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2016.09.29 Thursday, 文 / (English) Xie Congyang 译 / Alexis Murakami

十万八千里（零一步）

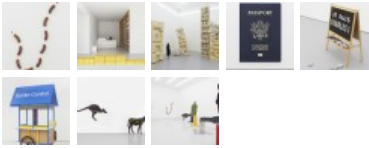
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刘辛夷 | 十万八千里

空白空间 (北京朝阳区机场辅路草地255号)，2016年6月11到7月31日

对于艺术，人们往往乐于谈论感受、直觉、情感与体验，相比之下，知识生产对于艺术家的工作而言则可有可无。刘辛夷显然不这么认为。在他看来，以作品陈述某种个人见解并不是艺术的全部，重要的是借助创作作品的过程，对自己感兴趣的议题展开探究，并产生某种知识观念的更新。带着一种广泛的“格物致知”的习惯，他希望把握纷繁的现象表层之下潜藏的逻辑，小到每日与各色人物的交往接触，大到世界各国内政外交的各种叙事。

于是，刘辛夷作品中的每个细节设定都以实证研究为基础。在为我们介绍他的《大宗帝国》系列时，刘辛夷特意提到，在创作这组作品时，他做了大量的研究工作，对作品涉及区域的地理轮廓和动物剪影的相似度进行人工比对，从而决定匹配方案。作品糅合了生活中两种常见的视觉形象：超市的肉类购买指南和标示有行政区划的各地地图。在艺术家看来，世界就是一个大超市：在地球上，人们为土地与海洋划出疆界；在超市里，人们对动物的不同部位定出价格高低，两种做法都是权力意志的投射，目的是实现资源与利益的优化部署。



所有照片 (9)



刘辛夷，大宗帝国—非洲袋鼠，亚克力板、广告钉，118×240×4 cm，2016 刘辛夷，大宗帝国—北美野驴，亚克力板、广告钉，120.5×133×4 cm，2016

这组作品清晰地展示了刘辛夷在知识生产上的策略：通过从一个形象到另一个形象的“滑动”，使属于不同范畴的事物产生关联，在语义的不断转向中，令观众对事物产生新的认识。经过近年来的实践，艺术家对这一策略已应用得可谓得心应手。在许多作品中，语义转向直接通过视觉形象来承载，如《健美阶级》中，艺术家把象征工人阶级的锤子与代表中产生活方式的哑铃嫁接，举重若轻地指涉了前社会主义国家

官方意识形态和民众生活环境的整体转变。与此同时，艺术家也继续利用作品的标题文字来暗示



刘辛夷,《自信国民》, 木框、亚麻布、丙烯, 300×211×5.2cm, 2016



刘辛夷,《查理一世》, 黑板架、EVA磁贴, 总体尺寸可变, 2016

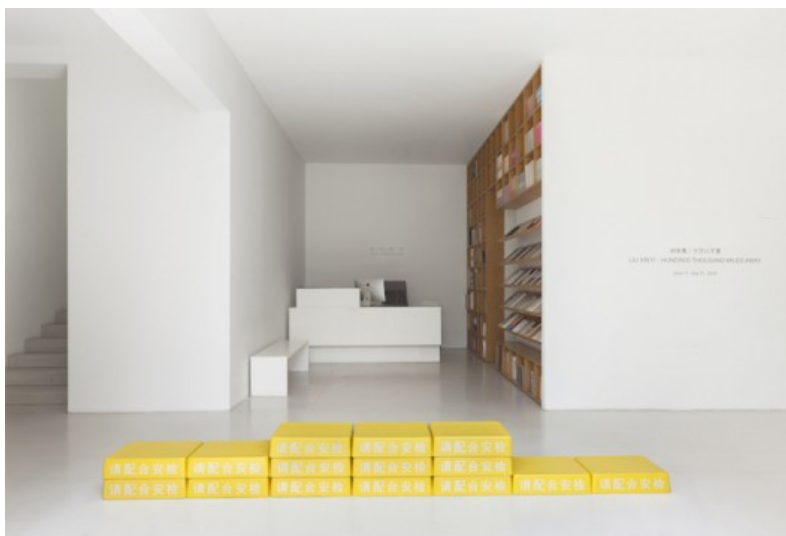


刘辛夷,《乐园》,木方、多层板、车轮、车轴、瓶装水、灭火器、水性漆、板凳,总体尺寸可变,2016





刘辛夷,《九段肠》,聚氨酯、酚醛树脂、铝棒、油画颜料,总体尺寸 290×172.5×16 cm, 2016



刘辛夷,《安全第一》,玻璃钢安检台、水性漆,总体尺寸 34.5×340×36 cm, 2016



“十万八千里”, 展览现场

- 1.刘辛夷在一次访谈中说道:“如果说要‘打断’知识逻辑里边的一些链条,我其实也需要‘打断’我自己的态度。能不能在判断中产生一个新的可能——无论是视觉上,还是思维方式上——取决于在这个过程中我能否建构起一个模型,然后让它尽可能的自治,自身比较完整。【……】它应该是一种知识,一种崭新的东西,而我通过一些修剪让它逐渐陌生。”见《刘辛夷谈自身创作》,艺术论坛中文网,2014年1月15日。
- 2.在一篇自述中,刘辛夷坦言罗兰·巴特《符号帝国》一书对他的启发:“巴特在移动的视点中解析有关日本的文化符码时,从一个落点到另一个落点的跳跃性给我一种点到为止的修辞感受。”——刘辛夷,《关于符号帝国》,见于艺术家个人网站。
- 3.见《十万八千里》展览新闻稿。

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2016.09.29 Thu, by Xie Congyang Translated by: Alexis Murakami

Hundred Thousand (And One) Miles Away

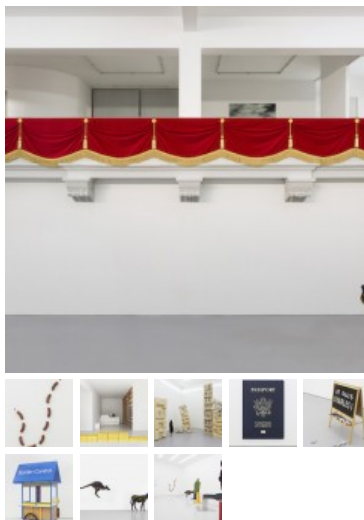
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“Hundred Thousand Miles Away”

White Space (No.255, Caoyangdi Airport Service Road, Chaoyang District, Beijing 100015), Jun 11–Jul 31, 2016

People enjoy discussing feelings, intuitions, and experiences with regard to works of art; the production of knowledge, in contrast, might not be terribly pertinent to many artists' work. Liu Xinyi begs to differ. In his view, art is not completely about the expression of personal insights, but rather about looking into topics that elicit interest and re-generating ideas about knowledge.(1) With his habit of “acquiring knowledge by investigating things” (a maxim from ancient Confucian text *Great Learning*), Liu hopes to grasp the logic beneath a myriad of phenomena, from daily interactions with all manner of characters to the greater narratives of state and international affairs.

The placement of every detail in Liu Xinyi's work is therefore founded on evidence-based research. For his series *Block Trading Empire*, Liu specifically mentions how as part of the creative process, he conducted extensive research comparing the geographical contours of regions with the silhouettes of animals in order to decide how to pair them. This work juxtaposes two common visual imageries in life: charts of cuts of meat in supermarkets and the geopolitical boundaries on world maps. For the artist, the world is a huge supermarket. On earth, people define borders on land and on the sea; in the supermarket, different cuts of meat are priced from low to high. In both cases, the designations are projections of authority aimed at the optimal redistribution of resources and profits.

[See all photos \(9\)](#)

Liu Xinyi, “Block Trading Empire–African Kangaroo”, acrylic boards, acrylic standoffs, 118 × 240 × 4 cm, 2016, and Block Trading Empire–North American Wild Donkey”, acrylic boards, acrylic

standoffs, 120.5 × 133 × 4 cm, 2016

This set of works clearly displays Liu Xinyi's strategy in the production of knowledge: as he "glides" from one image to another, he connects things from different categories; the semantics shifts, thus allowing the public to generate new understandings.⁽²⁾ With his practice in recent years, Liu has perfected this strategy. In many artworks, the semantics has been shifted so that it is borne by visualization. For instance, in "Working Out Class", the artist has grafted a hammer, the working class symbol, onto a dumbbell, the middle class symbol, thus adroitly pointing to wholesale changes in lifestyle following changes of ideology in formerly Socialist countries. In the meantime, the artist anchors the works with their titles, shifting the chain of meaning. In other works, such as "Safety First", the audience is invited to participate so that their bodies are incorporated into the chain of signifiers.

For an artist, it is a sign of maturity if their work reaches a sense of logical consistency; this suggests that their career has experienced certain fluctuations and turbulence after taking off, and is now cruising smoothly. Yet in this exhibition, the semantic games that Liu is accustomed to have begun to reveal certain limits. Aside from pointing out the source of the works' experiential material, the title of the exhibition "Hundred Thousand Miles Away" also sums up Liu Xinyi's methodology thus far: creating semantic shifts with visual imagery as signs within the work. In the mean time, it points to the distance between reality and preconceived ideas.

The piece "Wonderland" embodies the aforementioned elements, originating in the artist's reflections about border posts. On the one hand, for example, as enforced through airports, border posts are undoubtedly strict and uncompromising, and yet their actual positions are within the cartographical boundaries of a country or region. On the other hand, the real borders are often located in uncertain places such as rivers or the open sea. The artist juxtaposes border checkpoints with itinerant street vendors, finally linking them to brightly colored "wonderland" imagery. Vendors signify flow or circulation, whereas "wonderland" might suggest a fictitious, artificial environment. Through the chain of symbols constructed by visual imagery and exhibition titles, the seemingly secure position of border posts and the authority they represent are questioned. A similar structure can be found in a few other works in the exhibition which point to the unknown ("Nine Segments Sausage") and the mutability ("The Road of Arab Ba'ath Movement") in all sorts of political, geographical, and cultural boundaries.

Liu's semantic game over the concept of "borders" in the end forces the works into retreat and hems them inside the classic triangle of "concept", "language", and "reality" in classic Conceptual art and inside endless metaphysical reflections. For decades, artists have been tirelessly reiterating the gaps between language, meaning, and reality. Though there are better and worse approaches, the philosophical question is utterly without novelty today; what can be substituted are the concrete examples and visual forms used to expound on this issue. Just as in life, however, humor tears a crack in ordinary experience, momentarily subverting the rules. But jest remains jest precisely because no one takes it very seriously. In the end, if the exhibition itself offers an opportunity to break down established ideas or interpretations as the criteria to judge the efficacy of a work, then in that case, how can pointing out that various specific or abstract boundaries are neither natural nor eternal be considered a new understanding, in any sense of the term?

Supposing that some definite knowledge is still a worthwhile pursuit, certain other works in the exhibition offer possible pathways. Through rigorous restorations of detail, "Royal Balcony" transposes the grand balcony of England's Buckingham Palace to a gallery space, shifting the power structure of surveillance and the surveilled between royalty and commoners to that between gallery managers on the one hand and artists and visitors on the other. And "Confident Citizenship", at first glance, looks seamlessly constructed, but it is in fact an imaginary, nonexistent passport for world citizenship.

In these works, symbols are not transposed deliberately; instead, their basic structure is maintained while the visual signifiers are deconstructed and regrouped, thus testing or even provoking the visitor's direct response to the symbols. Viewers are thus asked to consider, as individuals immersed in specific historical contexts and with specific visual experiences, what controls our intuition? Who is in control? How is this controlled? Rather than being endlessly suspended in a labyrinth of signs over hundreds of thousands of miles, this series of works is not merely focused on the "conceptual"; it asks direct questions of specific experiences—an important step in propelling the work towards definite knowledge.

(1) From the interview, in Chinese, "Liu Xinyi Tan Zishen Chuangzuo (刘辛夷谈自身创作)" ("Liu Xinyi Talks about His Own Works") on Artforum.com.cn, Jan 15, 2014.

(2) The artist admits the influence on his work of Roland Barthes' *Empire of Signs*; on his own website, Liu writes, "Barthes' analysis of Japanese cultural signifiers left a rhetorical impression on me in how it jumps from one point to another."

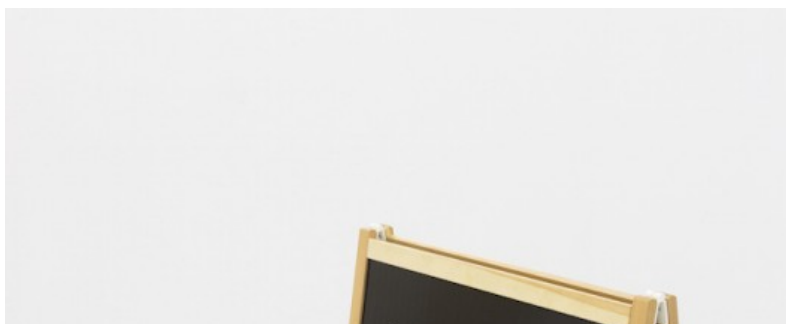




Liu Xinyi, "Royal Balcony", polystyrene, velvet, ropes, tassels, flower-shaped clasps, 200 x 1100 x 70 cm, 2016



Liu Xinyi, "Confident Citizenship", wooden frame, canvas, acrylic, 300 x 211 x 5.2 cm, 2016





Liu Xinyi, "Charles I", blackboard stand, EVA magnetic stickers, overall dimensions variable, 2016

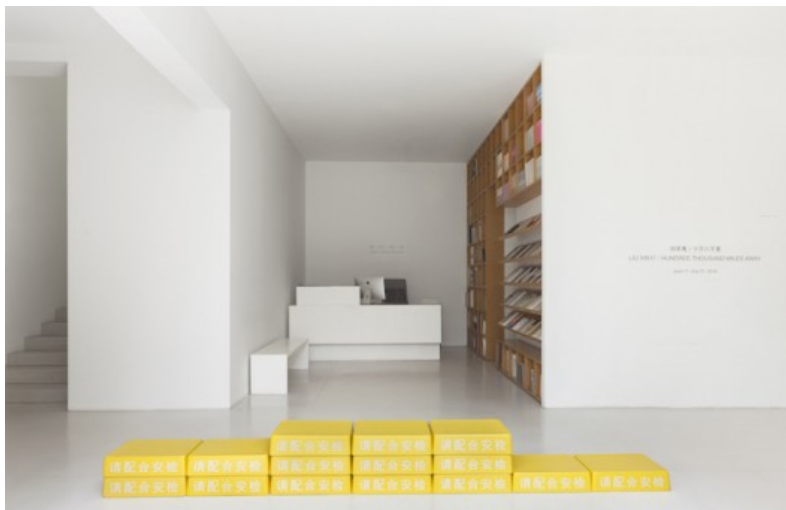




Liu Xinyi, "Wonderland", timber, multilayer boards, tricycle wheels, axle, bottled waters, fire extinguisher, waterborne paint, stools, overall dimensions variable, 2016



Liu Xinyi, "Nine Segments of Sausage", polyurethane, phenolic resin, aluminium bars, oil paint, overall dimensions, 290 x 172.5 x 16 cm, 2016



Liu Xinyi, "Safety First", fiberglass made security checkpoint plinths, waterborne paint, overall dimensions 34.5 × 340 × 36 cm, 2016



Liu Xinyi, "Palmyra", polystyrene, waterborne paint, overall dimensions variable, 2016



"Hundred Thousand Miles Away", exhibition view

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