

Liu Xinyi: *Chaoyang Qunzhong*

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Chaoyang Qunzhong (The Chaoyang Masses) is a simulacrum of life, fabricated by artist Liu Xinyi through the use of a readily available apartment space, A307. Upon entering building A of Hongyuan Apartment from the West gate of 798 Art District, and pushing open the door which adorned with a notice to examine the water meter reading as the poster of A307 on the third floor, one might be deceived into thinking this place was a mere copy of the interior refurbishing of a local elderly resident's house. Its theatricality is illustrated by Liu Xinyi's meticulous research of the house's details, ranging from the placement of book and fruit replicas to a hammer placed underneath the bed; from the looped playback of a wellness-related TV-program to the radio plays of Shan Tianfang, as well as the air-brushed decorative paintings entitled *What a Wonderful World*, *Yellow Chrysanthemums* and *Plump Crabs Usher in Chongyang Festival* and *The Snow-capped Great Wall*. All these elements partially allude to conditions regarding age, class, ideology, economy and health. Together they form an integral visual narrative structure, which outlines processes of aging and stagnation: the familiarity and affection of the older generation appear shriveled and empty. The title *Chaoyang Qunzhong* is not without its origin, as it recently became an independent dictionary entry. A Baidu Encyclopedia search yields the following description: Chaoyang Qunzhong is a term that originates in Beijing's Chaoyang district, referring to an undercover organization involved in the uncovering of major cases related to drug abuse among a number of celebrities. As a newly emerged elite force, it is second only to such elite intelligence organizations as the CIA and the KGB. Despite its jocular origins, Chaoyang Qunzhong depict the micro-political life in this highly politicized city. If we were to posit that the duty of Chaoyang Qunzhong was to monitor the lives of others, then Chaoyang Qunzhong had also become the object of prying and judgment in Liu Xinyi's work *Chaoyang Qunzhong*. The entire apartment space is filled to the brim with details but lack of "content", whether it's the emptiness of the simulated books, the emptiness of the closet, the emptiness of the sculpted fruit or the emptiness of the repeatedly broadcast sounds. At this point in time, *Chaoyang Qunzhong* still aren't masses formed by individuals with an independent will. Instead, they constitute a group portrait molded in bulk, whose distinctiveness has been erased.

The work *Chaoyang Qunzhong* has made good use of the original properties and 'objects' in the A307 space, and can therefore be regarded as a site-specific work. Actually, when everyday 'objects' that are strongly linked to signs, symbols and metaphors have been taken away from concrete incidents or aren't paired up with a concrete aim/target, they end up lacking connections and are very rarely looked at attentively. In this project, by imitating a collective portrait, Liu Xinyi uses methods of conceptual art to reset readily available objects. Through visitors, these objects undergo a re-acknowledgement. On the surface, this project's content consists of three obvious match-ups that can do without excessive interpretation, i.e. 'residential building VS art district', 'apartment space VS art practice', 'private volition VS public display'. Liu Xinyi's sensitivity to relational models has been a decisive factor for his oeuvre's orientation. Hence, the issues that are actually revealed by *Chaoyang Qunzhong* (which remain internal

issues of the system of art) are situated on the contradictory cusp between the spatial properties and work-based logic.

Let us briefly recapitulate the history of "apartment art": before it was brought up officially as a systemized concept by Gao Minglu, and prior to its alleged demise and loss of efficacy in the commercial art environment, apartment art in the mainland wasn't any different from other organizations that were self-initiated since the end of the 1970's by young intellectuals within the cultural domain. It's a product of a small circle of people who've distanced themselves from the official system and the social mainstream. Despite the area of activity being limited to the artist's private dwelling or studio space, its final goal is still to refer to a broader political appeal and commonality. More so, it is a method of organization and praxis in the domain of art utilized by dissenters who are bogged down by encumbering pressures. Although A307 is an apartment space in terms of physical properties, its working logic is entirely different from previous manifestations of apartment art. Only by relying on the internal workings of the art system, can its activities attain value. As one of the numerous shapes in which non-profit "alternative spaces" are manifested in Beijing, it complements the industry chain and provides artists with a free zone outside of the system of galleries and museums. We end up with the question whether such an incarnation can truly contribute to the dismantling of the art system's boundaries, or whether it merely serves as a new strategy of "institutional critique"? Hence, the "hollow" copying of real life by *Chaoyang Qunzhong* seems to also serve as a reflexive question regarding industry regulations.

---Translated by Sid Gulinck