowns of countries; restriction of staying at home; facing an unknown future. Despite the survival of the majority on earth, an inevitable economic recession is approaching. *Thunder Afar* seems to tell us what is going to happen.

In mid-November in Chengdu, the weather was very pleasant, unlike the cold wind and driving rain of Denmark, or the heat and protests of Hong Kong. I had long wanted to meet He Duoling; though we had never met, he was not unfamiliar. In the 1980s, I heard Cao Jing, a poet and my classmate and comrade-in-arms, describe in her poetry what she saw between He Duoling and Zhai Yongming as: "When I close my eyes, roses bloom in every corner." They were quite the pair; at the time, He Duoling was a rising star due to his works *Spring Breezes Have Arrived* and *Youth*, which showed that, in an oppressive time, spring breezes heralded the arrival of a period of great change.

When I saw He Duoling, a single sentence flashed in my mind: "The highest excellence is like that of water." At his studio, a secluded courtyard in the Blue Roof Art Village, He Duoling was contentedly painting by the swimming pool. There's no need for pleasantries when his neighbors, who are friends, students, and curators, come over. They're as comfortable as family, and He Duoling paints as he talks with them about life, art, music, and architecture. I certainly don't know as much as he does about music, and you can't find anything wrong with the museum he designed - the clear, simple style comes from the same playbook as that of the top northern European architects. Montesquieu's environmental determinism holds that climate has an immense influence on a people's character, feelings, ethics, and customs. Yes, Sichuan's broad swathes of fertile soil nourish all living things, and artists stand out from this group. They have foresight, marching on the front lines of life and fashion. When something spreads to the masses, the artists lose interest in it and move on to developing new frontiers. In the name of love, they torment and are tormented by others. Picasso drove his numerous lovers to madness, but works selling for sky-high prices at auction are the spoils of that war.

Chengdu is a city that you have no reason not to love. Kuanzhai Alley and Chunxi Road, with their Zhong dumplings and dragon wontons... these old streets have changed beyond recognition. We may be disappointed by how quickly our youth has disappeared, but twenty years have passed in a flash. When reuniting with my old comrades, youth actually feels like a lifetime ago.

I admit that I hadn't read a lot of Zhai Yongming's poetry, but in curating this show for He Duoling, I had to rummage for threads between the lines of her poems. From the poet's portrait, He's spiritual world, his sources of inspiration, and his passion for life can be absorbed all at once. His work emerged from the friends and lovers around him, and the environment in which he was raised and lived. Whether happy or sad, aren't all of us loving and being loved? Isn't continuing to love the motivation for life? Edvard Munch spent freezing-cold winters in the Norwegian forests, but he only created the great yet despairing work *The Scream* when the woman he loved left him. In fifteen long years of education and work in Denmark, I have carefully studied outstanding contemporary artists

like Olafur Eliasson, who energetically penetrates time and space with light, water, air, and temperature, but I have to admit that I still have a firm affinity for romantic realist painting. If you look at the exhibitions that Emilie and I have curated, you see that most of the artists have distanced themselves from the noise of contemporary art. From Michael Kvium to Jonas Burgert to Christian Lemmerz, they are all obstinate intransigents, stubborn as dictators. I don't reject any form of contemporary practice; I delight in seeing all of them follow their own paths.

I would also like to recognize Cao Jing, who made this exhibition possible. My colleagues at Tang Contemporary Art Hong Kong and I are excitedly awaiting the opening of this exhibition for He Duoling.

Curator: Kuang Wei

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