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CULTURE



installation view of He Xiangyu's 'Crossed Beliefs' with the work 'I'm Sorry' in the foreground. | COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SCAI THE BATHHOUSE; PHOTO BY KEIZO KIOKU

ART

The effervescence of artist He Xiangyu

BY JAMES JACK

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

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He Xiangyu is a conceptualist with a clear vision of the world as a philosophical playground. The critical language employed in his artworks quotes from global consumerism, Americanism and militarism, emphasizing the power of infinitesimal change. He uses the shape of a leaf to describe creative process: Starting at the stem it branches out in many directions before returning to a thin tip in the end.

Tell us more about the title of “Crossed Beliefs,” your current show at SCAI The Bathhouse

I feel religious beliefs should be more serious, but belief in error can be romantic. Our error may even be the way to the gate of the future.

How did your cola project begin?

I took a bottle of Coke home and boiled its contents down in the studio. Then I tried one ton of cola. Next I went to my hometown and boiled 127 tons, which is the average amount of cola consumed there over three years.

Why use cola as a medium?

I love the material because it looks like dark stone, but it is not stone. There are seven different colors inside. I just wanted to remake this industrial product using industrial means. The most important thing is to influence social systems such as business, government and art as an individual.

What about your work “I’m Sorry” — how did that come about?

Sometimes Americans say “sorry” when they don’t mean it. While living there, I always felt distant because of my lack of English ability. As if facing a door that cannot be opened because the handle is too hot to hold, I could not get into their daily lives.

Is it your vision in the video “My Dream?”

While I was in Berlin, I had jet lag and there was a lot on my mind. I couldn’t sleep and I was in bed looking at my cell phone. I realized that while I was looking, intervals of time slowed down. Maybe I was half asleep. I used the flashlight on my phone and made five hand-held videos. The next day when I looked through the videos — they all had different colors of air and dust. Each one had a story.

What is your relationship with the people in the “Express Hotel” photograph?

The two women are a gay couple who I spoke with for six months before they agreed to let me shoot. The only thing I asked is for the one who plays the role of a woman in the relationship to cover her body, and the one who plays the man to cover her face. This action creates an awareness of gender roles within individual relationships as well as within society.

How do you engage with the language of Chinese painting (in the Cola Project) as a global artist?

What we are saying and doing right now is real. I am moving away from globalism because it brings about more of the same thing: everyone drinks coffee, everyone does this and that, etc.

Now I am looking for a way to jump out of that kind of management of reality. And I think I have found it.

“He Xiangyu: Crossed Beliefs” at SCAI The Bathhouse runs till Nov. 9, open 12-6 p.m. Free admission. Closed Mon. Sun. and Sat. and holidays

www.scaithebathhouse.com (<http://www.scaithebathhouse.com>)
