

LEAP, *Cheng Ran: What Why How*, p204-205, June 2012

艺术界 LEAP

THE INTERNATIONAL ART MAGAZINE OF CONTEMPORARY CHINA

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CHENG RAN: WHAT WHY HOW

LEO XU PROJECTS, SHANGHAI 2012.04.22~2012.05.27



《千禧年的天使(≡6)》，2012年，单频有声录像，7分45秒
Angels For The Millenium (#6), 2012
 Single-channel video with sound, 7 min. 45 sec.

“天使”缓缓跌入油亮的水面，一道似来自天堂的光撕破了无限延展的黑暗。他的身体被四溅的泡沫缠绕，时而潜入底部，时而于上空盘旋，发出如子宫回声般尖锐的巨响，又好似痛苦的嘶鸣。看到这里，你或许会以为这是艺术家程然对比尔·维奥拉某件经典录像作品的又一次致敬，但随之，两名身着潜水服的救生员闯入画面，打破了原本唯美的冥想空间，将人拉拽回现实中。

在中西方文化中，水的隐喻常常与救赎有关。将画面倒置后，溺水的天使头朝下，向外伸展着四肢，比起被“拯救”，他似乎更享受摆脱地心引力后的随波逐流，等待洗礼后的新生。相比维奥拉在《千禧年的五个天使》(2001年)中传递的宗教感染力和宇宙观层面的人类经验——生、死、存在，程然版的《千禧年的天使(#6)》在这份超脱中加入了现世的焦虑。救生员的出现，暗示了个体经验的局限性以及

无可规避的权力干预。

禁锢/越轨、毁灭/自由、现实/乌托邦，二元对立贯穿了整个展览，成为这位逐渐告别青春的聒噪，步入成人世界法则的年轻艺术家对环境的直接映射。“沃特威尔茨·霍”是程然的首次个展，收录了艺术家于过去一年间创作的四部影像短片。展览中文标题取自程然2010年的同名作品，三个英文单词——What Why How——的叠加，既戏仿了西方电影在香港的中译名标题，又以一个身份模糊、指代不清的神秘男名出现，用戏拟性的改造搁置了能指的意义，暗示观众将展览放置于后现代的文化语境中。

程然所代表的这一代中国青年，成长于盗版DVD、互联网以及二手信息泛滥的时代。与前辈不同，他们的难题并非诉求于变革，而是如何在纷繁复杂的多元社会中寻找自我价值；不是融合，而是分

野。这令他们的创作对束缚、反抗、边缘化等主题尤为敏感。陈列于一楼放映厅的另一部短片《1971—2000》，挪用了1971年斯坦利·库布里克的《发条橙》和2000年维姆·文德斯的《百万美元酒店》中识别度极高的视觉元素和奉为流行文化经典的原声音乐。两部影片的主人公皆游走于主流话语的边缘。它们在程然的成长记忆中留下了强烈烙印，艺术家借此倾诉情感，恰似亲密的喃喃私语。于二楼明亮空间中展出的《Lostalghia》，则源自安德烈·塔可夫斯基的名作《乡愁》（1983年）。电影的开篇呈现了两个全然对立的世界——俄国乡村黑白褪色的风光与意大利郊外浓雾缠绕下田园诗话般的牧场。程然的改写则避开了原著忧郁的知识分子视角，重新演绎焚毁教堂与古典艺术的场景，用自己的方式对美学、正统、典范等概念提出了质疑。

以程然为代表的新一代艺术家正逐渐走入大众的视野：他们跳脱出中国录像艺术的传统与条条框框，直接在西方电影、音乐、艺术等大众文化中寻找典故与灵感。他们的创作抛开了改良主义理想，将影像引入到更加私人的领域。 唐凌洁

The “angel” falls slowly, breaking the water’s shiny surface. Brilliant light, as if from heaven, tears open the infinite stretch of darkness. His body is shrouded in seafoam and bubbles, at once completely submerged in the depths of the water, then hovering in the air, with loud, penetrating cries echoing as if from within the womb. Up until this point, one might assume that Cheng Ran is paying homage to Bill Viola. Suddenly, though, two people in swimsuits, lifeguards, burst in, breaking the meditative atmosphere as they haul him back to reality.

In Western culture, the metaphor of water is often related to redemption. But in this piece the image is inverted and the angel drowns upside down, with his limbs outstretched. Unlike his rescue, he seems to enjoy his free passage through the water granted by a release from gravity, waiting for the rebirth that comes after baptism. Compared to the human experience of religious inspiration and outlook in Viola’s *Five Angels for the Millenium*, Cheng Ran’s *Angels for the Millenium (#6)* adds a sense of real-world anxiety, and the appearance of the lifeguards hints at the limitations of individual experience and the unavoidability of interfering powers.

Imprisonment and transgression, extermination and freedom, reality and utopia: binary opposites run throughout the whole exhibition, the gradual farewell to the clamor of youth and the induction into the regulations of the adult world that form this young artist’s direct reflections on his environment. “What Why How” is

Cheng Ran’s first solo exhibition, and brings together four video works the artist produced over the past year. The exhibition’s Chinese title borrows from Cheng’s 2010 work of the same name, three English words transliterated, rather than translated, into Chinese. This is a parody of the Chinese translation of Western film titles often seen in Hong Kong, the transformative effect of which displaces the title’s original signification and alludes to the audience’s placement within the postmodern cultural context of the exhibition.

The generation that Cheng Ran represents grew up in a time of pirated DVDs, the Internet, and deluges of second-hand information. Unlike in previous generations, its challenges lay not so much in the need to respond to change, but in the search for self-value within a complex, agglomerate, and multivariate society; distinction is now more important than fusion. This has led their creative works to be especially sensitive to themes of restraint, resistance, and marginalization. Shown in the first-floor screening theatre, the video *1971-2000* borrows visual elements and iconic parts of the original soundtrack from two films now regarded as classics of twentieth-century popular culture: Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) and Wim Wenders’ *The Million Dollar Hotel* (2000).

The protagonists of both films skirt the margins of mainstream discourse, leaving strong impressions in Cheng Ran’s memory. The artist appropriates this flow of emotion as if speaking in intimate murmurs. The bright gallery space on the second floor shows a third video piece, *Lostalghia* (2012). A play on Andrey Tarkovsky’s 1983 film *Nostalgia*, the film’s opening scene shows two opposing worlds—the Russian countryside captured in faded black and white, and the fields of rural Italy in thick fog, reminiscent of scenes from pastoral poetry. But Cheng’s edit sidesteps the intellectual’s perspective of melancholy in the original, instead re-playing the scene of a church’s burning, as well as other classical scenarios, using his own methods to probe questions of aesthetics, orthodoxy, and paragon.

As Cheng Ran’s generation of artists gradually enters into popular view, it has begun to throw off the traditions and established frameworks of the Chinese moving image, instead directly drawing inspiration and source material from Western popular culture, be this film, music, or art. Their work rids itself of the ideals of Reformism, taking the image into far more personal realms.

Tang Lingjie (Translated by Dominik Salter Dvorak)