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Poetry, Film and Painting

In the past ten years, I have written some poems about films, like *A Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick* and *Tickets*, but the dialogue is one-way and limited.

Hong Kong local artist Ivy Ma is my friend. We have some meaningful dialogues between film, poetry and visual art. Ivy moved away from the rowdiness of the city to a quiet island around 2009. She also began to study and think about visual aesthetics with regard to photography and various media. In *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Roland Barthes developed an idea of *punctum*, a personally touching detail within a larger object, space or person. Ivy made her work about searching for this *punctum* or detail in films and elaborating on it.

In November 2009, Ivy sent me a batch of drawings that she had created based on scenes from the films of Ozu Yasujiro. Here I felt that she remotely and silently observed, searching the imagery with a transcendent gaze. In response to Ivy's works, I wrote a poem responding to her. It is included in the pamphlet of the joint exhibition *In Details*.

Cinema is often thought of as an integrated art, painting as a spatial art, and fiction and poetry as temporal arts. Although Ivy's paintings eliminate the sense of time, breaking up the 24 frames-per-second cinematic continuity, they are not purely spatial art works. Having removed objects or characters from the film images, she gives expression to the feeling that 'people change but the past does not' (or 'that-has-been').

Some of the works in Ivy's solo exhibition *Still Lives and Waves* were adapted from images taken from the films of Ozu and Fei Mu. Ozu and Fei Mu were 'Eastern' in spirit and very much concerned with ethics and order in the face of modernization. I was thinking about how the 'Eastern' values and aesthetics integrate into my own poetry, but not writing in traditional styles and forms.

Quoting *Poetic Remarks in the Human World* by Chinese scholar, historian, and literary critic Wang Guowei: "In the state of 'Self', in which objects are viewed through the perspective of self, self is evident in all objects; in the state of 'Selflessness', in which objects are viewed through the perspective of object, self and object are no longer distinguishable." Wang Guowei also wrote, "The only way to reach the state of selflessness, is through stillness." And the keys for viewing classical Chinese paintings and poems are 'stillness' and 'objects (life).'

In my poem "Luo Ping's The Spirit World," I avoided writing "I," but I narrate by using "You"—a man who lost himself in a classical Chinese landscape painting. The object is more important than the viewer. The second and third paragraphs are totally different; it becomes a little bit scary. The poem is a dialogue between me and Luo Ping, a Chinese painter of the Qing Dynasty. In eighteenth-century China, he had painted ghosts and spirits. He said he had seen the weird images with his own eyes.

In my poem, You (the viewer) enter the picture and, seeing the weird images of the picture, cross the borderlines between life and death, Yin and Yang, real and imaginary worlds. At last, everything is gone and You return to the selfless world where every single stroke is a response to Shitao's theory of painting.

Two of the works Ivy Ma made in the series about history museums are *A Birthday Card Drawn by a Prisoner* and *A Camp Trousers*. We visited Berlin and Sachsenhausen concentration camp separately. The image source of *A Birthday Card Drawn by a Prisoner* is a hand-drawn birthday card for Rudi Grimm, a German political prisoner who was given a hand-drawn card by the Czech prisoners on his birthday in April 1944. She imitates and draws the card on a woodblock. The other one is *A Camp Trousers*. The trousers belonged to Henry Michel. In September 1940, Michel, whose newspaper, *Grenz-Echo*, had been banned in Germany since 1933, was arrested by the Gestapo. He was interrogated in St. Gilles prison in Brussels and at police headquarters in Aachen. After being held briefly in prison in Dusseldorf, Hanover, and Berlin, Michel arrived in Sachsenhausen concentration camp on November 6, 1940. Here the SS initially assigned him to the punishment detail of so-called 'shoe-runners,' who had to run about forty kilometers round and round a special circuit every day, carrying heavy backpacks, to test shoe soles made of leather substitutes. She draws a pair of trousers on a woodblock.

After viewing Ivy's works, I wrote a poem about the prisoners. The poem is called "Criminal Evidence." The artwork and the images are still, so I narrated a story of my own experience, a journey about time, space, history and suffering, in which the characters of the poem start moving and talking.

"On Viewing Huang Bore's Paintings of Hong Kong" is my latest poem about painting and poem. Huang Bore was born in Guangdong Province, but he settled in Hong Kong after 1949 and stayed until he died in 1968. After 1956, he travelled and went hiking widely across Hong Kong and did sketches of every place he visited. In 1960, he held his only solo exhibition, *Paintings of Hong Kong*, and became one of the first painters to depict Hong Kong local scenes. Since we have had many discussions on Hong Kong identity recently, I want to represent my point of view as a Hongkonger and ask, "Which is Hong Kong's true landscape?"