



BI RONGRONG: TAKE THE ROAD YOU'VE WALKED ON

“Waves were chased, connected, and repeated.
It has shape, because it can be touched.
The sky draws close,
But it drifts far away with a touch; it has no shape.
The sky is full of light, and its colors are changing.
Waves, thanks to the light in the sky,
Has shape. “

Transparent, light and fragile—such are Bi Rongrong’s direct impression and feelings on glass, “transparency makes glass looks swift.” For those familiar with Bi Rongrong’s art style, her works are closely related to, or originated from, her paintings, which are rich in colors and visually appealing. When seeing the outcome of the 2016 Annealing Project, Bi Rongrong expressed her hope to further explore the relationship between her works and the field with the help of the professional teams at SHMOG. Such an exploration requires the artist to try media other than painting to extend the lines, shapes, colors, and structures in her mind into the space. “Glass and contemporary art can totally learn and integrate with each other; cross-border creation is fun.” From the shape to the color, and from the lighting to the perspective, glass seems to be a material exclusively tailored for Bi Rongrong. This medium is capable of reaching different dimensions than painting in terms of expression, thus enabling her to open new perspectives to interpret the relationship among different objects and structures.

Majoring in Chinese painting, Bi Rongrong turned to contemporary art after graduation, and she possessed a totally different perspective from ordinary contemporary artists from the beginning. Just like the illustrations in *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* that are designed for learning painting skills, mimicking, repetition and different combinations, she has been considering and producing a very individual modular system in her own artistic practice. If the *Manual of the Mustard Seed Garden* is a standard manual based on orthodox narratives in the literati painting, Bi Rongrong's modules are completely personal and private, which have generated a reference system that refer to each other behind the paintings. Each illustration or pattern comes from a piece of personal experience and is a memory of the past; therefore, each of the works are refined and constructed from numerous such modules.

It is better to travel far than to read voluminously.

Bi Rongrong once said: "Chinese painting majors are used to draw fragments in their trips, and the picture gradually extends from the current mountain or plants, during which process a lot of things can happen. Such narrative is very romantic." Maybe this way of observation has made the artist sensitive of what passes her and willing to build some of connections between them. She likes to travel because she can keep breaking up time and territorial restrains and intertwine them on her personal timeline. "In the last two or three years of my trips, I've collected some posters on streets in the city, graffiti, as well as patterns on buildings and on exhibits in museums." For the 2017 "Annealing" project, she chose the "wave" as the basic inspiration and material for creation. She first collected the elements of "waves" from a small pottery ancient Greece that dated back to 2,800 years ago in a museum. With more trips, she collected more and more "wave" patterns: from the pillar with spiral patterns in the Assyrian Empire period four thousand years ago, to the river and ocean patterns on the dragon robes in Qing Dynasty of the seventeenth century, and even to her records of a lake near her apartment during her stay in Italy. "I think these patterns are very interesting, because they connect the past and the present, as well as different regions. Through the collection process, I found that although separated by time and space, these patterns have incredible differences and similarities. I took photos of them, archived them, and then extracted, refined and re-constructed."

How to put the colorful graphics into three-dimensional works in the exhibition space? For Bi Rongrong, who had never known much about glass, she had to learn everything about it from the beginning. "The glass is really heavy, and the production process is full of power!" The vibrant young artist is also a very curious person, who would love to try anything even at a glance. "The most difficult part was the determination of the plan. I did not understand the performance and techniques of glass, which caused a lot of trouble." But Bi Rongrong never gave up asking: what are the characteristics of glass? How to make this shape? Can I make that color? As the high plasticity of glass, which was well conceived in mind, met with great resistance because of the difficulty of the techniques or the cost of production, she has learned more about glass as a material,

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including the weight, light transmission and plasticity—these abstract concepts became clear as the project was implemented. Gradually, Bi Rongrong grew from being confused about where to start to being better aware with an improved plan.

From the nine versions of work, we can identify great changes as well as the process where the artist learned. This piece of work about “waves” can be said to be a landmark case, which changed from the red three-meter-high plane double waves, to transparent waves, to a single wave combined with metal, to a 50-cm-high wave, and to a three-dimensional wave. “I hope I can convey my understanding the relationships between objects, structures and the environment we live in through the expression of lines, blocks, shapes, colors, structure, space and other languages.” Collecting materials and knowledge during travel is the result of the artist’s connection with the living environment: such close and personal relationship is first transformed into paintings. In this “Annealing” project, these elements have been placed in the specific exhibition space. Through lighting, structures, video and sound, the artist builds close connections among these seemingly loose elements. For viewers, they can walk through the three-meter-high works, and get close enough to see and feel these elements. From an individual experience, to the viewing of paintings, Rongrong built the relationship between the viewers and the painting, between the three-dimensional or large works and the venue, and even among the magnetic fields of viewers.

Such changes can be spotted in a certain pattern. Last March, Bi Rongrong held a solo exhibition called “Absolute” at Vanguard Gallery, where the paintings, installations and animation were all based on her collected material. The title came from one of the patterns she collected from the dome of a museum, and because such an architecture has a special structure and a sense of revival, the meaning behind the word has gone beyond the image or the structure itself. She began by using this word to rebuild her self-awareness, and has been improving or digging deeper this construction process. From private to the public, Bi Rongrong has expanded and enhanced the dimension of her works, so as to lead the audience to re-examine these personal experience, enter into her woven fantasy world, and listen to her stories on roads in a magnified and powerful



way, “As for the connection and reaction of the audience on the works, I am also curious and I would like to see how it goes on the exhibition.”

The use of glass has also made Bi Rongrong feel the difference from her previous painting work in her studio, because she had to consider more factors and influence, “I’ve tried something new in expression because the change of the media and space, such as the combination of glass and metal and the increase in the total volume of work, which has prompted me to raise new questions on the understanding of my previous works.” This female artist, who may look small but is highly energetic, never stops challenging herself, “I usually have new ideas during the process of creation or production, so there will be new ideas in the implementation process. Of course I will have regrets, and I will take them as the drive for my next move.”

The “wave” of the glass is itself a brief history of evolution, starting from the time human beings discovered this natural material from the wild to later periods. The “waves” in different time or space of the world have finally been involved in the modern reflection of Bi Rongrong. At this point, the wave pattern itself seems no longer important, as the constructive relationship has established in the process. If Bi Rongrong’s previous exhibition, “Absolute”, was considered as the beginning of this construction process, this new solo “Wave” is the continuation of the construction. The changes that have taken place in the works are no doubt a process of including her own understanding and her soul.