



Loy Luo: KuArt Special Feature, The Thrown Inspiration — 2021

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Artist of the year 2020 · Unremitting

Annual Topic: This Year

The year 2020 was an unusual year for all of us, also, it was a difficult year. Today we stand in 2021. When we look back at the past year: what we have been through? What we have been thinking of? What we have had the conceptual and creative changes? What we will do?... Obviously, the epidemic has changed the development track of our time forever, and "post-epidemic" will become the background topic of discussion for a long time to come. Therefore, we hope that in "*Topics of the Year: The Year*", on the one hand, we can review the overall thinking and creation state of artists in 2020; On the other hand, it also tries to show artists' judgment and grasp of the future, and discusses how artists deal with the great unknown, as well as how to integrate it into new artistic expression: grasp the main line in the change, bulid the foundation in the chaos , and inspir the greatest creativity on the biggest problems -- that's the attitude we want to take in this column.

Keywords

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Biographical Note

Loy Luo is a contemporary artist based in New York. Her practice integrates painting, sculpture, installation, writing, and the operation of artist-run spaces, and is grounded in a long-term investigation of the philosophical and cultural dimensions of abstraction. In recent years, through what she defines as an Unpremeditated Actionist approach to artistic generation—together with spatial practice, exhibition-making, and interdisciplinary collaborations—she has expanded her earlier focus on individual artistic production into a broader inquiry into how art is generated within specific cultural, social, spatial, and institutional contexts.



A Chinese artist living and working in Beijing, she has been working in New York since January 2020. She received her MFA from Beijing Institute of Fashion Technology in 2010 and taught art at Beijing Institute of Technology Management and Management from 2010 to 2012.

Loy Luo :At the beginning of the epidemic, The feeling that being thrown by the whole world was my inspiration.

Kuart=K: In the year of 2020, when the epidemic is raging, what is your living and creative state?

Loy Luo=L: When I first came to the United States, before the epidemic started, I went to visit museums, art galleries, and exhibitions in different cities. After the outbreak began, I started to prepare for the creation of an exhibition of portraits of 100 people. When I walked on the street with a mask, I asked passers-by to take off

their masks and let me take pictures of them from various angles. Some moved their masks to their chins, some hung them on their ears. I said it was for the memory of life in the epidemic in New York, and some people responded and some people refused.



"The Other I" 100 People Portrait Action Show, White Box Art Center, New York
2020

For nearly half a year, I bounced from place to place, my address changing month to month. My lifestyle changed as well. For example, at the International Youth Hostel in Brooklyn, I used the huge communal area as my own open studio and befriended artists and people from all over the world; At the Queens Community Apartment, I lived with a group of young people, some of whom slept on the floor, and we encouraged each other to ward off the initial panic. I also rented a room in a shared apartment in downtown Manhattan through Airbnb, but I couldn't stand being there because the room was windowless, and too small to fit anything except a tiny bed and the cold, arrogant attitude of the landlord. However, I didn't give her a bad review, since I didn't want to interfere with her business in those terrible days. Another time, I looked out of the window of my room in a midtown business hotel and experienced the magic of not knowing the real city from the top of that metallic mountain. Or, living in a high-rise apartment in Chelsea on the West Side, I began trying to peek through a large, glass-windowed wall into the lives of wealthy New Yorkers...In short, experiencing the living conditions of residents in different blocks changes from east to west, north to south. My creations at this time only needed a mobile painting box and a sketchbook, so moving from place to place was convenient enough.



Live performance art at the White Box Center ,New York, 2020

At the end of July, I moved to the Brooklyn DUMBO art district, rented a half-underground studio and mimed being homeless, working and living as a homeless person in the studio. My neighbors had a gallery and there were several other artists with normal places to live. Soon, my homeless act and paintings were known to the locals, so at the end of 2020, the "homeless" exhibition was successfully launched in Undercurrent gallery.



"Homeless"live art exhibition, Undercurrent Gallery ,2020

K: Earlier in 2020, you held an exhibition of 100 portraits of "The Other I" at the White Box Art Center in New York. During the epidemic period, what is the difference between these portraits and ordinary portraits?

L: "The Other I" looks like a portrait exhibition, but it is not. First of all, this exhibition was designed as performance art. During the epidemic period, I traveled around the city and encountered different people. I responded to this specific period in the form of sketch portraits and kept-memories. Secondly, the exhibition was not like those in which the portraits are taken directly in front of the object. Instead, I observed from the street, from different angles, capturing fleeting moments and facial expressions, and selected one picture which, in my eyes, captured the object's inner character. With this copy I drew the portraits subjectively and objectively.



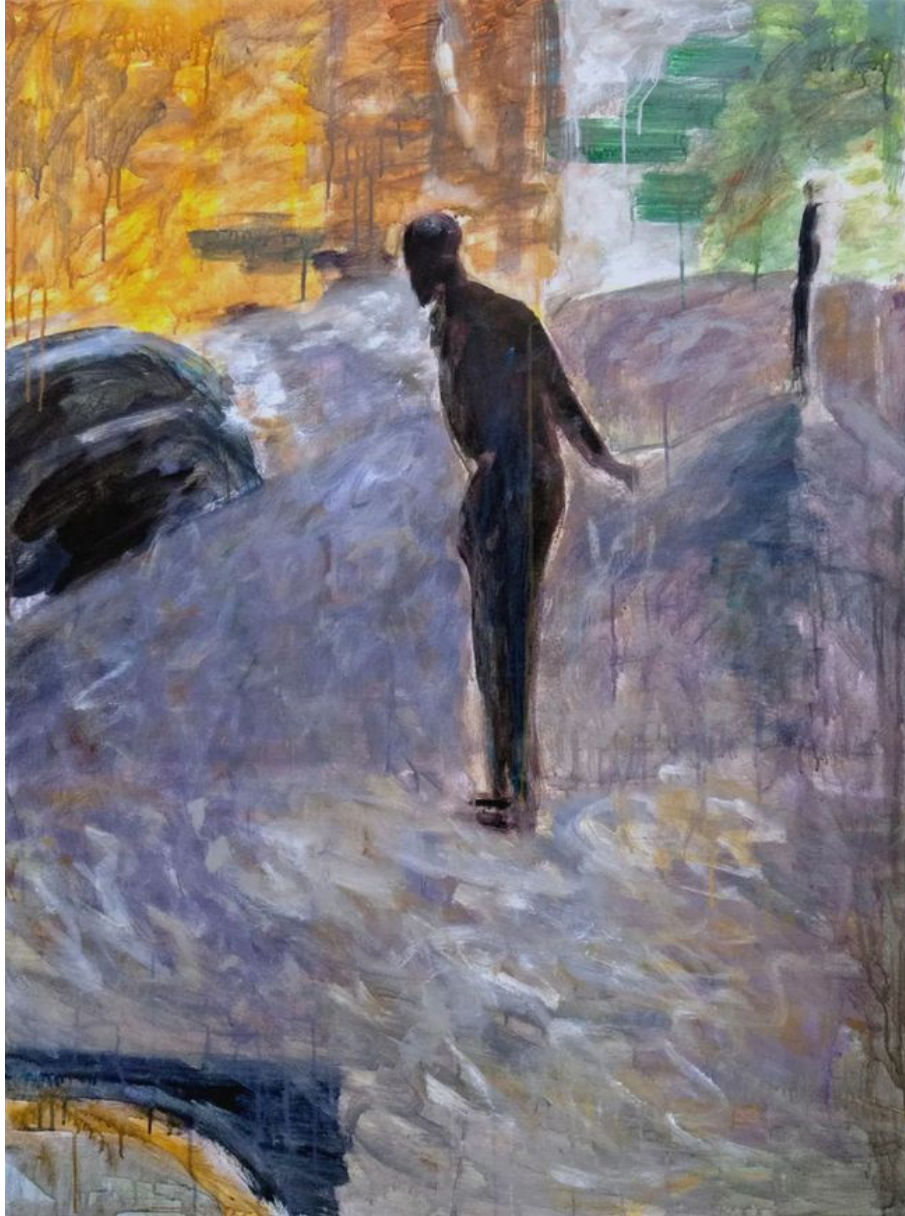
Screenshot of the video, the exhibition academic seminar , 2020

There was a mask theme implied here; as the physical mask of the object is removed, the mental mask is also prompted and attempted to be removed, not by hand, but by selecting a special moment that tells a defining story. Thirdly, the opening of the exhibition was a launching ceremony, and only half of the sketches on site were completed at the time. The kick-off was an impromptu, face-to-face sketch of a moving character for a spinning Sufi dancer. All the works of the 100 portraits were not completed until the closing ceremony of the exhibition, including a large group portrait, so the process of the exhibition itself was a dynamic and gradual process. It ended with an almost ritualistic closing ceremony, with me and a gong musician and the audience participating. Fourthly, the physical installation of the exhibition and a video installation, which was planned to be composed of five units of videos, constituted important parts of the exhibition. This group of videos was like a compound eye to observe, or present this period.

K: In 2020, you also hold a solo exhibition of "Homelessness" at New York's Undercurrent Gallery. Are these works also related to your observation on the living conditions of the underclass people in New York during the epidemic?

L: Frankly, I don't think of these works as observations of the underlayer of New York pandemic-life on the ground. On the one hand, homelessness in New York is complex. Some struggle with underlying mental health problems, but others choose

the wandering life, like artists. In addition, some of my paintings do not portray a conventional state of homelessness, but rather a temporary state of wandering during the pandemic, such as sitting on the floor like a tramp, outdoor dining, searching in vain for a toilet, or unabashedly peering through closed windows, etc.



Dumbledore, Mixed Materials 2020, 91cm x 122cm

K: But after all, your art is really concerned with the living conditions of people at the bottom of society. Why do they especially touch you and make you want to express it?

L: Perhaps there is one thing in common between the faces of these seemingly underclass people; that is, they do not wear masks. At one point I even tried to conclude that maybe the people ended up homeless because they didn't wear a “mask”.

The interpretations of critics and audiences may be diverse, but for me, the three solo exhibitions I did this year are actually trying to trace one theme from different angles, that is, the loss of human individuality and subjectivity. In the online show of Funspace Gallery in Rome, Italy, which took place in between White Box and Undercurrent, I was surprised to find that the individuality that I had initially cherished and tried to emphasize in extreme detail, eventually and inevitably dissipated in the image of the group. It took me a long time to understand that the dilemma of individuality was an almost unsolvable paradox, at least not through visual means alone.



《Subway》 91cm x 122cm Mixed Media 2020

With reflections on the relationship between art and technology which had already begun before the epidemic, I realized that human subjectivity has been lost in the era of big data, because the individual's self-view has been replaced and submerged by self-fragmented images. The objectified and fragmented reality leads to the loss of human subjectivity, that is, the active and reflective self lost in the passive, objectified projection. In my opinion, the meaningful choice of these fragments is a metaphor for self-reflection, while the artist's choice behavior, prior to hand-painted labor, is not only the beginning of reflection or self-reflection, but also the beginning of the recovery of self-subjectivity.

A further reflection was that in the epidemic, the human faces were covered by the masks, and it was inspired by the repeated actions of people taking off the mask. The repetition of this action helped me complete the shift of the concept of mask in my consciousness, that the physical mask was replaced by the spiritual mask. I was aware self-reflection is not so simple, and the true self is seen not only in laying down the obvious, external protective disguise, nor those seemingly natural moments due to fatigue; the mask which is deeply inset into the individual spirit and social skin is not so easy to take off, even if people want to do it with great enthusiasm and motivation.



Construction site foreman, Sketch 11 x 14 inches 2020.6

It was precisely because of the implementation of "homeless" that I was initially surprised at the so-called clear exposure of the faces of the people at the bottom of society, and then I began to think more about the demand for masks for the

functions of social order. At this time, the mask derived its third meaning, the efficiency and rationality of the functions of social roles. So, while respecting the dignity of the homeless as human beings, I also had a thought beyond criticism of the systems that create homelessness and which are often condemned. Toward the end, a long, noisy BLM protest, which was finally replaced by the passion of the election, gave me a more intuitive understanding of another connotation of the mask, implying behavior of conformity.

All this speculation, repeatedly overthrown, was my underlying passion for these paintings. From the extreme detail of the faces to the messy and fuzzy images, and again to the faceless but still highly-recognizable archetypes。



People Looking at the Exhibition, Sketch, 11 x 14inches, 2020.8

K: From 2019 to 2020, you also participated in the CD, "No Words Chinese Voice," co-produced by MuliangwenWang (Dou Wei, Wen Bin, Wen Dake and Wang Xiaofang), in the form of guest female voice. Is music also an artistic expression that you often use?

L: Yes, since the “Stillness” exhibition in Beijing, I have played music in all my exhibitions. In the two live exhibitions in New York, I have cooperated with local musicians and dancers to help convey the theme of the exhibition.

The first time I cooperated with Wenbin was in 2018 on the background music for that exhibition. Wenbin's understanding of the intention of my work, and his expression of musical art, made our cooperation take place in a free realm of understanding and deep trust. In the world of pure music, an illusion of love buried deep in the heart is stimulated and released, thus producing a state of absolute relaxation.



"No Word Chinese Voice Post" CD

A year later, Wenbin suggested my voice to Dou Wei. Dou Wei asked Wenbin to invite me as the guest voice immediately, saying that my voice was clean and pure, in a way he never met before. So on a summer afternoon, 2019, I met Dou Wei without

prior notice, and after shaking hands and exchanging pleasantries, we immediately started recording. Later, nearly fifty minutes of the single "no words time ," was finished, smoothly and wonderfully. It was really an unforgettable experience of artistic creation: the sound was near and far, entwined and encircled, empty and bright; the pitch was generated and flowed naturally in the lyrics, the timbre was open, or cloudy, or tipsy, or hidden, just as sighing, breathing, singing, reading, surrounding silence, everything was sound, everything was music...The music originated in the laziness of drunkenly waking up, the end like a breath sucked in, less than spit out, suddenly cut off, such as a knife through water, such as cutting through silk, unguarded against, and suddenly surprised. The singer, as a listener, imagines herself frozen in the present, with her mouth open, becoming a silhouette of history...

K: Is the situation in New York getting better? In your opinion, what changes will be made in the development trend and direction of art in the post-pandemic era?

L: Sometimes, I heard the numbers of infections and deaths skyrocketed and sometimes they said that things were getting better, but no one I know has ever died. Perhaps that's why people didn't always stay at home and instead took the opportunity to do something. I don't think about the trend and direction of art although I had contemplated it in the past. For example, in the 2010s, I predicted that abstract art would have a big explosion in China, which came true within a few years. But then I stopped making predictions, and thought it is kind of absurd and boring for artists to predict trends in art.

K: What are your plans for creation and exhibition in 2021?

L: The creation and exhibition plans for 2021 are in progress and I want to keep it a secret for the time being.



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