

The Intimate Universe and Pure Pulp to open at Wellin

At the Wellin Museum, diverse forms of art meet to exchange interesting perspectives and nuances. This Saturday, the Museum will host the reception of *The Intimate Universe and Pure Pulp*, the result of two long years of planning. *The Intimate Universe* by Yun-Fei Ji portrays the Chinese countryside nostalgically, criticizing the ambitious infrastructural projects that destroy natural habitats regardless of any negative cultural and environmental implications. Yun-Fei Ji is a Chinese artist who has been a resident of New York since 1990.

The exhibition progresses from new to old pieces, making the viewers contemplate the change in the artist's style in a span of ten years (2006-16). *Pure Pulp* is a collection of artistic pieces by twenty artists who collaborated at Dieu Donn  studio, a New-York-based nonprofit organization, to produce diverse works of art that introduce paper in a new light as a strikingly efficient artistic material.

The Intimate Universe starts with "After the First Seventh Day," a group of three scroll paintings of people in the interval between death and rebirth, inspired from *The Tibetan Book of The Dead*. The paintings will make their first appearance at the Wellin. The small size of the room where the paintings are shown and its dark blue-colored walls create an intimacy that puts the viewers in a state of contemplation of death. The paintings offer a profound analysis of the spiritual process that people experience in the last seven days of the interval, the portrayed souls seem restless and worried about what form they shall be reincarnated as. After the "First Seventh Day" is "outside time and place," said Tracy Adler, director of the Wellin, "it stands as an abstract representation of the spiritual world." This section interestingly connects with the rest of the paintings as a representation of an authentic Chinese tradition.

The colors are faint in many of the pieces, creating a sense of grief. The mourning expressions on the peasants' faces are moving. Not only do the peasants mourn their displacement from their only home, but they also feel sorry for the separation from their rich culture that is part and parcel of the countryside. "The peasants lost their heritage," said Katherine Alcauskas, collections and exhibition specialist at the Wellin.

Details like feathers of birds, animal's hair and different weaving styles of baskets are quite elaborate, highlighting the richness of the Chinese countryside scene and culture. The H shape of some walls and the half-moon shape of the gate to "After the Seventh Day" are characteristic of the Chinese Zen garden and evoke a strong impression of Chinese culture to the viewers.

Ji illustrates the way change is inflicted on people and the environment. In "On the Lookout," there is a contrast between the birds and the rubbish and Ji portrays many other paintings of the countryside as devastated after the peasants' departure. Some paintings are accompanied with Chinese text that reflects on the process of moving from the rural areas and the change that took place in these areas, making the viewers sympathize with the actual humans involved in this story.

Ji's surreal representation denounces the government's stripping the peasants of their most precious and unique possession: their culture. "The Move of the Village Wen" captures a comprehensive account of the countryside represented in 31-foot-long surrealist episodes. According to the wall text, the appearance of people with animal faces and features in "A Sudden Wind in the Village" is symbolic of the Chinese cultural traditions. Any sense of gravity vanishes when flying bicycles, hoses, plunges and worn out shoes—things that the peasants use for their work in fields—are clustered together with the floating peasants above their homes, indicating a sense of loss. Some peasants are held together with faint threads, making them look like marionettes, which is indicative of the compulsive way the government dealt with the peasants. "Ji pictures them as grounded in the surreal world," said Alcauskas. This vision is also reflective of the officials' undermining of these peasants and the general negligence toward the demise of that culture. The surrealist theme beautifully captures the transformation of these cultural qualities into remnants that will never form a complete representation of the Chinese countryside to the world. This is especially poignant because all the peasants are old, emphasizing that the generation that knew everything about the countryside did not have a chance to pass this cultural background to their children. Any appreciation of the countryside will be extinct with the displacement of the old peasants.

Ji's thoughtful representation of the countryside is a deeply personal one. The rural area is a place that gave him peace of mind and helped him cope with the pressures in his life and he paid tribute to the Chinese countryside by sharing its story with the world.

In Pure Pulp, the representations are diverse in theme and use paper, certifying the efficiency and pliancy of the material. Paper is used to make three-dimensional pieces (including a magnified, three-dimensional hat inspired from a paparazzi photograph of Blanket Michael Jackson's hat), illustrative books, watermarked drawing collages and paintings. Ji uses paper creatively and incorporated with different materials like cotton, thread, linen, wire, plastic bags and a lot more. Juxtaposing the different uses of paper as an artistic material draws an implicit comparison between the creative approaches to using paper to its best potential, making it a truly inspiring collection. A wide variety of colors is used, the colors are bright in some artworks, like "Portrait (Woman I and II)," faint in others, like "Dust," and combined in a spontaneous and attractive fashion, in yet others like "Swamp." The content of the artworks involves different cultural themes portrayed abstractedly and realistically, like feminism in "Dakar Days" and terrorism in "Suicide Bomb."

The innovative techniques of using paper in The Intimate Universe and Pure Pulp trigger a deep sense of appreciation of the diverse materiality in artistic portrayal.