

弗洛塞芬 *Fallen lush racing share*

Hou Zichao

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“The action-image then tended to shatter, whilst the determinate locations were blurred, letting any-spaces-whatever rise up where the modern affects of fear, detachment, but also freshness, extreme speed and interminable waiting were developing.” – Gilles Deleuze, “Cinema 1: The Movement-Image,” p. 121

Cycling through the disparate landscapes of Southeast Asia and the Middle East, from the desert to the woods, and then back: layers accumulate like sediment, loosely cohering a collection of dissimilar fragments – gestures, dispositions, affects. The landscape is refracted. Together, these fragments form a visual travelogue relinquishing “the old realism of places,” as Deleuze once wrote. He was referring to cinema, but, of course, we are speaking here of painting, a form of painting that revels in the potentialities of mediatization.

Each canvas in 弗洛塞芬 *Fallen lush racing share* incorporates the date palm tree as its central motif, which grounds the work itself just as it does the landscapes Hou attempts to capture back in the studio, through a combination of memory and source video. Here, the date palm is both general and delectably specific, a sort of maypole around which much may be bandied about: blot-like daubs of citrus that levitate before us, jagged applications of flat color, abstract brushwork, alongside other ecstatic gestures. Angular lines of International Klein Blue dart across certain compositions, drawn from a Taipei road guide, signaling a distinctive collapse between the moment itself and its later recollection. The mediation of sensory experience Hou has cultivated in the past reaches a pinnacle here – the chopiness of a video stream locates its correspondence in the imperfection of memory. Yet Hou’s is not a binary operation, confined only to these perceptions. It is as if this experiential data he mines is then inscribed back into the historical specificity of painting: a propensity toward flatness and layering derived from Les Nabis, for instance, while an identification with brushwork (indeed, Hou constructs his own devices) emerges from the long tradition of Chinese landscape painting.

A series of corresponding palms sets the stage. Not quite sequential, in the filmic sense, yet not entirely disconnected from one another, either: each is set in the same place, conceived as a similar journey endeavored along deviating paths. Or maybe these works are, in fact, filmic, if we are to conceive of the juxtapositions as depictions of two moments in time. One work is particularly instructive in this regard – 驰骋智慧尽头 *Gallop wisdom end*. In the first frame, red-orange dots rain down from the date palm, and then, in the second, they are gone. In their place, the vertical gallop of the glitched-out, spectral horse posits a motion study embedded within other studies of animation. If Hou’s past works occasionally reminded us of low-poly graphics, the new works sometimes conjure after effects applied to digital video, overlays rendered in post-production, or aleatoric disruptions in the stream. Hou’s process, meanwhile, continues to draw upon the vernacular of graphics editing software, like Adobe

Photoshop, the technical strategies one may identify in the works on view – masking, layering, filling, for instance. Working with a single brush at a time – a single tool, one might say – Hou selectively replicates the emotive tenor of any given moment within the composition.

Although such connections to digital image production are never far from one's mind, they too, fall short of a full account. One of the few smaller canvases on view, 巨枝 *Giant branch*, draws from the technique of Chinese paper cutting, an artform in itself, gesturing toward the process in acrylic. The symmetrical cut is retained, although the conventional red is exchanged for a vibrant sort of lime green. Like a window flower – the cut-paper decorations adhered to windows – the canvasses' date palm is no longer represented through the usual logic of representation, but rather reduced to a signifier, overlaid upon, or perhaps obstructing, yet another scene.

Such suggestions indicate that the depiction of these natural elements is never fully neutral, but rather historically determined. Just as the paper-cut has migrated in meaning over time – from intricate folk craft to symbolic discursive space to a form of urban nostalgia – the paintings that comprise 弗洛塞芬 *Fallen lush racing share* speed through associations, hidden meanings, poignant evocations of how the world actually seems and looks and feels in the highly mediated present. Seen from a distance, they form a world of lost coordinates, both specific in the examined terrain and broadly recognizable to those of us who have not exactly been there, as afterimages, or, after Deleuze, as dispatches from novel sites of antique import, as “any-spaces-whatever.”

Hou Zichao (b. 1988, Shanxi, China) lives and works in Beijing, China. The artist completed his BA (Hons.) degree from Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, London, in 2013, and earned his MFA from Chelsea College of Art and Design, London, in 2014. Solo exhibitions include: “弗洛塞芬 *Fallen lush racing share*,” Tara Downs, New York, US (2023); “Practice Land,” Cans Project, Taipei (2023); “Child in the Woods,” SPURS Gallery, Beijing, CN (2022); “Everlasting,” Downs & Ross, New York, US (2021); “No Time for Romance,” Mine Project, Hong Kong, HK (2020); “Light Breaks Where No Sun Shines,” Boers-Li Gallery, Beijing, CN (2019); “FOUNTAIN,” AOMA, YT Creative Media, Beijing, CN (2018); “Ray. Stone. Wave,” Aura.a Gallery, Shanghai, CN (2017). Hou Zichao's works and projects have been presented in group exhibitions including: “Crossing Frontiers,” Nassima Landau Art Foundation, Tel Aviv-Yafo, IL (2023); “The Disconnected Generation,” Song Art Museum, Beijing, CN (2022); “In Defense of Secrets,” Downs & Ross, New York, US (2022); “CLEAN,” SPURS Gallery, Beijing, CN (2020); “Variant,” Bin Art Center, Hangzhou, CN (2019); “LOVE LOVE LOVE: Intimate,” Today Art Museum, Beijing, CN (2018); “Elite Young Artists Program,” Rightview Art Museum & Guan Shanyue Art Museum, Beijing & Shenzhen, CN (2016).