

Title Fu Lei : Dreams of Desire
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FU LEI

ARTIST 7B

DREAMS OF DESIRE

BORN AT THE DAWN OF THE CHINESE CULTURAL REVOLUTION, VISUAL ARTIST FU LEI HAS SEEN THE TUMULTUOUS AND RADICAL CHANGE OF CHINA'S CULTURAL AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE, FROM CALAMITY TO PROSPERITY. MOTIVATED BY CHINA'S NEWFOUND AFFLUENCE, THE BAROQUE-REVIVALIST'S ESCAPIST SCENES CAPTURE THE MODERN WORLD'S PROPENSITY FOR EXCESS AND DESIRE. WHILE THE ARTIST MAINTAINS BEAUTY IN HIS PORTRAYALS OF VICE, IT'S CLEAR THAT EVEN FU IS UNSETTLED WITH THE TRAJECTORY OF OUR IMPULSES.

What is the idea behind 'Dreams of Desire'?

The theme behind my artwork has always been about desire and excess. That's why the humans are all very big and fat. From one figure, I added another, and then I started throwing in a lot of different animals and objects. This symbolises desire in its entirety. Everybody has desire, whether you're a human, an animal, or an object. Even cockroaches and flowers desire something. Desire is equal.

Why paint in the baroque style?

When I started learning how to paint and draw, I was exposed to a lot of classical styles. I prefer this style because it speaks to me more than anything else. I tried to refer to contemporary and abstract art, but I enjoy baroque the most. To express my ideas and philosophies, I must use classical styles. I enjoy it so much, and I would like to have my own interpretations of it.

The classical style is very fixed. If you see a shadow, then it's a shadow. But I do it in a way that forces you to put it together. It's the concept that is abstract.

Many of your subjects are depicted with ropes tied around their ankles, sometimes tied to fixtures and other times untied. Does this signify being bound or being free?

It represents the grey area between being free and being trapped - that's why there are both iterations. The ropes represent control and the relationship of being controlled, or controlling others. As with my personal relationships or being controlled by society, it discusses the process of breaking free.

Having opened one of the first art studios in Beijing's 798 District, what are your thoughts on its transformation into a lavish, excessive locale?

It's been more than 10 years since I was based there and, as an artist, it's definitely not a good change. It's regulated by the government, so there's nothing I can do about it. A lot of artists used to be based there, but a lot of them felt uncomfortable about the changes, so many of them moved. It has become a marketplace for tourists and art collectors. It's disruptive to their work, the way the piece is commercialised. All of China has become commercialised - you can't control it.

If commercialism is disruptive, what does an artist need to be able to be inspired to create?

There are two types of inspiration. You find inspiration from what happens in your daily life, and then you also find inspiration within yourself - as an artist. There are some artists in China that choose to observe others, rather than

observe themselves. Of course, this is one way to be inspired, but for contemporary artists, it's more important to observe what's inside of you and what you experience for yourself.

In today's world, we have almost everything available at our fingertips. What are your thoughts on technology fueling excessive behavior through instant gratification?

The advancement of technology is the result of desire. There isn't really a practical need to have everything instantly. Now we use emails instead of snail-mail, so when you receive snail-mail, you feel exceptionally touched.

We should let nature take its course and go with the flow, without disrupting the peace. Mobile phones disrupt interpersonal relationships, because instead of having real conversations, we have virtual conversations. That's not going with the flow.

There's a philosophy in China, you don't do anything, but you're doing everything. Like a drop of water - if the drop is round, the water will be round in shape; if the drop is rectangular, then it will become rectangular. But no matter how you tilt the water, the level will always be flat because it doesn't want to go against nature. So just let what happens happen. ♪

Text: Tony Davis Images: Art & Photo Gallery