

Gu Xiong and I are trying to follow the signs through the suburbs in this small city in the mountains; below us two rivers flow together. At the end of a Cul-De-Sac, we find a sign and then follow a narrow path through the tall yellowing grass and sagebrush to the Kamloops Chinese Cemetery, a desolate area populated by hand-painted wooden markers. A few months later we will locate another such cemetery on Vancouver Island, tucked in to the back and beyond, out on the edge of Cumberland, a town that bulldozed its Chinatown in the 1950s. We’ve been piecing together histories by moving around the country and into the landscape, many of the same landscapes once depicted by the Group of Seven that would have adorned the walls of that Beijing gallery and been translated into that unknown man’s sketchbook. Back then, the images inspired, but they may have also carried another message. Growing up in Canada, those paintings often appeared in more than just art books, they would illustrate books on geography and the histories of resource industries such as mining and logging, oil and gas. Perhaps the Chinese government didn’t understand that these paintings would inspire revolutionary thinking among its youth, but they may not have missed Canada’s history of identifying with, while simultaneously exploiting, the natural world. Canada has consistently identified itself as a land of extraction and these efforts are being undertaken more and more now in collaboration with China and with China in mind. The Group of Seven may have helped to reveal a new Gold Mountain.

I am sitting now with a colleague looking at a painting by Lawren S. Harris that may have been one of the works that hung in Beijing in 1984 and could have made its way into that lost sketchbook. I am “responsible” for this work now and this is what has taken me to California, to imagine exhibiting Harris there to another new audience, and to wonder what they will make of his austere northern visions. By pure coincidence, we all find ourselves in Los Angeles and so we gather together at a table in the warm sun under palm trees, Gu Xiong, Ge Li and their daughter Gu Yu. It turns out that we have all been thinking of migrations, of what it means to be placeless and leading fragmented lives. The next day, Gu Yu and I will meet again and while we wander, we try to piece it all together, all the details of our connections since we met two decades ago. Gu Xiong’s relationship with Gu Yu inspired my relationship with my daughters, they have always been present in my working life, participants who are emerging as collaborators.

On the bus heading up Wiltshire Boulevard I am alone, the ride is long and the traffic is dense. I drift off, losing track of the stops and end up at the end of the line. I step out onto Ocean Drive, descending the steps to the beach and walk out to face the surf. “What’s wrong with you?” she’d asked me again as I headed for the bus. “I have come to realize,” I told her, “that I want to go home, but I don’t really know where that is, and that feels very familiar.” In that moment I realize that everything changed when I met them almost twenty years ago, that since then I have never really looked at a Group of Seven painting without thinking of China, and that I always return to my conversations with them when I think about Canada, its past and its future. My sense of home changed when I met them, became precarious, unstable, ethereal, I came to think of Canada as not a place but more of an unstable idea, a shifting conversation, a tentative, at times provocative, dialogue between individuals and cultural groups that will never settle and may in fact have passed us by, may have just been a story that now lacks coherence and cohesiveness, that has become frayed, like a dream.

“Alex Colville’s horse running towards that oncoming train,” he exclaimed, “that was China to us!” Once again, out of the blue, in the warm sun and under palm trees, my perception is shifted, what I thought I knew is disrupted, and, as always, I am richer for it.

处在文化转型中的思考

顾雄

所有的文化都是复合物，而伴随一个人出生的文化，则赋予个人对其文化的深刻理解。正是这种文化的潜在影响造就了艺术家与生俱来的气质。如果一个人要想进入另外一种文化，他或她必须有意识地进行一种近乎天生的转换，以便能够理解一个陌生的新世界。正是在这个不断转换的时空中，我发现了自己，不同文化的冲突在我的作品中，是一种持续的进化和演变，它就像一道道“艺术的电流”改变了我整个人生和艺术。

通过多年来在海外的生涯和艺术实践，我的研究方向始终围绕着如何创造一种新的文化本性。文化冲突的爆发来自于个人或社会负载着一个时代的变迁。一个新文化本性的产生，来自于个体的不间断的文化实践，我的艺术研究以艺术批评的角度，从视觉艺术出发，涉及到社会学、地理学、人类学、经济学、政治和文学的范畴，我的艺术力图探索全球化、本土化和个体文化本性的变迁，以及相互之间的关连和影响。

文化的转型，不仅是一个单纯的以两种文化的混合来呈现的，而是要创造一个崭新的文化空间。孤独和压抑是这个转换从一开始就必须面对和接纳的现实，而这个新的个人文化本性为其诞生又具有从来没有的开放和自由。有形的和无形的全球文化和社会的同化，影响着我们居住的这个世界。在这个环境中，个人文化空间的独特性更突显其魅力，这也正是我感兴趣的氛围之所在。我的艺术表现了这个文化转型的过程，它与我在加拿大的不同文化背景中的挣扎与重获新生紧紧地连在一起。

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Rethinking Cultural transformation

Gu Xiong

All cultures are complex, but the one into which you are born is the one you come to understand most profoundly. Thus, this influence is what finds its way into the work of an artist and, I believe, is expressed almost instinctively. If a person should move to another culture, he or she must make both a conscious and instinctive adjustment in seeking to understand what at first is a strange new world. It is within this dynamic milieu that I have found myself. This conflict of cultures in my work is in a state of constant evolution. It is a continuous generation of ‘artistic electricity’ that fuels change in both my personal life and my work as a contemporary artist.

Through the years, the direction of my research has centred on the creation of a hybrid cultural identity. Cultural conflict erupts when the individual and society undergo a process of change. A new cultural identity is born as individuals reconstitute themselves through their own cultural practice. My research always draws on the critical angle of visual art as a point of departure, and then encompasses other areas of knowledge such as sociology, geography, economics, politics and literature. I addresses integration and assimilation, histories both collective and personal, and cultural synthesis across boundaries. My art seeks to delve into the dynamics of globalization, local culture and individual shifts in identity, and rethink the space of global culture flows.

Theses shifts do not merely constitute a simple amalgamation of two original subjects, but instead, seek to create an entirely new space. Alone and isolated from its birth, this new individual identity is nevertheless open and free. Visible and invisible global forces of social and cultural homogenization have inherited the world. In this environment, individual spaces embody the seeds of difference and alterity. It is the construction of this new level of being in which I am interested. My art expresses this process through my own life experience of displacement and rebirth in Canada.