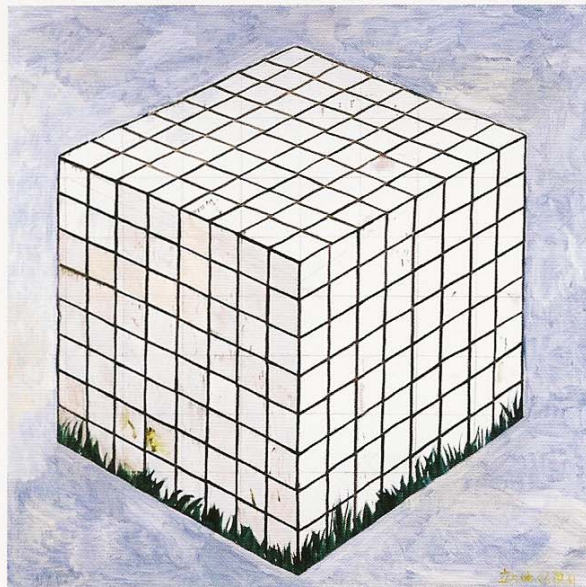
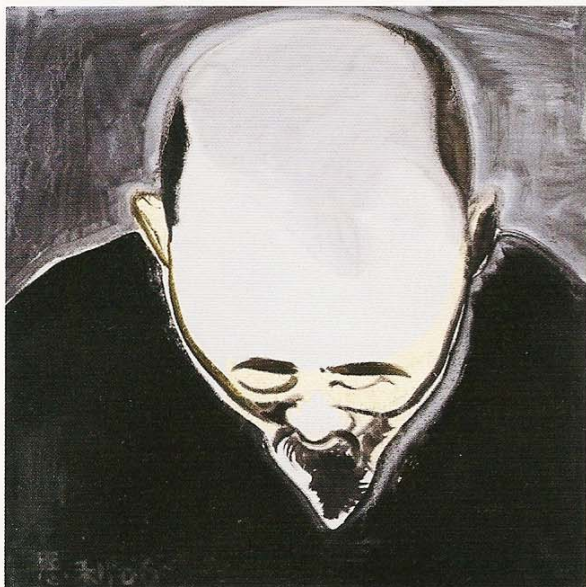


A Solitary Voyeur of the Quotidian

□ By Yale Yin



左：
张恩利
《头发》
布面油画

Left:
Zhang Enli
Hair
Oil on Canvas
2006
60×60cm

右：
张恩利
《立方体》
布面油画

Right:
Zhang Enli
Cube
Oil on Canvas
2006
200×210cm

In Zhang Enli's recent works, objects of daily life that are seemingly neglected - ashtrays, bottles, rubbish bins, wastepaper baskets - often appear in his paintings, creating his own form of container culture.

In his eyes these objects are expressive, like individual entities with souls. These common objects seem to have a human existence, and humans exist first and foremost in time. Time is linear, and between each point on this line are contained particular moments of our lives; perhaps the artist wishes to connect the time period of human life, mend and modify it, and endow it with the particular form of a container. The time a man uses in his entire life is like filling a container: sleeping, eating and drinking, getting married... these acts of 'filling' are sometimes unconscious, but more often conscious acts; sometimes passive, but more often active. The time when a person's basket is full is the time when his life comes to an end. All these containers are perhaps symbols of the different facets of our daily lives.

If Zhang Enli's studio has a soul, then all

these glasses, boxes and containers are the providers of this soul. These objects could be old, or simple, but as Zhang Enli spends times with them, he gradually senses the dignity in their peaceful solemnity, and the quiet beauty evoked by their structural simplicity. The unintentional exaggeration and glorification of these small and vulnerable objects extend into the artist's contemplation and subversion of the value of life itself. Perhaps we cannot exactly say that the artist exaggerates these seemingly 'vulnerable' objects, because with all things there is a certain scale of judgment, and when we choose different points of references, the results are naturally contrasted and different; whether an object is big or small is simply the relative outcome of a particular chosen scale.

In an earlier series *Eating*, the artist places himself in the paintings, as a voyeur among the group of eaters. The more you are unable to eat, the more you want to eat, and the more hungry and greedy you get - this is a very natural mentality of rebellion. In addition is the fact that the great tradition of the Chinese

is to do 'real business' over meals - business deals, courting, confessions - are all conducted during the process of eating. Thus a Chinese person's first greeting is naturally 'have you eaten yet?' This has become a kind of figurative expression in our culture. The Chinese are willing to spend fortunes on food, without worrying about wastage - ample quantities of food and wine, expensive and rare delicacies - at the root of this emphasis on eating is still a mutation of greed, a result of our ancestors' fear of hunger. With this table of eaters Zhang Enli vividly portrays a picture not only of the diverse flavours of life, yet even the innermost desires of these people.

In the *Hair* series from approximately the same period, the series of napes that the artist portrays marks the distinct personalities of individuals and conveys different expressions transformed at the back of the head. They are revelations of professions and habits, status symbols, expressions of a life's existence. His perception and depiction of this often neglected 'back side' invite us to take notice of the uncommon aspects of these ordinary objects, seen in particular times,

张恩利
《树》
布面油画

Zhang Enli
Tree
Oil on Canvas

2006
180×150cm



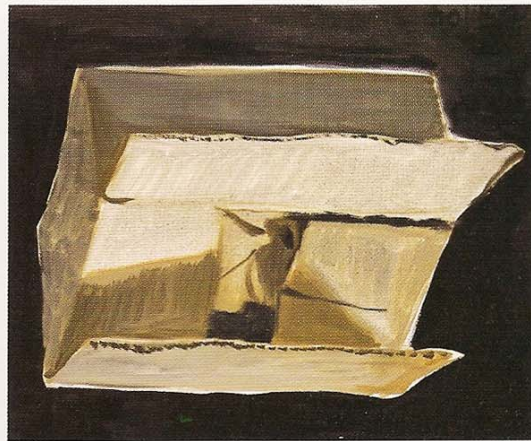
angles and situations. His observations later extend to objects including toilets, ditches, ashtrays, wastepaper baskets, chairs, trees, public toilets, walls, and columns. Among these the one that creates the deepest impression for me is *Public Toilet*—the kind of white ceramic public toilets that could be seen everywhere in the early stages of city reconstruction in China, which, with time, have left on the ceramic tiles and deep stains and marks of dirt, reviving the memory of the stench that you used to smell every time you passed. Today most of these public toilets have been taken apart, with very few of them still left standing. With the increasing speed of globalization, even the development of these toilets has followed the phenomenon of 'out with the old, in with the new'; this type of toilet, seemingly buried in the waste of history, are captured and documented by Zhang Enli, complete with their marks of dirt and filth, standing quietly yet at same time restlessly on his canvases. In these works the forms of the ceramic tiles recall the quick and natural brushstrokes in traditional Chinese paintings; this transported method of expression conveys the artist's exploration in the aspects of painting and presentation. Zhang Enli seems to be increasingly interested in this particular kind of ceramics. In several recent works

左：
张恩利
《木箱子》
布面油画

Left:
Zhang Enli
Box
Oil on Canvas
2006
140×238cm

右：
张恩利
《容器》
布面油画

Right:
Zhang Enli
Container
Oil on Canvas
2006
40×50cm



depicting water troughs, his focus is on a unique kind of square-shaped water trough constructed from green and blue ceramic tiles; the gradation and crossover of colours make you feel as though you were seeing them with your own eyes, the brushstrokes are liberated yet solid. The image of the trough is vivid, quiet, yet leaves room for imagination, creating the feeling of familiarity. The outspreading square tiles, just like mosaics, invite you, followed by your heart, to enter into and be captivated by this three-dimensional sphere. The thoughts of the artist transgress the limitations of the earthly world, abandon traditional ideologies,

break through ideas within the everyday sensory confinement, and give a unique aesthetic to seemingly ugly and ordinary objects.

If an artist could find a soul that is closest to him, then his works could become part of his life. I believe in Sainte-Beuve's concept of 'soulmates', of mutual understanding regardless of difference in time and space. Zhang Enli's persistence is a proof of this: the soul of an artist's work is preordained, and it is for the artist to continuously seek it through exploration.