Voon Pow Bartlett

Li Songsong: Conflicts of the In-Between

We Have Betrayed the Revolution is the first solo exhibition in London by Li Songsong. Twelve large-scale oil paintings more than adequately occupy the palatial space of the recently opened flagship Pace Gallery, nestled directly north of the Royal Academy of Art's Burlington House, in the prestigious Mayfair district. The gallery has described the exhibition as "New paintings that portray historical figures and events that play a part in the Chinese collective conscious."[1]

This is a fairly good description as the trajectory of Li Songsong's artistic development does appear to have followed major political events related to China and is thought to be "part of the debate on the process of socio-political change that has been taking place in China since the second half of the 1980s."[2] Li Songsong's political agenda also appears to have received support from Ai Weiwei, whose article is one of two in Li Songsong's exhibition catalogue. Ai Weiwei writes, "historical facts . . . disappear or are forgotten, either intentionally or unintentionally, never to be mentioned again."[3] Consummate in his strategies and famed for his widely publicized critique of the Chinese government, Ai Weiwei's ubiquitous voice booms in the art circuit, where, recently at the Venice Biennale 2013, he denounced certain artists: "Creators who are apolitical . . . cannot be called true artists."[4] Li Songsong's distinct, disjointed way of working with patchy brushworks and textured aluminum panels alludes to the similarly disjointed dissemination of history by the Chinese government, as well as the ambiguity and multiplicity of interpretations of that history. Narrative is often subsumed under a fragmented reality in Li Songsong's work, like a jigsaw puzzle of Chinese life, where any missing pieces serve to recall memory of absent history.[5]

Li Songsong's strategy is typical of the in-between generation that he belongs to. The artist was born in 1973 and was just three years old when Mao died. He was too young to have witnessed or remembered life under Mao, but old enough to remember the Tian'anmen massacre of 1989 (he was then an impressionable sixteen-year-old). His style of working, wavering "halfway between their photographic source images and pure painterly abstraction," is perhaps indicative of the ambivalence of his generation.[6] His work is characterized by the use of photographic pastiche to represent the fragmented manner in which his generation understands the history of

Li Songsong in front of *Big Girls,* 2013, oil on aluminum panel, 280 x 250 x 14 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace London.

its own country. He believes that meaning is constructed through the way a story is presented: "Everyone knows the story. The important thing is the way that you tell it. The way depends on your attitude and attitude changes with time. As society changes, attitude changes accordingly."[7]

Li Songsong is part of the generation of experimental artists that bases its work on documentary photographs of the Cultural Revolution. There is a deliberate ambiguity in his work to reflect a historical sensibility, one of selective memory that is the product of growing up in an era in which media is reality and tales are passed down from older generations. He is fully aware of the strong recall that these historical photographs can evoke and uses his painting skills to that end.[8] The strong sense of nostalgia

Li Songsong, *The Square,* 2001, oil on canvas, 180 x 320 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.

felt by his parents' generation and those who lived through the Cultural Revolution, something lacking in his own memory bank, is translated through an emotive stance that is palpable in *The Square* (2001). This painting was based on a photograph showing people mourning the death of Mao Zedong in Tian'anmen Square in 1976. The impressionistic work demonstrates the hallmark blurring effect made famous by Gerhard Richter. The omission of direct references to Tian'anmen and Mao serve only to heighten the acknowledgment of the passing of a historical milestone. Bowed heads and heavy hearts, white funereal garments painted sketchily and in a drip-like manner, convey solace. The monochromatic documentary reportage-style depiction evokes a universal expression of grief.

Yang Yipang, *The Square,* 1987–88, oil on canvas.

Li Songsong would have been aware of the "old photo" craze *(lao zhaopian re)* in China in the 1990s. Wu Hung wrote on the work of Li Songsong and Han Lei that "because the original photos are familiar to millions of Chinese people, the paintings' succinct brushwork has an indexical function to trigger the viewer's memories of their photographic models while demonstrating the painters' admirable skill in translating conventional documentary photographs into artistic, painterly images."[9] Li Songsong also would have been aware of another painting of the same name by the veteran avant-garde artist Yang Yiping, *The Square,* (1987–8), in which the "spatial and temporal disjunction contrast Tian'anmen with the surrounding people, whose presences seems to be accidental and in a 'startling state of disunity'."[10]

Instead of showing a disconnection between the people and their past, Li Songsong's *The Square* showed a nation united in grief. I find the success of the painting has much to do with its lack of context, its lack of indications

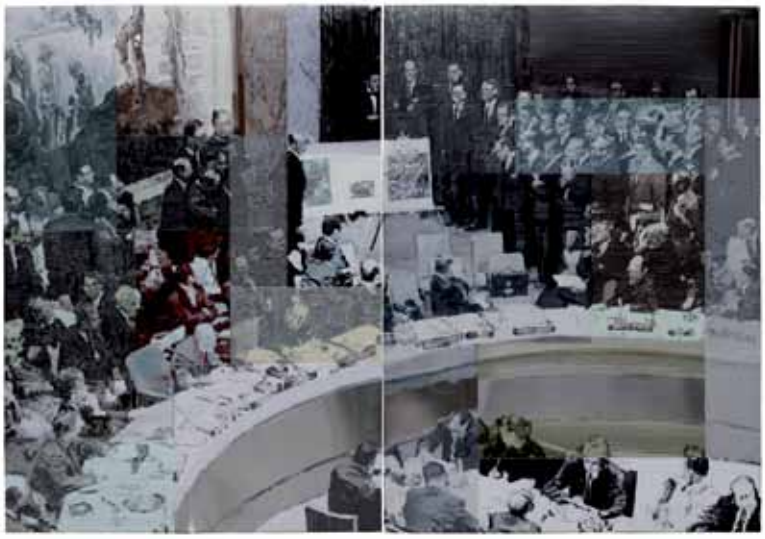
of Mao or the Square. The *lao zhaopian*, the actual old photographs themselves, probably plays a crucial part in this evocation. What Yang Yiping's and Li Songsong's paintings have in common is a reduction and homogenization through the use of black and white to achieve a surreal effect. Tian'anmen Square and Mao are strangely present, in different ways; in Yang Yiping's painting, the heavy superstructure of the Imperial Palace and Mao's portrait dominating the painting's upper half is in stark contrast to the painting's lower half, where mayhem appears to have broken loose, a historical and sacrosanct space has been turned into a marketplace, where everyone seems to be going about their own business, and no one in the crowd is paying the slightest attention to anybody else.[11] In Li Songsong's painting, you see only the back of the mourners, in their multitude, yet the "indexical" link to Mao and his funeral is so palpable you would have heard a pin drop. Although the context of the event has been completely removed, presumably signalling Mao's absence as well through his death, his presence is profoundly felt through the powerful show of the people's emotion.

Although a cloud hangs in ominous suspension over the ambiguity found in the present series of paintings, the titles lend themselves to political readings. This brings up Mao in another way, referring to his strategy of political rhetoric in establishing his revolutionary "power and persuasion" as the then-new aesthetic.[12] Meaning elided by thick encrusted paint shares equivalence with Mao's propaganda paintings, where happy smiling faces depict a country that in reality was destitute with physical and spiritual poverty. In other words, titles and image are imbued with a tension that arises from their incongruence. For Mao, the visual genres and the recurrent iconography were augmented with inspiring and emotive didactic slogans and captions, such as "Work hard for the electrification of agriculture" and "Make the great leader Chairman Mao proud, make the great socialist motherland proud."

Li Songsong, *Couple*, 2011, oil on canvas, 360 x 300 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.

Direct quotation of iconic photography and events developed with more ambiguities. *Gift* (2003), based on media coverage of Chinese fighters parading a shot-down enemy airplane during the second Sino-Japanese war and *Cuban Sugar* (2006), referring to China's crisis in domestic sugar production, would not have appeared representational in themselves. The image of a plane is one and a montage that looks like officials engaged in a congress meeting can have a number of interpretations. In *Couple* (2011), however, we see a return of the

Li Songsong, *Gift*, 2003, oil on canvas, 109 x 158 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.



Li Songsong, *Cuban Sugar*, 2006, oil on aluminum panel, 280 x 400 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.

sophistication of *The Square*, where just minimal content is used to evoke the strongest of emotions. *Couple* is based on a well-known photograph and is another reference to Tian'anmen Square, this time the 1989 incident, where once again we are confronted with the potent absence of this political monument, this "sacred space."[13] Viewers are left only with a hardly discernable image of two lovers sheltering with their bicycle under an overpass while tanks roll above them.

The series presented at Pace seems to have a stronger political overtone, although a certain level of ambiguity still resides in them. "Li Songsong is not alone in his veiled critique—literally veiled in layers of paint as if something is partially hidden under that . . . In a way, we can say that speaks to the way politics works in China."[14] The work at the exhibition has the ring of the battle cry that must have drowned out others during the Cultural Revolution, but with a heavy dose of derision through the use of irony and allegory. *Guests Are All Welcomed* (2013), a painting with an image of a man relaxing in an armchair, appears to be descriptive but in fact seems to mean the opposite of its title. This apparently innocuous portrait with a friendly title can be easily mistaken for a poster advertising a meeting place or a hotel. According to Pace Gallery, this image is of a Western gentleman seated

in a room is Neil Heywood, the Englishman murdered in 2011 by Gu Kailai, wife of the now-convicted Chinese politician Bo Xilai.[15] Heywood is sitting in an armchair with his legs crossed. He is wearing a black suit and black shoes and a smile, ostensibly without any premonition of things to come. Political intrigue is disguised behind Li Songsong's leitmotif of layers of oil paint, with delicious colours of greens, browns, reds, and lilac that render the face unrecognizable.

Li Songsong, *Guests are All Welcomed,* 2013, oil on canvas, 120 x 120 x 11 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace London.

We Have Betrayed the Revolution (2012) gives the show its title. Encumbered by such words as "We," "Betrayed," and "Revolution," this title is unquestionably an "indictment" writ large. The "We" in *We Have Betrayed the Revolution* is an overt criticism of the government if not also a punitive charge against the people. The painting, as the gallery personnel informed me, depicts a conversation between two infamous military officials, Wu Huawen (1904–62) and Wang Jingwei (1883–1944). It looks similar to the iconic image of the meeting between Mao and Nixon in 1972. Presumably the discussion shown in Li Songsong's painting refers to a revolution being betrayed. Interestingly, this title brings to mind Leon Trotsky's 1937 *The Revolution Betrayed: What Is the Soviet Union and Where Is It Going?*

Li Songsong, *We Have Betrayed the Revolution*, 2012, oil on canvas, 200 x 290 x 11 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.

In fact, the idea of revolution seems to have been topical during Li Songsong's years growing up, and was found in political publications such as *The End of the Revolution: China and the Limits of Modernity* by Wang Hui, Professor of Intellectual History at Tsinghua University in Beijing, on how to interpret modern China.[16] Wang Hui's essay entitled "Shunning the Sublime" was published in 1993, when Li Songsong was twenty, in which the author praised the cultural pluralism in contemporary China, which he thought was indicative of positive social and cultural progress.[17]

Li Songsong, *It's a Pity You Aren't Interested in Anything Else,* 2013, oil on canvas, 300 x 210 x 9 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.

Politics directly affects peoples' everyday lives. Li Songsong's painting *It's a Pity You Aren't Interested in Anything Else* (2013) references consumerist culture in China, and takes the form of a larger than life-sized Calvin Klein advertising billboard—a ubiquitous display of consumerist culture in urban Chinese cities—and depicts a young Caucasian male model clad only in Calvin Klein undergarments. Its title carries a scornful reproach to the rapid route taken by Chinese consumers from "Karl Marx to Karl Lagerfeld."[18] It reads as a strong admonishment of the Chinese government's employment of an insidious tactic of soft power, effecting an aestheticization through the commercialization of culture and of everyday life for the masses. This work suggests that the government has succeeded in dumbing down the population through a conceptual undermining of intellectual standards. A communist country where we are led to believe that the government is aspiring to erase class, seems to be becoming more capitalist than most

capitalist countries, one in which rich consumers—the major spenders on designer goods—sit alongside their less fortunate comrades, who can only watch helplessly the growing gulf between the haves and the have-nots.

If these are Li Songsong's sentiments, they are not unique among Chinese artists. A recent quote by Venice Biennale artist, Wang Qingsong, is equally acerbic if not more succinct: "Take a look at the urban people's life. We dine at McDonald's, KFC, and Pizza Hut. We drink Cola, Starbucks coffee and Lipton tea. We live in a Roman fantasy, Lincoln Park, Vancouver Forests, and East Provence. We drive Mercedes Benz, BMW, and Lamborghini. All these Western consumer products 'modernize' this originally agricultural country. However, such life in high fashion is so ridiculous, contradictory, and crazy. The Chinese traditions and elite culture fail to have energy and vigour, deserving to be trashed. This is the contemporary China in its massive scale."[19]

Li Songsong, *Watching a Play*, 2004, oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace Beijing.

In mapping out Li Songsong's progress as an artist, it would appear that there is an increasing tendency in his work toward an experimental approach that is privileging formalist qualities at the expense of legibility, with his more recent works approaching abstraction. When photographs are torn apart and presented in fragments in his work, it is, ostensibly, to maintain "some excitement over the unknown, like a game . . .'. . .this would make me more relaxed . . . It doesn't give me any psychological pressure."[20] In so doing, Li Songsong seems to be seduced into exploring a formal relationship between textures and colours and probably considers the prettiness of the paintings useful in diverting attention from content. He once admitted to Pace Beijing president Leng Lin, "It's like telling a story packed with violence and gore with a huge smile of your face."[21] He was also quoted as saying that he was unconcerned, when in portraying a famous meeting between President Nixon and Jiang Qing in *Watching a Play* (2004), whether the depiction of an arm was "Nixon's arm or . . . Jiang Qing's arm."[22]

Zhong Nanhai (2011) seems to be carrying on this experimental approach, as it is made up of disparate segments that direct more attention to the paint than to content, more an exercise of chance than meaning. In fact, those familiar with Beijing would immediately recognize the scene depicted to be central Beijing. Rather than a mere pretext for an arrangement of mute albeit delicious-looking greens and browns, we are presented with the imperial garden adjacent to the Forbidden City, with its strong political significance.[23] This work is based on an image from Google Earth, an aerial photograph that renders the scene a series of grey, low tonal values with red and white highlights.[24] What looks like a mapping of abstract shapes shrouded with some uneven brushstrokes, a fusion of Sean Scully geometry with the neatly swept sands of Japanese gardens, has the capacity to depict another reality.

For Li Songsong, painting does not necessarily carry a purpose but may just provide an excuse to paint. The physicality of the paint, its thick gestural marks, are beyond impasto. They are "phenomenal techniques" equivalent to a plasterer dragging his float across the wet plaster.[25] One can imagine the layers upon layers of paint that are applied to the canvas, a feat in itself considering its thickness. Before allowing time for the paint to dry, and unlike a plasterer whose craft is to achieve a perfectly smooth surface, Li Songsong draws on the wet paint with a trowel or stick-like instrument. It is a form of "action painting" except that the spontaneity of action painting is replaced with a carefully planned and executed set of activities. "What was to go on the canvas was not a picture but an event."[26] For Li Songsong, it is an intuitive, perhaps even existential event, one in which he only "reacts to images that trigger his strongest and most intuitive artistic responses."[27]

Political events are rendered as purely aesthetic experience and experimentation, supplanting historical connotation with the artist's own legacy of artistic production. The charged images of the shot-down enemy airplane paraded by the Chinese fighters in *Gift* are viewed through the lens of experimentation in the formal techniques of painting. The scene becomes secondary to Li Songsong's seductive brushwork, as "fact" and "truth" become "disembodied into a malleable network of fluid gestures."[28]

To Western audiences unfamiliar with contemporary Chinese art or even Chinese history, some of these paintings might look like the impasto of Glenn Brown, Willem de Kooning, or Frank Auerbach, and, for others, even Van Gogh. The pastiche style is that of Hans Hofman and David Salle, and the photographic style that of Gerhard Richter. However, unlike Glenn Brown's equally thick painting, which many viewers have expressed the sensation of wanting to lick or even eat,[29] Li Songsong's paint-encrusted canvases lack subtlety and *raison d'etre*, almost to the extent of being repellent, as one gallery owner must have felt, saying to one artist, "That's enough, you don't need any more paint!"[30]

Belonging to the in-between generation, Li Songsong seems to struggle with, on the one hand, a sense of social responsibility in which art needs to serve a function, rather than, on the other, relished for its own sake. The strategies of restraint, irony, or humour found in Cynical Realism and the Chinese avant-garde have dissipated into the zeitgeist of the last millennium. Li Songsong's work may not be "terrifying to behold," nor "capable of producing strong nausea and deep fear,"[31] especially when positioned in relationship to the abjection so common in contemporary Chinese art, such as pissing, self-inflicted wounds, and the carnivorous. However, the profligate use of paint in Li Songsong's work is almost a smack in the face of decorum, if there is such a thing in the etiquette of painting. The amount of paint used would have made Jackson Pollock look miserly, if not unsustainable. There is a grotesquery to do with the excessive oleaginousness and toxicity of oil paint. The power elicited by the sparing use of paint in earlier work such as *The Square* is sadly absent.

Lu Xun Was Dead (2012) could be a reference to early-twentieth-century writer Lu Xun's use of allegorical devices to depict man-eaters and cruel inhuman methods as punishments for crime in *A Madman's Diary* (1918). This resonates with an aesthetic of negativity.[32] *Beast* (2012) bears an oblique connection to the programming at the Spoleto Festival, Charleston in 2012, where one of the Festival's two opera productions was *Feng Yi Ting*, by Chinese composer Guo Wenjing, which propitiously tells a story of a seduction and murder that saves an empire.

At the turn of the last century, there was clearly a tradition of the macabre, grotesque, and the melancholic in the Chinese contemporary psyche, evident in contemporary artworks and literary circles. Wu Hung's account of Liu Zheng's portrayal of deformity, one hundred photographs of real people in *My Countrymen* (2001), was "dying, death and posthumous mutilation on the one hand and . . . fantastic or macabre figurations of the body on the other."[33] Liu Zheng was kept company by the likes of Gu Dexin's *Pinching the Flesh: Object as Living Life* (1998)[34] and Zhu Yu's performance, *Eating People*, in 2000, of eating a human foetus**.** More recently, at the Chinese Pavilion at the 2013 Venice Biennale, Wang Qingsong displayed abject images in *Temporary Ward* (2008), a gratuitously gory display of open wounds and other horrific injuries.[35] The literary reference in Wang Qingsong's work is equally dismal. Ba Jin's novel *Ward Four* (1946) is a tale of abstract humanist ideals and allegory of the poor, where an unrequited lover drowns herself rather than become a concubine, amid prose describing the desperate conditions of a wartime hospital. Sartrean existentialism lies behind Zhang Xiaotiao's lurid paintings. His "magnified pictures of our material life," using festering decay, human waste, snakes, and rats, have been described as "grotesque."[36] He Yunchang has remained constant in this inclination; his incredible *One Rib* (2008–09) involved having his eighth rib removed. In *The Trusting Man Who Drowned*

While Holding The Column (2003), He Yunchang cast his arm in a cement pillar and kept it there for twenty-four hours,[37] and in *Conversation with Water* (1999), he hung from a chain over a river and lacerated his arm and let his blood run into the water, in commiseration with the homeless and the plight of migrants.

Previous page: Left: Li Songsong, *Lu Xun Was Dead,* 2012, oil on canvas, 122.5 x 123.5 x 9.5 cm. Right: Li Songsong, *Zhong Nanhai,* 2011, oil on canvas, 350 x 180 x 11 cm. © Li Songsong. Courtesy of Pace London.

This tradition of the grotesque and the melancholic could have arisen from the complexities of China's entry into the global market place, where economic success did not seem to have alleviated a longstanding feeling of ignominy blamed on a hundred years of aggression from the west, starting with the Opium War (1839–42) which led to humiliating concessions with the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing.[38] There are still constant gloomy references in current debates such as the lecture by Professor Yan Haiping to the "Century of Shame" and the "Sick Man of Asia." [39]

Ai Weiwei writes of working in an environment with a cultural deficit and of the history of China as a history of negation, where the importation of modern ideas and "craven pragmatism and opportunism" cannot make up for the lack of spiritual awareness in China.[40] Ai Weiwei's insight describes an aspect of the prevalent mood of despair and frustration, commonly known in China as *minzu xuwuzhuyi*, and which Geremie Barme refers to, in *In the Red*, as "national nihilism," a form of "cultural deficit, a lack of self-awareness, social critique and creative independence."[41]

Li Songsong's way of painting may be just a symbol of human endurance. The application of paint, layer after layer, the smell of the oil, resin, and solvent must be overpowering. If it is not addictive, this activity certainly requires formidable endurance, one that is reflective of earlier performance works such as Zhang Huan's *Twelve Square Meters* (1994), in which he sat in a public toilet naked and covered himself with honey to attract flies, or He Yunchang's *Golden Sunshine* (1999), in which the artist covered himself in yellow oil paint and hung from the roof to paint the wall except where his shadow fell; he ultimately went into shock and fainted after ninety minutes.

Li Songsong's stance may be one of resistance against authority rather than the cultural morass that Ai Weiwei referred to. The spade of morbidity has not escaped the eagle eye of the authorities who disapprove of any images of cynicism and violence, which in their eyes constitute a corrupt Western influence or a "proliferation of Western cultural crisis."[42] The issuing by the Ministry of Culture on April 3, 2001, of a notice entitled, "Forbidding Performing or Displaying Bloody, Cruel and Obscene Things in Public in the Name of Art,"[43] seemed to have the opposite effect, and undoubtedly the right one for the artists, as for some "accepting amnesty and surrender" would be intolerable.[44]

There are those who see Li Sonsong's motivation as purely aesthetic; for example, his selective painting of only the romantic figures of the lovers

in *Couple*, leaving out contextual, yet poignant, details of the historical source.[45] Yet his method of distancing historical significance through the multicoloured patchwork of panels is also refreshing.[46] It is a way to privilege the aesthetic qualities of an artwork that at times can be subsumed or denied by its socially and historically determined production, the reception and rhetoric surrounding it.[47] In the process of sublimating any political content, Li Songsong is approaching an art with an immanent value rather than one that is relational to its context, even if the question of aesthetic can become another historically specific discipline, explicable in terms of ideology and political values.[48]

As discussed earlier, there are many analogies to be made about Li Songsong's work with action painting, one of which is in the process of breaking down distinctions between art and life, where the act of painting becomes an indulgent, egotistical, and self-absorbed act—a performance representing his own life. This style may constitute a new aesthetic for Li Songsong, or about a liberating gesture—just to paint, or just to pile the paint on thickly. It is an incessant action, almost obsessive, almost as a form of erasure of the political, the aesthetic, and the moral. "The apples weren't brushed off the table in order to make room for perfect relations of space and colour. They had to go so that nothing would get in the way of the act of painting."[49]

Li Songsong's painting style is a cross between a study of the aesthetic and the physical release of painting, with an almost existential quality. References are mostly discarded, although "a painting that is an act is inseparable from the biography of the artist."[50] Judging by his historical roots of making art with social value, and the titling of his works, Li Songsong is "painting his own life."[51] On the other hand, it is tempting to suppose that Li Songsong perhaps is trying to escape his socialist past through an engagement with the pure aesthetics of painting. Ironically, in his gesture of excess, the aesthetic has been subordinated.

The irony is that there is a vulnerability and impermanence in a thick encrusted paint painstakingly laid on for perpetuity. The tension between the title and the painting reveals a sense of nostalgia. The idea of a "totalitarian nostalgia" is useful, where it is understood "primarily as an aesthetic nostalgia for the last grand style in the twentieth century . . . a nostalgia for world culture." Another analogy is with Russia, where "totalitarian nostalgia" is sometimes understood as "the product of an environment in which culture had to survive a balancing act between the old . . . ideology and mentality, the demands of art, and new commercial imperatives."[52] This term expresses the need of the displaced literati in China, dissatisfied with merely occupying a market niche, longing for the past when there was a familiar way of thinking, of discourse, and of communication.

Li Songsong cannot escape his destiny. He lives in a society grieving for a private history. Dozens of essays are written on China's recent past, on

nostalgia, from Wu Hung's "The Old Photo Craze and Contemporary Chinese Art,"[53] to Geremie R. Barme's "Totalitarian Nostalgia,"[54] to Chaohua Wang's "Refusing to Forget."[55] Even as I write there is news of a reprint of Mao's *Little Red Book*, the second most printed book ever, exceeded only by the Bible.[56]

There is no right way to discuss the work and life of the in-between generation. Their life, their drive to make work, are caught in a situation of ambivalence. Some are drawn to tell a story, perhaps to keep the possibility of the revolution alive, "at least in the imagination."[57] Some are also seduced by the paint and the act of painting.

Notes

1 Li Songsong, We Have Betrayed the Revolution, Pace London, September 19–November 9, 2013, http://www.pacegallery.com/london/exhibitions/12598/we-have-betrayed-the-revolution/.

2 Demetrio Paparoni, "Art and its Method: Li Songsong," Li Songsong, *We Have Betrayed the Revolution* (London: Pace Gallery, 2013), 5.

3 Ai Weiwei, "That Person, Those Things," Li Songsong, *We Have Betrayed the Revolution* (London: Pace Gallery, 2013), 9.

4 Kevin Holden Platt, "China's Venetian Quandary: Chinese Artists," http://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/12/arts/Chinas-Venetian-Quandary-Chinese-Artists.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0/.

5 Gao Minglu, ed., *The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art* (Buffalo: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, University of Buffalo Art Galleries, 2005), 115.

6 Richard Vine, "Dangling Man," *Art in America*, May 27, 2011, http://www.artinamericamagazine.com/news-features/news/li-songsong-the-pace-galery/.

7 Pace Gallery press release, September 19, 2013, http://www.pacegallery.com/london/exhibitions/12598/we-have-betrayed-the-revolution/.

8 Wu Hung, *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008), 119.

9 Ibid., 145.

10 Ibid., 129.

11 Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing* (London: Reaktion Books and University of Chicago Press, 2005), 196.

12 This borrows from the title of an exhibition curated by David Welch, Power and Persuasion, at the British Library, May 17–September 17, 2013.

13 These words were used by Wu Hung on the inside front cover flap of Wu Hung, *Remaking Beijing*.

14 This quote is from Mary Beth Heston, Professor of Art History and Director of Asian Studies at the College of Charleston, South Carolina. See Adam Parker, "Spoleto Festival unveils 'subtle, evocative' 2012 poster," *Post and Courier,* April 6, 2012, http://www.postandcourier.com/article/20120406/UNKNOWN/120409462&sIId=5/.

15 As alluded to in essays by Demetrio Paparoni and Ai Weiwei in the exhibition catalogue, Li Songsong, *We Have Betrayed the Revolution*.

16 Wang Hui is a leading member of China's "new left" movement and a past editor of *Dushu*, one of China's most influential literary journals.

17 Geremie R. Barme, *In The Red* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 296.

18 This is a popular saying.

19 "Wang Qingsong: China Pavilion at the Venice Art Biennale 2013," http://www.designboom.com/art/wang-qingsong-china-pavilion-venice-artbiennale-2013/.

20 Gao Minglu, ed., *The Wall*, 116.

21 Vine, "Dangling Man."

22 Gao Minglu, ed., *The Wall*, 115.

23 It has a history of being the headquarters for political parties during the Republic of China era in 1911, The People's Republic of China in 1949, and the current government.

24 Zhongnanhai is the complex of imperial gardens and lakes adjacent to the Forbidden City headquarters of the Communist Party of China and the State Council central government. Zhongnanhai is just west of the Forbidden City, opposite Tian'anmen Square. It is Mao's onetime residence and the location of his death, and also that of the death of the last Emperor, Puyi. It is not accessible to the general public. Li Songsong said he used to go swimming there as a child and was provided access by a friend whose family worked there.

[25] The comment "phenomenal techniques" was made by a member of the audience at the Li Songsong show at Pace Gallery New York, May 5, 2011. Robert Petrick interview with Li Songsong, "Li Songsong at Pace Gallery, NY, May 5, 2011http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0pmTCgOa2w/.

[26] Charles Harrison and Paul J. Wood, *Art in Theory, 1900–2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden, USA, Oxford, UK, and Carlton, Victoria, Australia: Blackwell, 2002), 589.

[27] Vine, "Dangling Man."

[28] Li Songsong artist's profile, Saatchi Gallery, http://www.saatchigallery.com/artists/li_songsong.htm/.

[29] Jonathan Brown,"A real scene stealer: Glenn Brown's 'second-hand' art is the subject of a Tate retrospective," February 16, 2009, http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/a-real-scene-stealer-glenn-browns-secondhand-art-is-the-subject-of-a-tate-retrospective-1622648.html/.

[30] Judith Neilson, owner of the White Rabbit Collection, walked in on Zhu Jinshi when he was applying paint with shovels and wok spatulas and purportedly said this; see http://www.whiterabbitcollection.org/artists/zhu-jinshi/.

[31] Laura Brook, "Damien Hirst and the Sensibility of Shock," *Art and Design* no. 40 (London: Academy Group Ltd., 1995), 55.

[32] Lu Xun was a famous writer and leading figure of modern Chinese literature. His writings set the tone of the political landscape in art and literature early on in 1918. In the 1980s he was the main inspiration for a new generation of enlightenment intellectuals who called for a "return to Lu Xun." After June 4, 1989, he suddenly fell out of favour and has now made yet another return. See Chaohua Wang, *One China, Many Paths* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 205.

[33] Wu Hung, *Making History*,139.

[34] In this work, the artist pinched a piece of pork every day until it dried out.

[35] The fact that Wang Qingsong's *Temporary Ward* (2008) was perceived as a portrayal of the ailments of the West did not mean that it was redeemed in the Chinese psyche. The work was staged and photographed at the Northern Stage Theatre in Newcastle, UK, featuring a cast of locals posing as accident and emergency casualties.

[36] "About Zhang Xiaotao," http://artsy.net/artist/zhang-xiaotao/.

[37] The title refers to a famous Chinese love story in which Wei Sheng was waiting for his girlfriend, who did not turn up; he died when the flood came.

[38] While the West has a tendency to view its histories as a series of triumphant events such as the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the storming of the Bastille, and so on, China marks its history with events of ignominy, such as denoting that China's modern history began on August 11, 1842, when the Qing dynasty, by signing the Treaty of Nanjing, capitulated to Great Britain in order to end the disastrous First Opium War (1839–42).

[39] Lecture by Professor Yan Haiping at the Centre for Chinese Studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, October 8, 2013.

[40] Ai Weiwei, quoted in Barme, *In The Red*, 363.

[41] Barme, *In The Red*, 363, 412, n. 8.

[42] Wang Yuechuan, "Contemporary Art is the Proliferation of Western Cultural Crisis," *Art Observation Journal* no. 12, (2007). Quoted in Wang Chunchen's catalogue *Transfiguration Exhibition* (Venice: Maretti, 2013), 67.

[43] Ibid., 67, n. 3.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Vine, "Dangling Man."

[46] Irina Makarova, "Recent Works: Li Songsong," artasiapacific.com, http://artasiapacific.com/Magazine/WebExclusives/RecentWorksLiSongsong/.

[47] This is a question of aesthetic quality and aesthetic value, as Janet Wolff argues in Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art (London, Boston, and Sydney: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), 31.

[48] "The histories of 'value' are a sub-sector of the histories of literary-ideological receptive practices," Wolff says, quoting Terry Eagleton, in *Aesthetics and the Sociology of Art*, 32.

[49] Harold Rosenberg, "The American Action Painters," in Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory, 1900–2000*, 589–90.

[50] Ibid., 590.

[51] Gao Minglu, ed., *The Wall*, 114.

[52] Svetlana Boym describes "totalitarian nostalgia" in Barme, *In The Red*, 316.

[53] Wu Hung, *Making History: Wu Hung on Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Timezone 8, 2008), 119–35.

[54] Barme, *In The Red*, 316–44.

[55] Qian Liqun in Chaohua Wang, *One China, Many Paths*, 292–312.

[56] "The re-emergence of Quotations from Chairman Mao . . . comes amid an official revival of the era's rhetoric. China's leader, Xi Jinping, has embraced Maoist terminology and concepts launching a 'mass line rectification campaign' and this week even presiding over a televised self-criticisms session." Tania Branigan, "Mao's Little Red Book to get revamp," *Guardian*, September 27, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/27/mao-little-red-book-revamp/.

[57] Harrison and Wood, *Art in Theory, 1900–2000*, 589.