

# Refractive Brain Therapy — Tan’s Views On Social Reality Through Digital Technology

## 折射与洗脑——谭力勤借数码科技介入现实

Tan describes: “the reflection is a natural physical state, but also a phenomenon of social behavior, easy to produce the illusion refraction, refraction can also precipitate authenticity. Artists Spa brainwashing technique applied in this state is an artistic interpretation of the phenomenon.” This language also clarifies exactly the theme of his exhibition, the audience can finally recognize the illusion and the social reality through this natural phenomenon — refraction, and the digital artwork may achieve both encoding and decoding impacts on our society.

Wherever you go nowadays, health care and therapy have become an important topic of peoples’ conversations, and there are various rehabilitation techniques entering the market endlessly. Perhaps you have tried many health spas, including foot bath, spa bath, sauna, etc., but you may have never heard of “spa brainwashing” and “brain alcohol treatment.” Tan’s solo exhibition in the Songzhuang Art Museum has given me some visual and conceptual experiences I had never before encountered with a new rational interpretation concerning “Brain Therapy” by applying digital skills.

“Refractive Brain Therapy” is Tan’s third large solo exhibition in Beijing. He, as always, uses the most cutting-edge technology to produce medium-sized 3D animation-installations. The large digital rusty metal-print of brains and heads on two sides are placed in big water tanks, and the audience can watch an evolution of spa brainwashing through a refraction of glass and water. In his artist’s statement, Tan describes that: “the reflection is a natural physical state, but also a phenomenon of social behavior, easy to produce the illusion refraction, refraction can also precipitate authenticity. Artists Spa brainwashing technique applied in this state is an artistic interpretation of the phenomenon.” This language also clarifies exactly the theme of his exhibition, the audience can finally recognize the illusion and the social reality through this natural phenomenon — refraction, and the digital artwork may achieve both encoding and decoding impacts on our society.

Visually, Tan’s digital art do not borrow any “Chinese symbols,” and it seems to be full of modern elements, computer technology and updated materials, but look carefully and you will be surprised to find out that his work is reinforced

by Chinese philosophy and spirituality. In the museum, Tan’s art captures viewers’ attention with the two half-haves of their brains immersed in full amounts of red-wine jars, which obviously imply the artist’s potential theme and criticism of Chinese society. It is often said, in addition to money, the functioning of Western society has to do with coffee and gasoline, but there are cigarettes and alcohol in China’s social function (used as an extremely important social lubricant). These works are hinted at and ridiculed by excessive alcohol consumption in Chinese society and by bad habits of losing their sanity and conscience. Tan also raised the question that maybe these social alcohol dedicated people would require the same amount of alcohol for their therapy and retreatment? Centuries of Chinese medical wine seems to have very unlimited play here, and money controls everything. This phenomenon is full of paradox from the social behavior of Chinese tradition to a rational and motivated civilization.

Besides the involvement of social reality, Tan’s creative thinking seeps deep lines of contemporary 3D virtual technology, obtaining his inspiration from science and technology, and then using high-tech to intervene in social reality. He often told people: technology is a new inspiration source. He spent countless sleepless nights in the computer labs, updating his technical knowledge, and applying them as soon as possible into art creation. At this solo exhibition, we have to admire him for profound 3D software knowledge, skilled deformation capability, applying accurate material and lighting competences and with the high resolution nature of rendering experiences. There are a lot of people who use 3D software currently at home and abroad, but those who

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apply such high-tech skills to contemporary digital art are very rare. This solo exhibition features nearly twenty major pieces which innovate on new computer modeling skills with a lot of deformed shape by contemporary perception. This unique model has strong box-shape sense, beauty with incomplete rhyme, naturally concise and texture shock effects. They are completely different beauty patterns, modeling structure from the paintings and sculptures.

Follow along with natural material to shape modeling deformation is another creative characteristic of the artist, who connects with his digital nature concepts. Among these strange and natural images, people often wonder how such natural texture can be applied to the art body. Of course, the materials are employed in 3D mapping with computers, but the natural textural images are often taken by artists from nature. However, in terms of how to apply and what type of effects to achieve, there remains much room for artists to recreate and play. Obviously, Tan would like to maintain simple and plain concepts in a complex natural material with complicated technology — each cerebral head uses only one textural map. This simplified approach contrasts with sophisticated computer programs — it seems very committed to Tan’s creative process, pursuing simple to complex and then returning to simple. All industrial animation clips use 720 x 486 pixels in NTSC resolutions or 720 x576 pixels in PAL currently, but Tan works’ resolutions are normally over 25000 x 16000 pixels, plus incorporate additional special effects rendering, effects that normal computers cannot handle. Tan told me that he had to build a render-farm to do the job.

Lighting and color are another area of animation software expertise for Tan; he makes full use of them to the limit of their capabilities. His pursuit of the simple harmony of color is the same process as other artists, but the richness, accuracy and strength of depth, cannot be matched by any other kind of art. In short, Tan has a unique life-force to control the overall momentum with computational infinite details in his digital art. When it comes to lighting, people usual think of film and theater stage, yes, the same basic principles are adopted by 3D animation software. Tan sought to abandon the traditional “three-points” lighting mode, and utilized big highlights with a small ambience approach, which a bit like multi-focus and scatter perspective in traditional Chinese painting. Also, the reflection in ambience attempt is very delicate, fruitful and multileveled.

When I left SongZhuang Art Museum, I sighed: Tan’s solo exhibition may refract some illusions, but it also reflects social reality. The virtual realm of brainwashing reminds us of the past, but also enables us to face the future more clearly.

无限发挥余力。这种充满悖论式的现象便是中国当前从社会行为转换为知识理性的如实写照。

除对现实社会的介入外，力勤创作思维方式深系着当代三维虚拟科技，他从科技中得其灵感，再把高科技手段介入现实。他经常对人说：技术也是创作的源泉。他度过无数不眠之夜在电脑机房中，更新技术知识，并尽快把它们应用于艺术创作之中。此个展我们不得不敬佩他对于三维软件熟练变形的建模能力，精确而万变的材质应用能力和超大分频率的渲染能力。国内外目前使用三维软件的人确不少，但把其技术熟练地应用于当代数码艺术创作中的则凤毛麟角。力勤此个展近二十幅大型脑额建模突破了三维动画界的造型传统，而采用了许多现代意识的变模模型。这种独特建模造型具有一种方块力度、残缺韵美、自然简练、肌理震撼的效果，完全有别於绘画、雕塑的造型格局。

顺其材质的自然来塑造脑额是艺术家创作的另一特征，这与他探求数码自然的理念有其关联。在这些奇特又自然的图像中，人们往往会惊叹艺术品的肌理是如何创作而出的。应用于三维软件中的材质图，往往需艺术家到自然中寻找，输入电脑后才能把材质图贴到三维模型上。而怎样贴，达到什么效果，便留给艺术家很大的余地去创作和发挥。显而易见，力勤力求在复杂的自然材质中保持简单而朴实，每一脑额艺术创作仅使用一幅材质图，这种简朴的手法与电脑深奥程序形成鲜明的对比，而力勤似乎很投入这种从简朴到复杂再回到简朴的创作过程。目前所有动画短片采用的分频率一般都是720X576像素左右，但力勤的脑额创作的分频率在25000 X16000像素之上，再加上许多特技渲染功能，一般电脑是无法渲染成像的，力勤告诉我只有渲染农场才可达其目的。

灯光和色彩是三维软件的又一特长，力勤充分利用其功能并发挥到极致，他追求简朴色彩的和谐对比与其他艺术无甚区别，但简朴色彩中的丰富性、精确性和深层的力度，是其他艺术种类难以比拟的。一句话，它既有整体的大家气势又有局部的无穷细节。谈到灯光处理，人们往往想到舞台和电影，是的，三维软件借鉴其基本原理。力勤力求抛弃传统灯光“三点”处理模式，追求一种多高光，小亮度的处理方式，有点像国画中的焦点透视和散点透视，而力勤采用的是后一种。其次，暗部反光处理手法也非常微妙，丰富而多层次，仿佛艺术家在用电脑绘制一幅立体的现代雕塑。

当我离开宋庄美术馆时，我感叹道：力勤个展折射出人们的某些错觉，但也折射出社会的真实。在虚拟式的洗脑中既能使我们联想过去，又能使我们更清醒地开凿未来。

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