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THE TEXTURE OF PROMISES

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The texture of promises

The exhibition title refers to one of the "promises" made to us by photographs: the easy identification of what is represented in them, their veracity and fidelity to reality. We trust their transparent meaning. We believe that their eloquence can overcome verbal language, and we expect that all this is available to us in the photograph's first visible layer, in its visual "texture".

A major part of photography's success as a communication tool stems from the properties it exhibited in the past, for it came to offer a solid view of reality. Transcribing the world in images ceased to depend entirely on memory in its various accounts — verbal and written — or on scientific and artistic representations, with all the possible subjectivities and inaccuracies that such documents might contain, which is why Roland Barthes claimed that, following the invention of photography, "henceforth the past is as certain as the present".[1]

When this first visible layer of a photograph has little narrative density, one could say that access to its meaning is in a "indeterminate state": it requires an access key, a text accompanying the work that acts as a password. The introductory texts, labels or captions of a series often serve this purpose: they reveal and anchor meaning. This anchoring, this non-visual information opening the door to understanding the photograph, must in most cases be provided by the author. It is a way of reducing the polysemy of images, the multiple meanings that can be extracted from them.

Nonetheless, if we recognise what the photograph represents — a landscape, for example — but are unaware of the author's intention, then our imagination is activated. We speculate about what it might mean, and we do so by using our own experiences, the emotions aroused by that first perception. In short, we put our intuition to work. But this process becomes complicated when the signs contained in

1. Roland Barthes, *La cámara lúcida* (Barcelona: Paidós, 1990), p. 152

the photographs have no cultural contiguity. This is the case of the traditional signs and models of representation used in Asian countries. Cultural references are crucial to understanding an image. Chinese characters illustrate this semantic obstacle, as they are completely illegible to Westerners and, like Egyptian hieroglyphs, they stem from images that have become more sophisticated until sublimating the form from which they originated. And they did so by placing calligraphy, the strokes of the brush, in the foreground. In fact, as François Cheng indicates, traditional Chinese painting "evolved from calligraphy, with the brushstroke forming the basis of pictorial technique", and it never aimed to perfectly duplicate reality, as is the case with classical Western painting. The interrelation of painting with calligraphic poems was a way of superimposing and allowing a wide spectrum of meanings to coexist. The Chinese painter Guo Xi (1020-1090) echoed the words of the ancients when he wrote: "a poem is a painting without form and a painting is a poem with form".[2]

Chinese characters provide a more open polysemy that is different from that of Western script characters. For example, the artist's name Gao Bo written in Chinese ideograms can always be read in the same way, but these same ideograms also contain other meanings: Gao means "big" and Bo means "wave or water". The two together can be read as "high tide" or "big wave", and this "big wave" can also be understood as a "big movement". The accuracy of meanings is therefore subject to variables of a different nature.

Alejandro Castellote

2. Chantal Maillard, *Las venas del dragón* (Barcelona: Galaxia Gutemberg, 2021), p. 167

Gao Bo

高波

All of Gao Bo's work represents a circular journey, a cycle of constant comings and goings, as he creates images and returns to them to reprocess, modify or destroy them, incorporating his work into that vital loop of creation/destruction that illustrates and affirms the evanescent essence of reality. The rationale behind the autobiographical meditative nature that permeates his relationship with the artistic lies in the profound influence that Tibet has exerted on his personal growth. It was the setting of his first photographs and metaphorically could be claimed as the metaphysical canvas on which he has been recording his passage through life.

Gao Bo travelled to Tibet for the first time in 1985. He was looking for something different, both exotic and unknown, at the age of twenty-one, and this Himalayan country was as far as he could go within China. Ten years later, when confronting the images taken on five trips to Tibet between 1985 and 1995, he realised that he had looked at the country from the supposed objectivity of photography without realising that objectivity is a subjective construct. Frustration then prevented him from understanding what had truly happened in those ten years. Reality is never finished; it flows and changes at a steady pace, without the possibility of controlling it; in other words, of representing it. He had to wait until 2009 to incorporate this transition towards the unattainable as a process and not as an end. And he did this by examining all the material as if it were a foreign archive.

In order to rearrange his images, he spread them out on a table without paying attention to chronology or geographical location, and he associated them by paying special attention to the multidirectional dialogues stemming from these encounters. A way of relating them that obeys intuition or, as he puts it, "subconscious behaviour". He created fictitious landscapes and scenarios in this process that mimetically correspond to reality but are not real. Distinct times and different perspectives coexist in them. Something similar occurs in traditional Chinese painting, in which different vanishing points and different planes of vision coexist and overlap on the same canvas.

The deep personal enrichment that Gao Bo's long-standing relationship with Tibetan society has given him required a symbolic ritual of devolution that would ethically and aesthetically bring to an end this new re-edition of his work. The formal solution for that purpose arose from a story

mythologies" whose formal and temporal disconnection with reality guides perception of the portraits towards surreal, dreamlike imaginaries that refuse to identify the meaning of what they show.

Weixin Chong

郭张 玮欣

The *Suiseki Softfalls* series employs a visual device to invert the solid nature of marble, or in the words of Weixin Chong, "an ode, a fluid transmutation of this beautiful material". *Softfalls*, which could be understood as a delicate waterfall, metaphorically describes the sensory effect she aims to evoke in those approaching this work, a kind of synaesthetic experience.

Suiseki is the art of finding a complete landscape in a piece of stone, a form of knowledge of its aesthetic, philosophical potential. It dates back to the Chinese tradition of "scholar's rocks" — the practice of appreciating rocks with complex formations and using these to observe and imagine. In the Chinese province of Yunnan, the city-county of Dali, whose characters are the same as those of the word "marble", this mineral has been used for centuries to underline the resemblance of the whimsical forms its surface takes with those of landscapes in traditional painting. This paradox of perception, very similar to the phenomenon of pareidolia,[1] is often heightened by the presentation of these pieces cut in the shape of a circle, another characteristic sign of Chinese painting. It is a way of revealing the close link between the forms of nature and those of art. This symbolisation contrasts with the allegorical nature of power, prestige, grandeur and permanence that marble has historically possessed in Western cultures, in which its use abounds in the architecture of palaces and great mansions, structures intended to eclipse time and represent ideals that outlast individual lifetimes.

Her growing interest in marble as a symbol led Weixin Chong to embark on a series of works about the physical and abstract qualities of this fascinating material, and this in turn led to a research residency in Carrara, Italy, the city known worldwide as the source of the finest marble and as a privileged place to nurture the works of sculptors from around the world. It also brought her into contact with the people working with Carrara marble, a craft embedded in local history and culture and also representing their livelihood. Chong describes the experience as "the starting point of the unseen processes that take place before the marble is exported to many countries". She experimented with methods of working marble as a surface and as a form, paying attention to the sensory perception of its tactility and irregularity of its fragments, which when polished reveal their grain and raw mineral form. She experimented with scales of perspective by inverting the micro and macro details of these marble surfaces, which prompt multi-layered meanings when printed on silk fabrics. The solidity of the stone is therefore viewed as a texture of surprising fragility by enlarging tiny textures and transferring these to silk in larger strokes.

1. "Pareidolia", a word that derives from the Greek *eidolon* (image, form, shape) and the prefix *para* (beside, alongside), is a psychological phenomenon that involves recognising meaningful models – such as faces or bodies – in vague and random stimuli. As neuroscientist Jeff Hawkins explains: "the brain is a kind of prediction machine that encounters vague information and specifies this by associating it with similarly known patterns". https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pareidolia

JI Zou

计洲

Ji Zhou's work is contemplative in nature. It depicts the impossibility of reproducing the real conditions of human vision by means of the laws of linear perspective. It is somehow a way of questioning the paradigm of Renaissance perspective, which recovered in art the ability to instil life into the flat surface of images. It is also a way to represent our subjective perception: we relate to reality in terms of fragmentation, and our mind must do some additional work in an attempt to fit the pieces together in a rational and comprehensible manner, assimilating it to the way in which human vision operates. For as the artist Juan Muñoz said, "there is a moment when the eye betrays you. It is giving you information that the brain does not recognise. Or, on the contrary, the imagination tries to describe the world before you and the eye is telling you no".

In order to create this work, entitled *Greenhouse 3* (2017), Ji Zhou took dozens of photographs in a botanical garden with a telephoto lens, which made him see only a set of fragments of the scene. None of these fragments were recorded at the same time of day, which means that the time is different in each image. And when this temporal variable is introduced, the picture dissolves and unitary space becomes impossible, converted into an imaginary constructed by our subjectivity. Ji Zhou dismantles and combines these photographic fragments and presents them again: he re-presents them by adopting the form of a palimpsest that contains formal echoes of