

Primitive Digital

原始数码

LiQin Tan's work is a thoughtful break for the weary mind on a rainy day, but is also much more. It is you and it is me. It is now and yet it represents all of history. It offers new perspectives and explores alternatives. It shows us that visual language can tell a story just as well as the written word. Most of all, it seems to say that although much has already been written, every day is a chance to contribute a little more.

这是二月雨季某日，当靛雷特画廊（北二街141号）中巨大而变形的脸孔盯住我时，我心灵被极大地震撼。最终好奇心战胜了我，决定进入大厅，从而逃避沉闷的天气并观赏艺术作品。此展览为华人艺术家、罗格斯大学教授谭力勤个展“折射与洗脑”，在大厅里，无论我走到哪里，那无情的石质般的面孔始终在身后紧紧地追随着我。其作品的艺术观念与手法赋有独到见地，在每幅精心雕琢的作品中，将从史前人类的原始跨越到当前互联网数码时代演绎得恰到好处。

力勤作品中的多变脸孔全用数码技术呈现，近似如中美洲奥尔梅克文明或复活节岛摩艾的雕塑群，看去阴气沉沉的面孔，但闪耀着机警的双眼，显得出奇的聪明，似乎要抓捕观众的心灵来思考。站立良久，我内心深处之魂已被三维数码图像的魅力深深俘虏。

在使用数码技术的同时，力勤仍保持对原始艺术和美国原住民艺术的研究，融合绘画雕塑等多种技法，甚至将数码图像打印於原始兽皮上。在创作手法上，力勤认为自己是一个“数码自然主义者”。他的个展中，尽管作品画面呈现的是远古的岩石和曙光及粗犷的人类图像，但展现方式上却采用了工业化制作手段和现代科技成果，即：印制于生锈的钢板与液晶电视中不断滚动的三维动画，由此而构成他艺术的主要结构。

相对人类文明史，数码艺术尽管是比较新的技术，但数码艺术创作与发展仍可追溯到古老祖先的绘画，雕塑或陶器技术上。事实证明，当我们在使用当代新科技时，都可以追踪其根源。力勤试图通过重温这基本的人类内涵来确保未来艺术的持续发展。

就他此次个展而言，占主导地位的头像

It was a rainy weekday in February when the gigantic, twisted faces staring at me from within the Dalet Gallery jarred me out of my introspection. My curiosity ultimately got the best of me, and I decided to enter the building to escape the dreary weather outside and explore the show. Beijing artist and Rutgers professor LiQin Tan's show Refractive Brain Therapy was on display, and everywhere I looked one of his stony faces was staring back at me. What I found inside was some well-crafted and insightful art that conceptually spanned the human creative process from prehistory all the way to the age of the internet.

Tan's faces are digital renderings reminiscent of the Central American Olmec or the behemoth Moai of Easter Island. The faces are lifeless, yet possess strangely conscious eyes; they seem surprisingly intelligent and appear to be sizing you up as you ponder them. As I stood before these idol-like forms, it struck me that the glamour of the digital images began to give way to something more visceral.

Ever since he began incorporating digital techniques into his art, Tan has always kept one foot in the school of primitivism. He integrates techniques like painting or sculpture into his work instead of just computer imaging and considers himself a "digital naturalist" in his creative approach. After studying Native American art, Tan even used animal skins as a medium to print digital images — a far cry from the LCD monitors and photographic prints we are now accustomed to.

While computer technology as it stands now may be relatively new, the evolution of digital art-making can trace its history to the ancient

techniques our ancestors used to produce paintings, sculptures, or pottery. In fact, contemporary methods must explore their roots. Without a connection to the distant past, digital images risk losing the connection to their innately human origins which predate complex machines. LiQin Tan makes sure to invest in the future by revisiting these fundamental histories.

For his Dalet exhibition, rusty metallic surfaces and industrial themes dominate the imagery alongside archaic references to long distant people and places. The faded memories of bygone days glimmer in the rocky textures but there are expressions of the near past, the present, and the future as well. The not-so-ancient past such as the industrial revolution and the contemporary obsession with the internet come immediately to mind, and the boundaries between past and present tend to blur quite a bit. As for the future, the slate is blank and with each passing day more is added to the tale of the human race. One thing LiQin Tan makes sure to drive home is the importance of our own personal journey.

The degree to which we as individuals "rust" or grow old (as seen in the eroded faces) is determined by our activities and our attitude toward life. As humans, we are forced to adapt to an increasingly technological and industrial landscape while maintaining a hold on our natural and animal tendencies and our place in society. There will always be deterioration of the body and mind over time, but our choices affect the rate by which this degradation occurs. We choose to smoke or drink alcohol, or we choose not to. We may opt to create cultural relics, or mindlessly consume television. The choice is

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up to the individual, yet bolstered or condemned by the society at large. Technology may not always mesh seamlessly with biology, but our creations ultimately come from within us. We mold our environments into machines and gadgets, but our psyches are sculpted in a similar way. That which lies outside of us is not always as foreign as it may appear. In this regard, Tan's work is extremely positive and hopeful of humanity's ongoing dialogue with its inventions and ideas.

In reference to the show's title, Refractive Brain Therapy, a few of the large heads are double-sided and sit encased behind walls of water that extend partway up their surfaces. While the physical warping of light is apparent, there is a linguistic trope in effect here as well. In Chinese, "refraction" has a double meaning. When used as a noun it means literal refraction or a type of illusion, but as a verb it can mean the discovery of a complex social issue or truth. With LiQin Tan's massive human representations, we encounter both very directly. The water changes the appearance of the image, but remains transparent. In a similar way, we look into the face of humanity and our individual distortions become clear through our reflection.

Tan's faces act as both mirror and prism, reflecting and bending our sense of self and social identity. Seeing as these works are much like icebergs—most of their content dwelling below the surface — the therapeutic elements may arise from a number places. There is, of course, the notion that we all have distorted or biased views of the world around us. This is a humbling notion which allows us time to come face-to-face with our personal and social beliefs. The dual digital and physical process sheds light on the diversity of culture while the monoliths themselves connect us to a distant historical and evolutionary past.

Nothing exists in isolation, and even the newest of ideas or objects owes its existence to something which came before. Tan's work is visually challenging and sublime. It brings us in tune with ourselves, our place in time, our culture, and the cultures of our fellow humans.

As I discovered, LiQin Tan's work is a thoughtful break for the weary mind on a rainy day, but is also much more. It is you and it is me. It is now and yet it represents all history. It offers new perspectives and explores alternatives. It shows us that visual language can tell a story just as well as the written word. Most of all, it seems to say that although much has already been written, every day is a chance to contribute a little more.

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作品印制在工业材料——锈迹斑斑的钢板上，它引申着古老原居住地居民的演变，而昔日岩石纹理中的褪色记忆，体现出过去、现在和未来的文化积淀。近代工业革命者和互联网当代痴迷学者都能体会到，过去和现在之间的界限已趋于模糊。至于将来，就如一张白石板将会雕刻着日新月异的人类故事。

人的老化过程和大脑“生锈”的程度是由活动和对生活的态度决定的。人类被迫适应越来越多的科技和产业景观，同时又要保护自然完美、动物本性和社会空间。随着时间的推移，退化的身体和心灵总是发生，但人类的选择完全可影响发生的概率。人类可选择吸烟或喝酒，也可选择不；可选文化创建，也可选盲目看电视。选择总是个人的，但会带来整个社会的支持或谴责。技术不可能总是天衣无缝地与生物结合，而创造最终会来自人类内部。人类既创造了大机械也创造了精小物体，而我们的心理都会以类似的方式去进行雕塑。在这方面，力勤的“锈脸”动画装置是非常积极和正面的，探索和寄托人类对其自然本性和技术发明进行对话。

就主题“折射洗脑”表现而言，力勤将数幅双面数码金属印制大脸孔放於玻璃钢水缸中，一半置于水下，另一半面往水上延伸，当物理光线照在不同水的表面，从而折射出变形的影像。力勤向我解释说，中文“折射”具有双重含义：作名词时，指物体折射自然现象；作动词时，可意味着复杂社会问题或真相的发现。在与力勤的大规模人类作品交涉过程中，我们看到和遇到的都是非常直接——水的折射不断改变人类脸的外观形象，但仍然保持其透明性。用类似方法，通过反思，我们能明确而清晰地面对人类扭曲的脸孔。

力勤的数码大脸孔像多面镜，反射出自我扭曲的社会责任感。此系列作品像冰山，内涵隐藏於表层之下，而精神理疗的熔浆随时冒出。这里明确了一观念，即承认我们拥有对周围世界的一种扭曲或偏颇看法，同时也允许我们有充足的时间去改变之。此大型艺术物体既连接到遥远的历史进化，同时又揭示了更深层的多元文化即数码和物质的双层进展。任何内容都不是孤立存在的，即使是最新的想法或事物都与某种过去存在的东西有关联。力勤的作品是对视觉艺术一种庄严的挑战，它能使我们及时调整自己的心灵和了解人类文化的变迁。

我发现，力勤的作品是对疲惫心灵一种完美的震疗；它是你的，也是我的，它代表了现代；它提供了新的视角和探讨新方法，揭示了艺术视觉语言也可以讲一个像文字书写的好故事；最重要的是，它似乎在说，虽然许多艺术已被历史文字记载，但新的一天都有创作和贡献的机会。

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