

Ren Jianhui 任建辉

CONTEMPORARARILY GREEN 绿风系列

‘Think green: Green is Nature. Green is Peace. Green is Purity. Green is Longevity. Green is Eternity’ In his latest compositions of oil on canvas, however, contemporary Chinese artist Ren Jianhui orchestrates a somber yet tempestuous concerto on the faces of his sitters in portrayal of their erosion by time, less the windows of their souls. As facial features dance themselves away along the timely breeze, the eyes remain shimmering in permanence, and so do our souls. Green is not Red. Green is Nature: Nature is Eternal.

“绿色代表自然。绿色代表和平。绿色代表纯洁。绿色代表长寿。绿色代表永恒”然而，在中国当代画家任建辉的最新画作里，呈现出忧郁，不安的曲调；描绘出时光的斑驳，和心灵的空虚。画里的人物轮廓栩栩如生，眼神也持久地闪烁，好似我们的心灵。绿色不是红色。绿色代表本质：本质就是永恒的。

Date 日期 : 12-31 Aug 2008 八月 12 至 31 日

Venue 展地 : The Art Loft, Volvo Showroom, 249 Alexandra Road

Time 时间 : 10am – 9pm (Daily) 每天早上 10 时至晚上 9 时

Price :入场 : Free 免费

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## The Call of Nature

Think green: Green is Nature. Green is Peace. Green is purity. Green is Longevity. Green is Eternity. In his latest compositions of oil on canvas, however, contemporary Chinese artist Ren Jianhui orchestrates a somber yet tempestuous concerto on the faces of his sitters in portrayal of their erosion by time, less the windows of their souls. As facial features dance themselves away along the timely breeze, the eyes remain shimmering in permanence, and so do our souls. Green is not Red. Green is Nature: Nature is Eternal.

Walking out of the shadows of Prof. Wu Guanzhong, the teacher who made him a favourite to succeed the volatile technique of dots and lines, instead Ren has distinguished himself in the contemporary art world with his unique technique, retaining just the “xingshimei” “形式美”, or beauty of formal aesthetics, emphasized by Wu during his college years. In his “Green Wind” series of portraits, Ren plays an aesthetic pun on ‘green’ creatively in its theme while continuing with his explorations further into the perfect harmony between Eastern and Western painting.

Evidently, Ren has found his expression of the Truth, and shows us the visually aesthetic route towards it. Although the paintings seem temporarily simplistic at the first glance, they are mysteriously suggestive with much food for thought. Nevertheless, I suggest the viewer to look at the series of paintings from three different levels of context, ascending the ladder of understanding aesthetically, socially and spiritually alongside the artist with progression.

In this series, it is apparent that Ren's technique of applying the oil paint in an unprecedented way, where he harmonises the essence of Chinese and Western art, has reached his maturity. Although it is difficult to determine for sure his unique process of treatment of paint, traces of a variety of brushstrokes applied with paint-brushes and palette knives and pouring the paint in calligraphic manner can be seen in his work. Artistic elements of Western realism, such as the refined brushstrokes on the sitter's eyes, the three-dimensional volumes of facial features and the single perspective from the viewer, greet the aesthetic essentials of Chinese painting – the “daxiangwuxing(大象无形)”, or indistinctness of form and formlessness, of Chinese art, the Chinese-ink technique of “liubai (留白)”, or imaginative areas left blank, and the simplistic Zen-like pictorial space, resulting in a truly international style of avant-garde painting. Most interestingly, Ren's personal style of painting reminds us nothing of the like, and reflects the fruits of his own arduous explorations from his practice for over forty years. What we witness today is the true masterpieces of Ren Jianhui, where aesthetic style tells beyond his artistic substance.

Green equates to Nature, especially in our age of climate awareness. Shades of green are employed by the artist in multitudes in his portrayals of unnamed sitters, as we wonder about the boundlessness and omnipresence of Nature in our lives. It is a phenomenon unchangeable and unavoidable, nor can we in our lives. It is a phenomenon unchangeable and unavoidable, nor can we live without. A different tint of green envelops the subject in each portrait, celebrating the diversity of mankind. Every person is unique and imperfect, but under the green veil of Nature, it is a world united and harmonious. While Nature is eternal, man is not. As we travel in time, our skins become wrinkled. Nature is eternal, man is not. As we travel in time, our skins become wrinkled, hair fallen, image blurred, minds obfuscated. The enigma in Ren's work alleviates the ruthless passage of time as much as Dali's clocks dilute the persistence of memory. As Confucianism teaches, "People at birth, / Are naturally good./ Their natures are similar, /Their habits make them different". While every feature on our faces might be washed away by the storms of time, the eyes, the windows to our souls, remain clear and untouched. The eyes of Ren's sitters reflect their good nature despite their poor habits after birth, not losing their luster over time. Thus their eyes are glittering with purity, the truthful reflection of their hearts and minds.

On the other hand, however, the complete tone of green triggers our inquisitiveness about its complement, red. The artist's concern and critique towards contemporary Chinese art is comprehensibly noted from his refusal to embrace a single dab of red paint in this large series of portraits. Ren believes art is a medium for the personal expressiveness of man, as well as a route towards attaining the Truth. Contemporary Chinese art, and even contemporary Chinese society at large, to the artist, is analogous to his sitters' inability in realizing their state of being lost in superficiality. The Truth is within oneself, as reflected in the eyes, the windows that neglect introspection.

Ren has always preached and practiced the philosophy of oneness with Nature. Since the very first painting of Chinese landscape during his youth, he has been seeking the meaning and the Truth of life on paper and canvas. As all cultural traditions and religious faiths converge into the philosophies of the universe, which in turn leads to the recognition, exploration and attainment of universal Truth, Ren ultimately believes that artistic practices such as painting, literature, music and dance, as well as aesthetic appreciation, are in fact meditative ways towards eventual enlightenment. Therefore, in the language of painting, Ren brings to us the medium where we look, think and meditate into the Truth of Nature, towards the ultimate joy of man, where one becomes more than a part of Nature, but rather becomes Nature himself. Simply put the art of Ren Jianhui is omnifarious, just like the tone of green, the mother of all colours.

Jack Ren Chong  
4<sup>th</sup> July 2008