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Portfolio: SONG Yong-Hong: Burning Realities 宋永红 : 灼热的现实

Yong-Hong SONG 宋永红

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宋 永 紅

Song Yonghong

灼熱的現實 Burning Realities

漢雅軒

Hanart T Z Gallery

August, 1995

Cover illustration:

City Scene
都市風景

Oil on canvas 油畫

1993

150 x 110 cm

Backcover:

Spring Sunlight
春天的陽光

Oil on canvas 油畫

1993

150 x 110 cm



Beijing Hutong
北京胡同

Oil on canvas 油畫
1994
150 x 150 cm

Burning Realities

Song Yonghong

宋永紅：灼熱的現實

hanart

T Z Gallery

漢 雅 軒

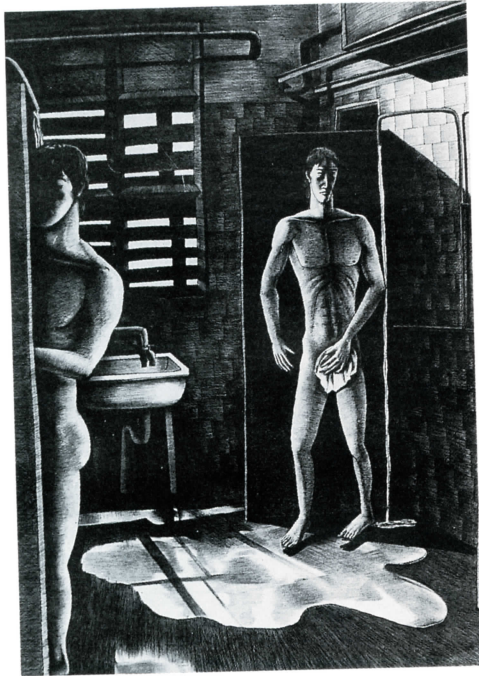
Unnatural Passions

Chang Tsong-zung

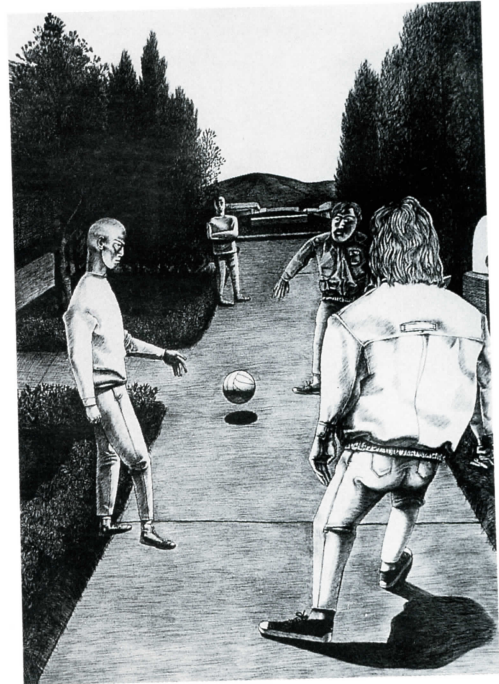
Beneath the cool and humorous surface of Song Yonghong's art lies a pressure chamber of trapped energy and bewildered anger. The lead guitarist of the Beijing rock band "The Flies", he is drawn to art by the same primitive sexual energy and anxiety of youth that give rock and roll its dynamic power. What bewilderment and anxious doubt that cannot be calmed with the emotional release of rock find their way into his paintings. Song's art is a distillation of angst and desire, of actions and dramas frozen in time, suspended by expectation and cynicism equally intense.

An acute anxiety pervaded Song's works from his early copperplate etchings. An invisible air of confrontation and strife filled the largely empty and silent scenes he portrayed, illustrating harsh sporting rivalry and nervous repetitive actions. Even loneliness was intense, shown in confrontation with his self image. (*Alien Environment*, 1988). One can almost hear the scratching of the sharp metal point on the plates, shrieking with its stiff, angry lines, slitting apart the cell of ennui that sealed the painter's world. The sharpness has remained till now, although the irreconcilable conflicts that tortured him have been brushed aside with cynical laughs and raucous humour. One of Song's obvious sources of anxiety is sexual, which he has perverted into visions of manipulation and aggression. At a more general level, Song's anxiety shows a persistent doubt and anger at the world, particularly in matters concerning the definition of social and moral roles. This has been developed into paintings with dramatic suspense, punctuated with scenes of the absurd and wicked humour expected of an errant schoolboy.

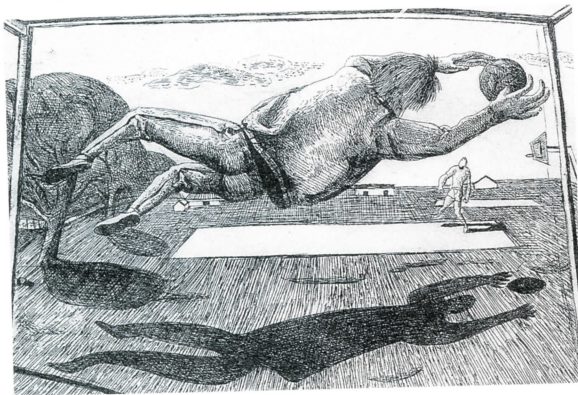
Stylistically, the first reference brought to mind by Song's art is Balthus. One sees an obvious influence in Song's scenes of loneliness and erotic suspense, but carried out without Balthus' cultural ambience. Song is more mean in his perceptiveness of social and power relations. He has not the benefit of a world of classical civilisation that lends spiritual and metaphysical support to a European artist such as Balthus. Song's anxieties are more immediate and raw; his cultural world is one that has been cut off from its past and in return has been offered nothing but sinister doctrinal rules. His art reflects the repressive spiritual climate of a society with few cultural concerns where human relationships are mediated by power. The monochromatic oil paintings from 1989 to 1992 were brutal expressions of this repressive climate. Since 1993 the artist has shown greater detachment, but continues to take a cynical delight in the absurdity of his own situation.



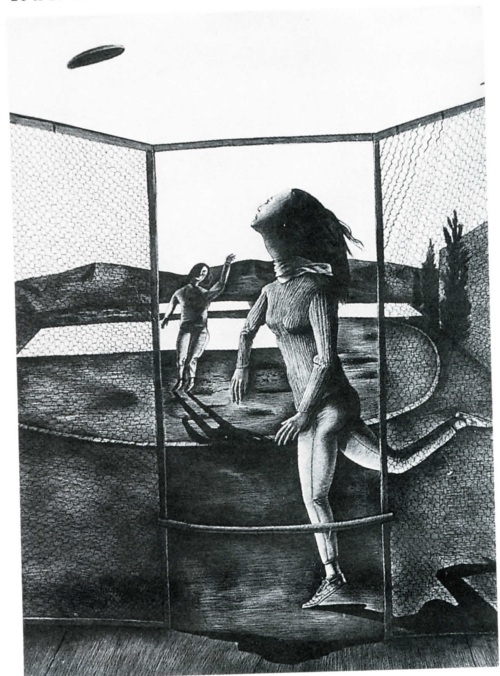
School-life : Alien Environment
 校園生活 《陌生環境》
 Mixed media 綜合材料手繪
 1988
 100 x 80 cm



School-life : Alien Environment
 校園生活 《陌生環境》
 Mixed media 綜合材料手繪
 1988
 20 x 15 cm



School-life : Alien Environment
 校園生活 《陌生環境》
 Etching 銅板
 1988
 15 x 20 cm

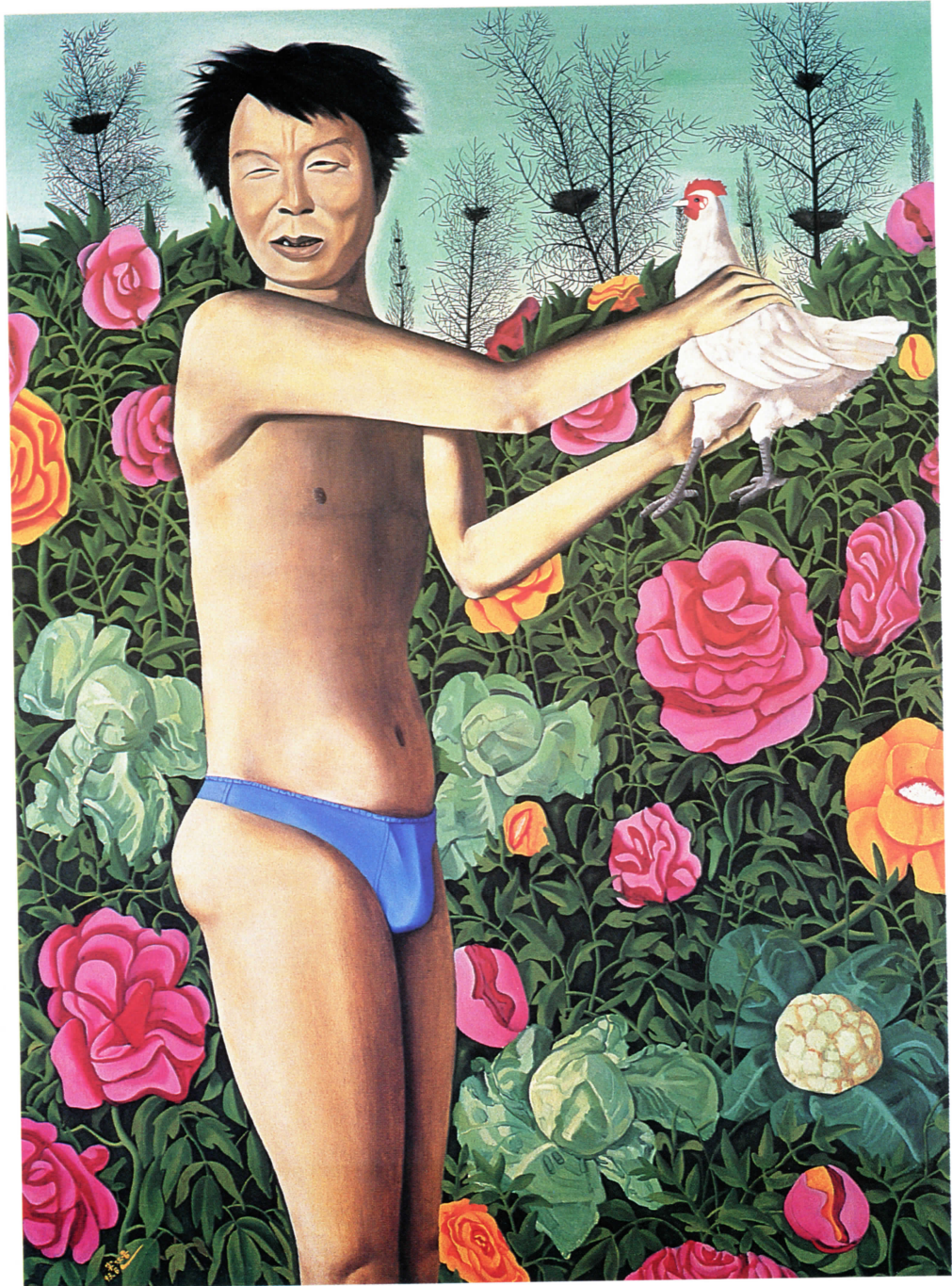


School-life : Alien Environment
 校園生活 《陌生環境》
 Mixed media 綜合材料手繪
 1988
 100 x 80 cm

Many of the monochromatic paintings reflect contained violence, such as *Hammer* (1992) and *Riding On A Bus* (1992), and the monochromatic colour scheme reiterates the suffocating atmosphere. Suspense and dramatic tension come as relief in these works; laughter punctuates the taut balloon of pressure in Song's otherwise nameless anxiety. Increasingly Song has developed this narrative aspect of his art, hiding the uneasy and unpleasant emptiness that lies at the heart of his paintings with a smirk. He explores the secret daydreams of the man in the street, and invites his audience to be the invisible witness. (*Real Illusion*, 1992 and *Blue-checked Bedsheet*, 1993). The lust for seeing, especially peeping, also wickedly exposes the viewer himself. By a sleight of hand Song has lately started to turn upon his audience by preying on their self-consciousness, and in recent paintings such as *Moat Around the Forbidden City* (1994) and *Beijing Hutong* (1994), the situations he illustrates are so believable that the viewer sometimes finds himself embarrassed, as though caught in Peeping Tom's act.

Sympathy and human warmth are scant in Song's world. Manipulation manifests itself as the norm in human relationships, often carried out simply in the spirit of perverse delight. (*Professional Smile*, 1992; *Medical Check-up*, 1994). Song's flat illustrative touch underlies the cold, clinical condition of human emotions, making the sad but garish vulgarity of contemporary living look all the more universal and inescapable. Heartlessness and emptiness are, on the other hand, the key to the dramatic suspense so central to Song's paintings. He captures for us the senselessness of a sexual relationship such as *A Quiet Place* (1991) or *Interior* (1994); desire and energy trapped in the barren ball-court of *Basketball* (1994); and the boredom of shiftless sunning on *The Balcony* (1993). These are mundane situations, but made intriguing by their spiritual hollowness. Song seems to hint at breakthroughs, like the calmness before a storm; but the storm could also have already thundered past.

These paintings form a tabloid of contemporary life in the eyes of the young. In return for life's triviality and cruelty, Song asks to be amused. His paintings are so mean that they seem funny, so bright and colourful that they become gaudy and camp. Song Yonghong is joyously remorseless in his exposition of other people's private weaknesses, but he is equally undaunted about embarrassing himself. In a life where no tangible shape seems to arise from the pointlessness of boredom, a creative mind is left to its own devices. Song Yonghong has discovered to our delight that anxiety may be relieved by the intensity of suspense; even spiritual hollowness need not be hell; it may at the very least be charged with shrieks of laughter.



Spring Sunlight
春天的陽光

Oil on canvas 油畫

1993

150 x 110 cm

新生活的焦慮

張頌仁

少年的焦慮是不限國界的。困悶的焦慮把生命力困在無形的氣壓場內；窒息的空氣澎湃着原始的慾望。似乎只有樂與怒的搖滾尖叫才足以撕破這囚場，讓激情渲洩的聲浪暫時恢復困悶中的平衡。宋永紅是搖滾樂隊「蒼蠅」的結他手。

從 1988 年的鋼筆銅版畫《校園生活》開始，宋永紅的圖畫中就一直保持着的一種緊張的氣氛：凝靜的環境裏繃張着無言的對峙，和沒有聲息而神經質的運動。那種緊張可以從尖銳的鋼筆線條聽出金屬的刮擦。宋永紅一直保持了鋼筆銅版畫的銳利筆觸，以生硬和沒有迴轉的忿懣，劃破生命裏的苦悶和壓抑。他的畫沒有溫馨抒情；人際關係只反映了生命的無意義和荒唐。宋永紅的焦慮一方面反映性生理的不平衡，發展出對性現象各種滑稽和畸形的描述。從深一層看，宋永紅的焦慮是一種對生命現象極為逼切的疑惑，尤其涉及自我對他人的定位，而這定位又往往為性慾與權力所侵犯。這疑惑表現在所有作品引人入勝的懸疑情節中，成為紓解作者緊張心理狀態的藝術手法。

在美術的傳承來看，宋永紅典型的寂寞場面和懸疑的性誘惑顯然受了巴爾庫氏的影響。可是宋永紅所隱喻的背面故事往往更為暴力，更為刻薄。他沒有巴爾庫氏所賴以營養的西歐古典文化環境。宋永紅的焦慮更逼切、更惶恐。他的文化環境是當今甚麼也不是的社會，上既不接傳統，下又是尚未定形的新文化。如果巴爾庫氏反映西歐中產階級道德對人性的約束，宋永紅反映了人性較少文化規範而更赤裸的權力社會裏承受的抑制。1989至1992的褐色油畫開始清楚地探討這主題，從 1992 至 1995 的艷彩油畫他把這種邊緣的心態再推演為這個新時代的照妖鏡。

褐色畫系列最強烈傳達的是一股克制下的暴力，像《鎚子》和《乘公共汽車》。單色調突出了作品的敘述性，像故事插圖。強烈不安的情緒在沒有情節的畫面最感不安，因此情節的出現成為宋永紅畫中渲洩情緒的透氣口。這些情節有現實的可能性，如《故宮護城河》和《第一步醫療檢查》；也有白日夢式的放肆，如《臥舖車廂》和《藍格子床單》。觀眾與偷窺者站在同一個視角上，像穿上透明的皇帝新衣，可以肆無顧忌地瀏覽。這種荒誕的

境象把一般人心底的邪念和偷窺心理無情地坦露開來。新的作品如《在泳池邊》和《故宮護城河》設於比以前作品更現實可信的環境下，也比較更強調了觀眾和畫家的介入身份。面對《故宮護城河》等作品，觀眾不禁會感列一絲尷尬，有若濫用了他的觀看權利。

從旁觀的偷窺這類心理，宋永紅推演至主動的介入；偷窺的冷漠與侵襲意念也進展為虐待心態。《職業的微笑》的理髮師獰笑地把控顧客，滿足於一時的制控權。《流水作業》和《醫務室》進一步於日常的生活情景裏提示了職權與凌虐的關係。宋永紅繪畫所採取的清晰平敘手法，更誇張這些情境的諧謔和荒誕。顏料平塗的筆觸，抹平了畫家的情感，也冷卻了油彩本身的肉體質感。宋永紅的世界令人發噁，可是人情淡薄。

生活的荒涼與缺乏意義是宋永紅作品充滿懸疑氣氛的關鍵。如《窗前》曖晦男女關係的空洞；《陽臺》和《都市風景》的無奈，有如受制於色彩繽紛但鉅細無遺而實在的現實環境。心靈的空虛使最無聊的情境都帶着戲劇式的懸疑：可能有大事要發生，也許突破已經出現。可是我們不知道是甚麼，可能甚麼也不是。

只有生命的原動力，性慾和權勢的刺激，才策動得宋永紅世界裏的人物。一種樂與怒的搖滾盪力，才使他們提起精神。這是九十年代中國的浮世繪，也是中國新生代的照妖鏡。這些畫刻薄得滑稽，明艷得惡俗。宋永紅不給他人留情面，也不輕饒自己。在這個明麗剔透，無可遁逃的新生活裏幽默是唯一灌頂的清涼劑。



Blue-checked Bedsheet
藍格床單

Oil on canvas 油畫

1993

110 x 150 cm



Experimental work in Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy in 1986
1986年在浙江美術學院時的作品



"Experience of a Happening", Song Yonghong and Song Yongping, Shanxi Province, 1986
1986年山西太原行為藝術《一個場景的體驗》，宋永紅與宋永平合作

燒灼感的直覺現實

栗憲庭

85 美術新潮時，宋永紅和他哥哥合作的行為藝術《一個場景的體驗》即為人所知。他們將自己包裹、塗抹成紅白兩色，在自行設定的、帶某種象徵意味的、鋪天蓋地的紅色環境中，自由而近乎潛意識行為近半小時。如果說該作品只是以身體對環境進行模擬性的體驗的話，那麼，宋永紅自 1988 年的浙江美術學院畢業創作《校園生活》起，則直接面對自身的現實環境，並通過自己內心最願意接受的敏感點，對現實環境作了極個人化的近乎偏激的解釋，正如他所自言：“我的投注目標是我對自身環境的興趣，超越理性的習慣勢力，實在是件令人興奮的事情。生活環境提供給我最基本的創作因素，把臆想的成分拌到畫面裏，抽離出最可信的動人局部。我不相信一些概念能解決藝術家的靈感問題，我只相信直覺，有許多燒灼感的直覺現實”。對這種“燒灼感的直覺現實”的關注在宋永紅的作品貫穿至今。

《校園生活》是一組銅版畫。紮縮、僵硬的人物造型，銳利的黑白銅版綫條加強了凝固的形體感，將日常生活中通俗而熟悉的場景完全荒誕和陌生化。表達出作者內心深處乃至現代人的無所事事的無奈與悲哀，性的壓抑焦灼。1990 年至 1991 年創作的一批油畫如《年輕人》和《清靜環境》等均是這種狀態的延伸，表達方式也很類似。這種狀態來自內心深處的不平衡感，然而宋永紅把畫面處理成一種看似平靜的樣子，仿佛把內心的不安和騷動都凝固了。宋永紅總是在窺視生活中難言的荒唐景象，並將這種景象加上他個人化的理解定格在畫面上。木偶式的人物造型，凝固一瞬間帶隱私感的姿態和表情，使看似安靜的氣氛中透露出一種壓抑的荒唐和病態的幽默情緒。可以說這些作品顯露了後來風靡全國的玩世寫實主義的端倪，並使他成為玩世寫實主義的代表藝術家之一。

宋永紅的作品一向善於以一種漠然、嘲諷和窺私般的旁觀態度，在普通的生活發掘那種既無聊、噁心，又裝模作樣的滑稽，揭露出日常生活中人的猥褻、可鄙、可笑的行為，近年的新作《北京胡同》、《故宮護城河》、《在泳池邊》等更趨成熟，尤其是作品中艷俗色彩的使用，漸出了一種與畫面人物、行為相吻合的庸俗感覺，加強了作品的潑皮和冷嘲式的幽默感。



Moonlight
月色
Oil on canvas 油畫
1989
40 x 40 cm



Unexpected Breeze
陣風偶然現象
Oil on canvas 油畫
1989
80 x 65 cm

Pornography of Things

Eric Wear

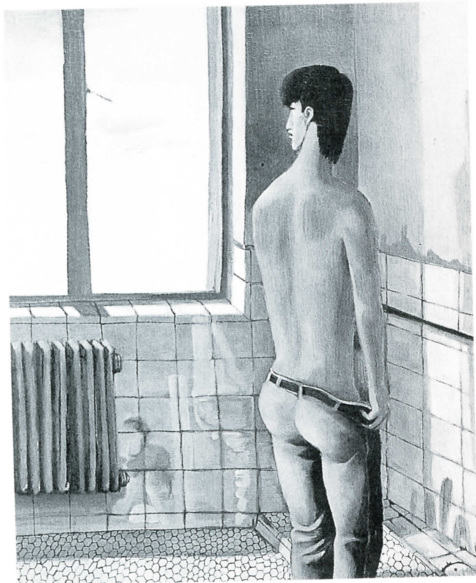
With figurative paintings such as Song's there is a temptation to begin by reading them as illustrations, as collections of symbols that can be exchanged for a narrative or an idea. One could go some way with this, and undoubtedly many will see in these paintings reflections on social and moral problems. And in the painter's response, either a purposeful ambiguity or an immature satire. Immature because it doesn't make clear the network of social causes and the interests which are served by these events. Or purposefully so, because no such pattern can be felt; individuals scramble about in the confusion of changes they can hardly grasp. In the roughest sense the individual feels confused and angry, entrapped in a compromising situation and inclined to hooliganism [流氓] as a form of frankness and a substitute for dignity.

As for narrative, there are no answers to 'what is going on?' The titles of the paintings are flattened out, offering less than a description of what seems to be the event pictured. The figures are painted in a way that allows empathy, either for them as victims or heroes.

Song's work presents a purely visual involvement with experience. As voyeurism it abstracts human situations and forestalls engagement. The painting technique is hard and flat, the colours even. Aside from some careful modulation of flesh and distinction of facial features, there is little illusion of atmosphere or differentiation of textures. Details in a garish tile pattern, rusted pipes and strands of body hair are given the same attention. Forms are rough and harshly delineated. The overall effect is enharmonic and makes a strangeness of familiar things (shampoo and other liquids becoming particularly viscous clottings.)

By avoiding a hierarchy of interest or a distinct development of atmosphere, Song offers less to engage us emotionally. We take up a viewpoint as observers of the delirious, wilful and aimless excesses of contemporary culture which, cruelly, as from an elevated platform, viewers in Hong Kong and outside of China may also see as the native material confusion of a developing economy.

Song's paintings are filled with a pornography of things and substances that appear to have displaced a real life and culture. Products and objects are distinguished for their labels rather than their contents. Vacuous calendar posters of kittens and pouting beauties, junk food packaging, and public acts of sex are equivalent and empty. The faces of the various actors are only slightly more open to sympathy—they often seem to be portraits (though this intuition is but an outsider's awareness of a private joke.) However, here the dark humour of the paintings is softened and given a poignancy not found in Song's earlier allegorical paintings.



Man in the Washroom
衛生間的男人
Oil on canvas 油畫
1989
60 x 40 cm



Young girl
小哈
Oil on canvas 油畫
1989
21 x 16 cm



Untitled
無題
Oil on canvas 油畫
1989
35 x 30 cm

Introducing Song Yonghong

Karen Smith

The greatest irony in the work of oil painter Song Yonghong is that it represents true pictures of the reality that is modern Chinese society. In flat, untextured planes of comic-kitsch colour, Song presents slices of contemporary life that are startling; provoking smiles and ill-ease in the same instant. Snipped out of the contextual continuity that in real life allows such images to slip past non-observers without conscious thought, they take on a significance that goes beyond being merely descriptive. Song's work reads as an absolute reflection of the confusion and perplexity in human relationships seen through the experience of the Chinese. It captures the clumsy naivety of a people stepping into a regime of increasing freedom for which their culture has not prepared them. Thus Song's paintings are filled with the problems of the disparity between the exterior surface of modern China and the interior world of hopes and desires of her people. It is a game where old, established rules are melting into vagary, which Song subtly expresses as a mood of emotional uncertainty, even turmoil. Once appreciated, this adds a depth to his work that the first glimpse of the bright, almost decorative colour and cartoon-like humour, disguise. Song's paintings are amusing but the smiles dissipate, the truth of the situations he depicts hits home; the light-hearted surface is washed away by a tide of melancholy, sadness, emptiness.

The most obvious development in Song's work in recent years is the switch to a more vibrant range of colour. This too reflects the change on the face of life in Beijing which is altogether more colourful than the gloomy mood of suppression and pressure that tainted the first years of this decade. But there are changes also in the compositions which are more intimate than his works of the eighties. The forms are more substantial and the chilly distance between Song's characters and the audience is reduced.

Song's rendering of the often curious world that is modern China is accurate down to the smallest detail. Works such as *Beijing Hutong* 1994, *Beside the Swimming Pool* 1994 and *City Scene* 1993, capture moments that are soaked in colour rich to the point of saturation. They are frozen instants in the very ordinary activities of daily life.

If there were any particular artistic influence to be found in Song's work, it would have to be the element of Balthusian innocence which breathes ambiguity into his depiction of the intimate relationships between men and women. This is most succinct in the works *Domestic Environment* 1994, and the *Blue-checkered Bedsheet* 1993. The focal point of both paintings is an unidentified woman, lying on a bed, her face obscured while a male figure looks on in a momentary pause



A Quiet Place
清靜環境
Oil on canvas 油畫
1991
100 x 100 cm



Elderly Couple
老年夫妻
Oil on canvas 油畫
1992
200 x 190 cm

before action. The tension is created in the contemplation of action. Without features, the women are no more than sex objects, to be picked up and played with at will. Sexuality portrayed as a function creates a sense of hopelessness and detachment harking back to Song's earlier works. In the cruelty of the bright 'happy' hues we ask " Whatever happened to love? "

Song Yonghong's paintings state simple facts. The humour that the images contain come as light relief to the whys and wherefores behind the poses, the forms and the moods of the compositions. In the freeze-framed images, Song's narratives imply more than their decontextualized images would reveal, illustrating life the way it is as perceived through the eyes and experience of the artist.





Professional Smile

職業微笑

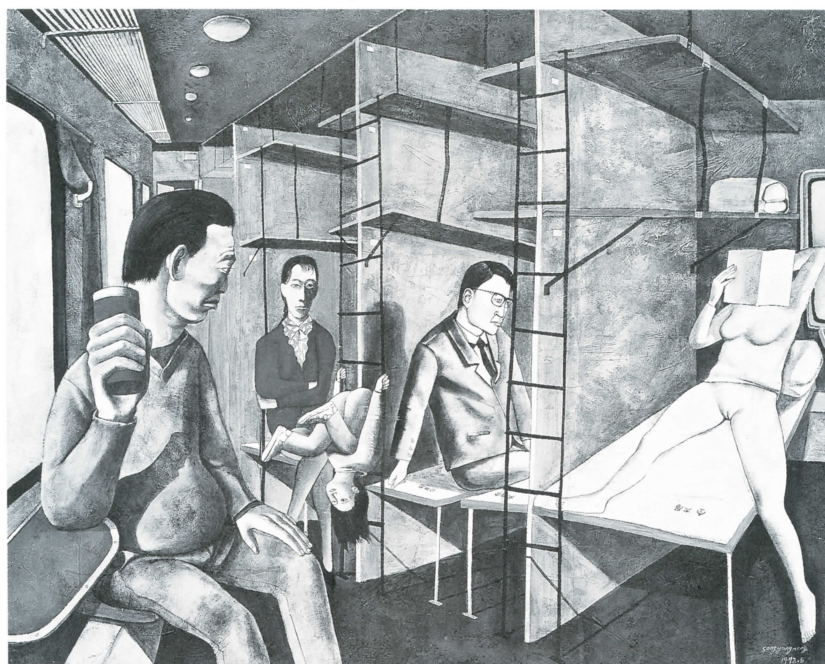
Oil on canvas 油畫

1992

180 x 300 cm



Real illusions
真實幻覺
Oil on canvas 油畫
1992
80 x 100 cm

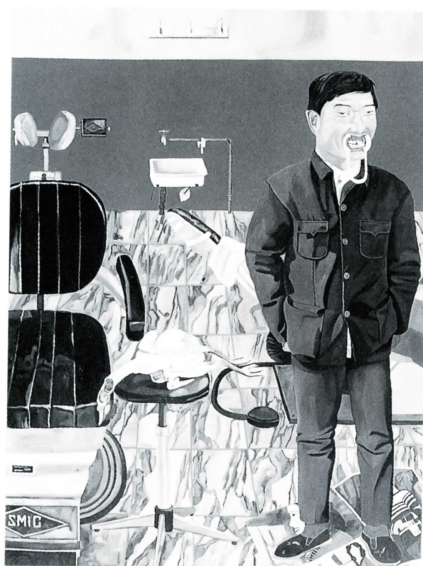


Sleeping Berth
臥鋪車廂
Oil on canvas 油畫
1992
80 x 100 cm

Cosmetic Dentistry (set of 3) 1995 《牙科•整形》組畫三幅 北京 油畫
參加德國漢堡中國前衛藝術展，1995



Oil on canvas 油畫
1995
160 x 130 cm



Oil on canvas 油畫
1995
150 x 110 cm



Oil on canvas 油畫
1995
160 x 130 cm



Landscape Diptych
風景兩聯畫

Oil on canvas 油畫

1994

80 x 200 cm







Production Line
流水作業

Oil on canvas 油畫

1994

150 x 150 cm





Pool Side
在泳池邊
Oil on canvas 油畫
1994
150 x 150 cm

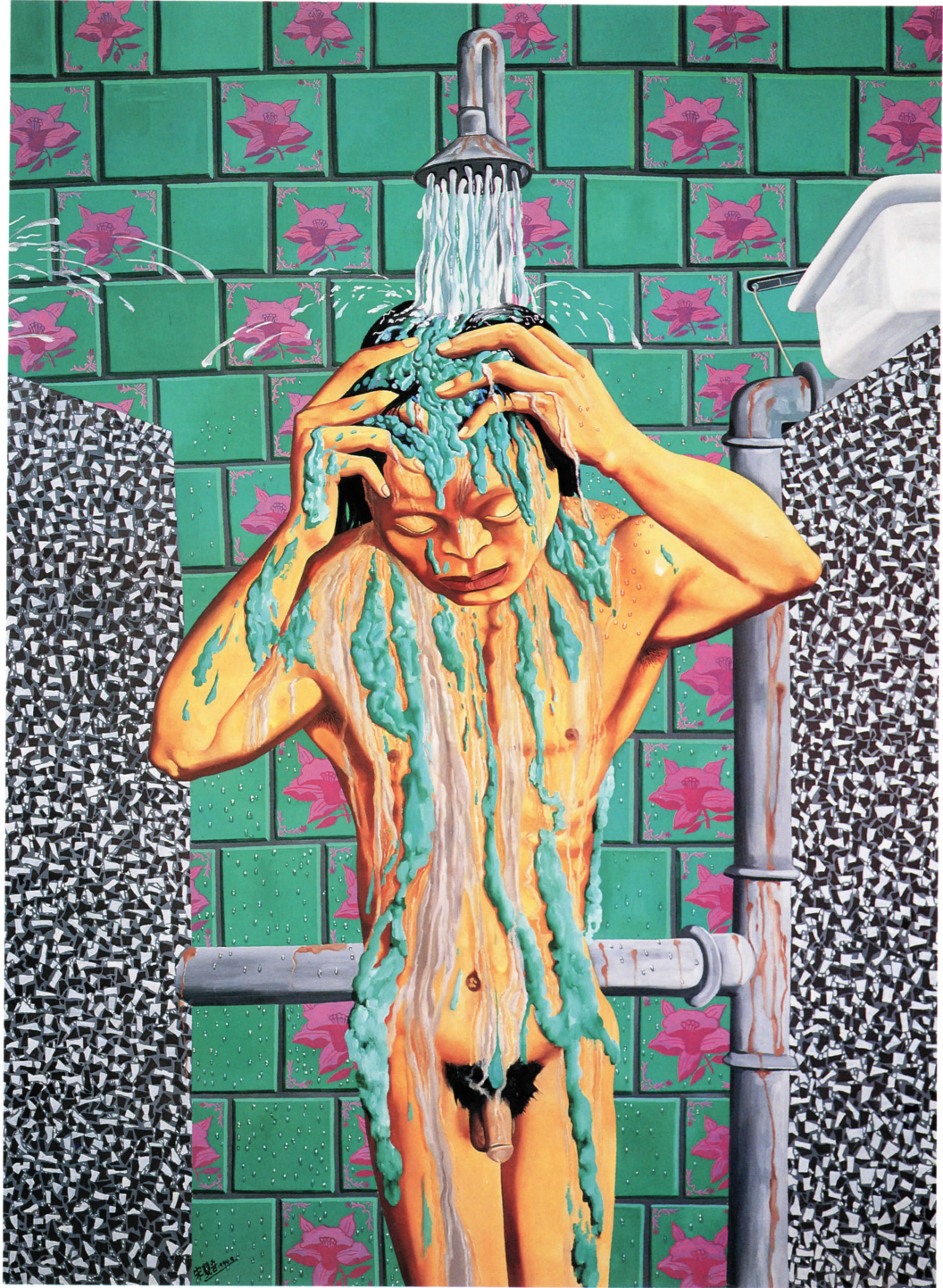


Balcony
陽臺
Oil on canvas 油畫
1993
150 x 110 cm



Medical Checkup
第一步醫療檢查

Oil on canvas 油畫
1994
110 x 150 cm



Man Taking a Shower

洗澡

Oil on canvas 油畫

1994

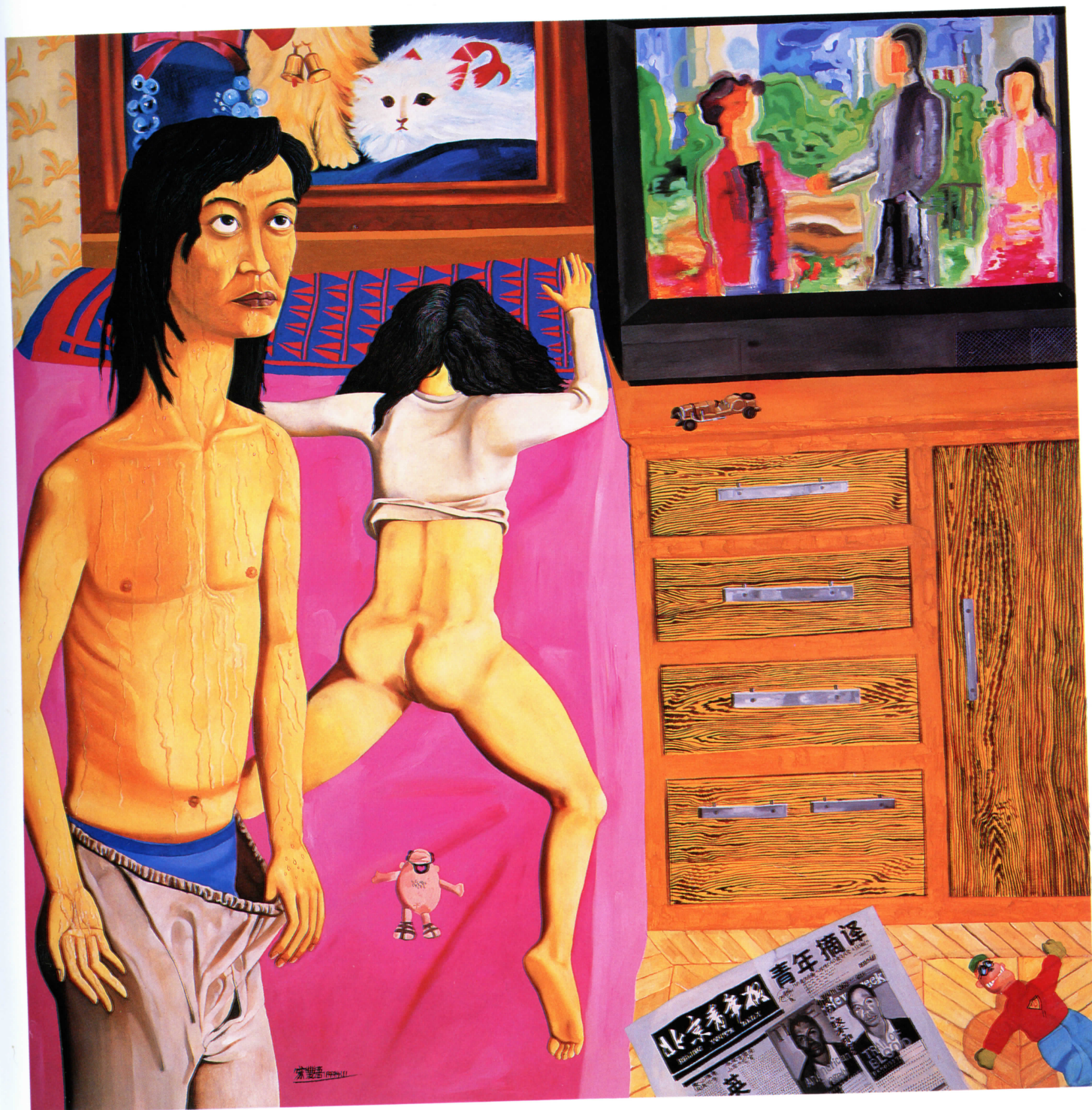
150 x 110 cm



Moat around the Forbidden City
故宫护城河

Oil on canvas 油畫
1994
110 x 150 cm





Interior
室内
Oil on canvas 油畫
1994
150 x 150 cm



Rock band, "The Flies" in 1994
1994年組織搖滾樂隊「蒼蠅」



Artist at work in Beijing in 1993
1993年於北京家中作畫



"Village Planning", Art project
in the countryside of
Shanxi Province in 1993
1993年參加山西的《鄉村計劃》
農村行為藝術行動，
(中間帶眼鏡者)宋永紅

Biography

Born in 1966, Shanxi Province, China

Graduated in 1988 from the Printmaking Department of the Zhejiang Fine Arts Academy

Currently lives and works in Beijing, China

- 1995 *Contemporary Chinese Art Exhibition*, Hamburg, Germany
- 1995 *15 years of Chinese Avant-Garde Art*, Centre d'Art Santa Monica, Barcelona, Spain
- 1995 *Burning Realities*, solo exhibition at Hanart T Z Gallery, Hong Kong
- 1995 *Song Yonghong and Aniwar*, Beijing, China
- 1993 *Mao Goes Pop*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
- 1993 *China's New Art, Post-1989*, Hong Kong Arts Festival 1993
- 1991 *New Generation*, China Museum of History, Beijing, China
- 1990 *Song Yonghong & Wang Jingsong*, Beijing Contemporary Gallery, China
- 1989 *China Avant-Garde*, China National Gallery, Beijing, China
- 1988 *Alien Environment*, series of works for graduation exhibition
- 1986 participated in the second *Shanxi Modern Arts Festival* with participation piece "Red Action"

簡歷

- 1966年 生於中國山西
- 1988年 畢業於浙江美術學院版畫系
- 1988年始 北京工藝美術學校裝璜系教師

- 1995年 《中國現代藝術展》，德國漢堡
- 1995年 《中國現代藝術展》，西班牙巴塞羅那
- 1995年 《灼熱的現實》宋永紅個人畫展，香港漢雅軒
- 1995年 《宋永紅、艾尼瓦爾繪畫聯展》，北京阿芒拿畫廊
- 1993年 參加山西《鄉村計劃》活動
- 1993年 《後八九中國現代藝術展》，澳洲悉尼
- 1992年 《後八九中國新藝術展》，九三年香港藝術節，香港
- 1991年 《新生代畫展》，中國歷史博物館，北京
- 1990年 《宋永紅、王勁松繪畫聯展》，北京當代美術館
- 1989年 《中國現代藝術大展》，北京中國美術館
- 1988年 《陌生環境》組畫，畢業創作展
- 1986年 參加第二屆山西現代藝術展《紅色行動》行為藝術



The Clinic
醫務室

Oil on canvas 油畫
1993
150 x 110 cm

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