

Liu Xinyi: Hundred Thousand Miles Away

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Published on June 23, 2016

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Exhibition duration: June 11- July 31, 2016 / White Space Beijing

After stepping into Liu Xinyi's latest solo exhibition "Hundred Thousand Miles Away," on view at White Space Beijing, the prevailing feeling is of dazzling displacement. Every work overtly displays its rather unexpected double nature, undermining the viewer's certainty about reality, its perception, and the mechanisms underlying the cognitive processes that regulate it. The pieces on view echo each other as part of a Gesamtkunstwerk that challenges the status quo, giving the viewer the feeling of being in an immersive installation, rather than merely dialoguing with single pieces, suspended between the realms of restraint (borderline) and freedom (circulation). The Borderline section of the show is visually dominated by "The Road of Arab Ba'ath Movement." Four silhouettes of infamous Middle Eastern dictators are positioned on boom barriers that lift and lower at certain moments, and like border barriers that allow the passage of people, they are carriers of a sense of both menace and relief. It is no accident that these profiles act as mobile targets, with circular patterns on them that remind viewers of this function, but also of the transient nature of these regimes in particular and power in general. This central piece is surrounded by works that wittily create both a visual and semantic derailment. "Nine Segments of Sausage," a map of the highly sensitive South China Sea area made of sausages, is a symbol of carnal, mundane desires for excellence; "Wonderland," an apparently naive and harmless cart on which the phrase "Border Control" has been printed. (It can also be read as "Control Border.") Liu also presents pieces from the series "Block Trading Empire," in which maps are inscribed onto animals that serve as reminders of certain countries. These animals stand for the exploitation that all countries face, cut to pieces like raw meat to be sold at a market.

The section devoted to Circulation is no less visually compelling and thought-provoking, dominated by visual metonymies that instill a sense of doubt in the viewers. Is there a real country corresponding to the large fictional passport emblazoned with "United States of Confidence" and a crest that is a collage of symbols from existing countries and institutions? Should we believe news from megalithic entities like Reuters and the AFP, when they are presented as monoliths on the verge of collapsing? And what if, instead of "Je suis Charlie," we write "Je suis Charles I," the King of Great Britain and Ireland who was executed for treason?

In Liu Xinyi's pieces, fact and fiction overlap, common sense is eroded, and grand narratives are placed under the artist's magnifying glass. Despite this fact, the artist does not take a direct stance; instead, he invites viewers to step into the realm of active reflection rather than mere passive contemplation. This reflection may help viewers to realize that a trick has been played on them. The border and the Promised Land are one and the same, if we are unable to transcend the segregation inflicted by a vision deprived of critical sense.