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The Round Table 02 圆桌 A Conversation with the No Name Painting Group

Gao Minglu, Madeline Eschenburg, Ellen Larson, and Dong Li Hui

Abstract

The following is a transcript of a conversation between three members of the No Name Painting Group, as well as Gao Minglu, Madeline Eschenburg, Ellen Larson, and Dong Li Hui. This interview was originally conducted in Chinese and has been edited for clarity.

About the Artists

Li Shan, Ma Kelu, and Zhang Wei were all members of the No Name Group. The No Name Group was a Beijing-based group of largely self-taught artists active from the early 1960s through the early 1980s. They were noteworthy for their active rejection of Soviet Socialist Realism promoted throughout the Cultural Revolution by the government. Rather, they upheld the notion of art for art's sake. Their work, however, must also be considered as a purposeful negation of official ideology and is important because of its unique position as the only underground, self-organized, avant-garde art group during the Cultural Revolution. It took some time for this group to be recognized as an important aspect of contemporary Chinese art partially because, while they did not conform to governmental standards, their work also did not contain overtly political themes, like some of the works by another early avant-garde art group in China, the Stars. Rather, their works tended to be landscapes or street scenes executed in a traditional Chinese, impressionistic or post-impressionistic styles. Their first official exhibition was held in 1979.

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A Conversation with the No Name Painting Group

Gao Minglu, Madeline Eschenburg, Ellen Larson, and Dong Li Hui

Dong Li Hui: What are your personal thoughts on your art? Have your thoughts changed over time?

董丽慧：您们个人对艺术有什么看法？从七十年代到现在您的这些看法有没有改变？

Zhang Hui: Actually, I am still pretty confused myself!

张伟：其实我一个人糊里糊涂的，基本差不多了

DLH: How about with regards to your work? Did any changes occur in your work?

董：那，对您的艺术作品来讲，作品有没有被改变？

ZH: Yes! I always wanted to paint well, but I actually think that the more I paint, the worse I paint! Now I am faced with obstacles, a kind of hardship, because even though I want to paint what no one has painted before, I can't seem to paint this kind of painting. I think it's really hard to express this sort of feeling. Recently, it's gotten a little better because I have started to explore new materials. I want to use things other than (conventional) canvas or paper. These new (unconventional) materials are much more interesting. This makes me feel like my paintings have changed. I have started to use tools that construction workers would use, like shovels or wall plastering. I am trying to find other things to paint on. As long as these objects have a planar surface, I can paint on them. These objects change the relationship between me and my paintings and this form of "canvas." I think using a piece of paper or flat canvas is too limiting. But take a shovel, for example. I bought a pile of shovel heads. The backs of these shovels look a little like the shapes of human faces, with a pointed shape on top.

张：是，我是想画好啊，很想画好画，其实我觉得越画越不好。很想画，真的很想画，但是呢，我现在有一个障碍，一个困难，我想画的好像别人没这么画过，可是还画不出来，怎么画的会类似于什么，所以我觉得有一点很难很难再画下出的这种感觉，最近稍微好一点是突然改变画画的材料。我想用一些不是画布或者不是纸，然后画这些东西还挺有意思。这个给我一个改变画画的感觉。我用的是建筑工人的工具，铁锹或者是那个墙上抹的，然后我现在还在找一些其他的东西可以在上边画画，只要接近是个平面我就想可以用来画画。它可以改变我跟这个画之间的关系和我和这个画布，如果是一张纸或者平面的画布，我会觉得太会受限制，但是比如说一个铁锹，铁锹没有这个把儿我买了一堆铁锹头铁锹的背面呢也有点像人脸的形状红起来的然后它是方的，但是有一点形状，有那个很特别的造型

Ma Kelu: You didn't tell the truth

马可鲁：你没有告诉我实情。

ZH: Then, after I applied the color it looked a little like a Peking Opera mask. After I showed it to people, they all agreed that it looked like a painted mask, particularly like a Peking Opera mask. I used really simple colors. It was just what I wanted to paint. I think that changing my materials in this way is really interesting. If I take this table (that we are sitting at) and paint it, it could be really interesting. But if I was painting the same painting on canvas, I would be really bored with it. I wouldn't achieve anything by painting in this way. Painting on this chair (I am sitting on) wouldn't be bad, either. Painting on its front or back would both be really interesting. This is how I feel about my painting now. (To Ma Kelu:) How about you?

张：然后呢，我画上颜色以后，它就有点像那个京剧花脸，我给别人看也说，啊！那个有点像花脸的感觉，特别京剧，颜色用的很简单，那它就是我想要画的别人看也有这样的感觉。我觉得改变这个东西去画就挺有意思。如果说我拿着桌子画可能很好玩，很有意思。但是如果同样画大布我会觉得很无聊或者觉得画不出什么特别的名堂？如果要是这个椅子也不错。画的椅子面上，画的椅子背上，也挺好的。我现在在想这些事情，（对 马可鲁）那你说：



From left to right: Gao Minglu, Ellen Larson, Zhang Wei, Li Shan, and Ma Kelu (photo: courtesy of Gao Minglu Contemporary Art Center) ◦

MK: I would first like to add a little to what you just said. Don't get mad at me, ok? Changes you've made in terms of certain things aren't that big, but overall, you've changed quite a lot. She (Li Hui) asked what the changes have been from the 1970s to today. Just now, I said you didn't tell the truth because your works, how do you say, have a lot of simple or essential (elements), ok? That shovel looks like a butt (laughs). (Zhang Wei) is an extremely relaxed artist. His paintings say that he isn't really concerned with the paintings' surface. Even though your composition and color sense are both really good, the work lacks mature language. To solve this problem, you have started to experiment with different media (like the shovel). Your new work is not that large in size, I've seen it. I think it's all really good.

Now I will talk about myself. My change might be a little bigger than (Zhang Wei's), as the concept is not really the same. I am a little more conservative than him to a certain point. In terms of form, I am more conservative because of the limits I have created for myself. In the nineties, I used different (unconventional) materials, but I saw too many people working in this way, so I went back to using conventional materials, just pigment and brush. Even today, I don't think these materials create any sort of limitations for me. I am using them to change my oil paintings, allowing me to go deeper. (By working in this way,) I never get tired of painting. Never. This aspect makes me very different from Zhang Wei.

马可鲁：我是的意思是补充，先不说我啊。你的变化在某一点上是不大，但是呢，变化也挺大，她(丽慧)说什么七十年代到现在。刚才我说的你 didn't tell the truth 是因为你的作品和这个怎么说，这个作品这个有很多 simple or essential, ok? 那个铁锹更像屁股（张伟）是一个非常放松的画家。（张伟）画说他

不太关注实际上也不太进入到画面的表面。你是一个不管构图也好，color sense 也非常好，但是你不进入到这个 mature 这个层次语言。所以呢你产生这个困惑，你要找不同实践来解决这些问题他的新的那些 size 不太大，我都看了，我觉得也非常好。

下面，我也说我自己。我的变化可能要比他大一些，但是观念也不太一样。我要比他在某点上要保守。就是在形式上很保守，因为我给我自己的限定，我在九十年代用什么其他的材料但是我看到太多人去做那个所以我回到那种 conventional materials, 这种用颜料只是刷只是画这些到现在并没给我什么限制我是用在变化油画可以在 go deeper 然后所以我对绘画 never get tired, never. 这点我可能跟你很不一样。

DLH: So just now, you spoke about changes in style. But, what about your thoughts on art. Have they changed at all? For example, when you first started painting, what did art mean to you? Were those thoughts different from your thoughts on art today?

董：所以您们刚刚说的就是风格的改变，但是您们对艺术的看法有没有受改变？比如说您们觉得艺术那个时候是什么，然后现在是什么？

MK: Of course my thoughts about art changed, how could they not change? But in the midst of this, there are some things that you might want to change, but cannot. Regardless of your views on art, the concept of art isn't like a moveable property, it's not like a piece of real estate. It grows and adapts with your own maturity. Its composition slowly develops as you change. But I don't think that one's *qizhi* (artistic temperament) changes. *Qizhi* is most important. It is even more important than your own knowledge. *Qizhi* penetrates through even your earliest work up through today, regardless of your perceptual or rational understanding. So, actually, I think *qizhi* is incredibly important. I think I am constantly changing even though I still use a planar surface to paint. Even though I have painted on three-dimensional forms, I don't concern myself with those things anymore. I have only given myself this one limitation, but at the same time, I have never stopped changing. From the beginning, you all know that No Name painters fundamentally emerged from a rather classic point of view, concerned with nature, and a completely expressionistic condition. After 1978 or 1979, there were more and more international exhibitions. There were also more and more modern exhibits.

马：肯定是有改变，不可能没有改变。但是其中有一点点你想改变也改变不了，就你不管你的观念，艺术的观念不是不动产，不是房地产。它是随着人的成长，这是结构的开拓漫漫你会产生得变化，但是变不了我觉得是气质，气质这个东西其实是最重要的。甚至比你知道还重要，这点贯穿到一开始的作品，到现在的作品，不管你是增加了很多，感性的理性的或者是知识上的，但实际上我对那点是至关重要的。对我自己来说一直在变的，虽然我一直在平面，平面，立体装置，虽然我做过，但是我不算那种东西。我只把自己其实有一个限定，但是一直在变的。从一开始你们知道《无名》的时候基本你的对艺术切入点从一种比较古典的角度切入，对于自然，对于这个事务那种全是那种表现是一种状态。达到了七九年以后，七八年以后这个国外的展览越来越多了。现代的展品也越来越多了。

Li Shan: I'm not like (Zhang Wei and Ma Kelu). I'm rather simple. I make art because I am not satisfied with certain parts of my life. I think that this dissatisfaction is interesting, so I continue painting (to express these things). That's all I have to say about that. Ma Kelu, please continue.

李珊：我可能不象他们一样，我比较简单的，我觉得艺术对我来说就是没好生活的一部分，还是因为没好生活的一部分所以我觉得有意思，我愿意现在还画画。说完了。马老师，你们说吧。

MK: You put it best.

马：你说得最好

LS: I am pretty simple. I think that during that time, I didn't have a good life. I still feel this way today. If my life was better, I think I would stop painting. But I still feel bored with my life. So I continue to paint.

李：我很简单。我一贯如此。所以我觉得那个时候是没好生活是有意思的，现在是一样的呗。我的现在不没好了我不愿意停画画。现在还是无聊的。

DLH: Let's continue. I have a second question. What sorts of influence did your time abroad have on your work?

董：那咱们继续吧。第二个问题。您们在国外的经验对您的作品有什么影响。

LS: Let them answer. This question doesn't concern me.

李：让他们俩说，跟我没什么关系。

ZH: The most important thing I learned from my time in the United States was the idea of personal worth. Before, I wasn't very clear about what this meant. For example, when I was in the US, I and my other painter friends all painted together. At this time, I continued to seek new ways to change myself, and the appearance of my own work. But in terms of the essence of my work, in terms of the rational nature of my work, the reasoning behind my work became clear to me. After I arrived in the US, the American way of life, the people I came in contact with everyday, and my understanding of aspects of American culture all deepened my impression of the essence of individual worth. We once set up a stall on the street to sell paintings in New York. This experience emphasized my own value and made me respect my personal spirit. I learned to believe in my own work and to stick with what I was doing. These ideas I learned during my experience in the US had the greatest influence on me. In terms of culture, we went to art museums every day, we'd look at work, we'd read books, or we'd watch TV. All of these things had a great influence on me. But the deepest impression I felt was the value of one's personal experience. Sometimes, I discuss the concept of freedom with people (here in China). I often get made fun of. They feel like freedom doesn't really exist. It's just a relative term. But I think you only know what the true meaning of freedom is when you don't have it. They don't think about freedom in the same way as you (Americans) do. They don't think that freedom was something understood only after one finally gains independence. But people in the US really understand this concept. This is very different from China. Of course, if I didn't spend so many years in the United States, I wouldn't have this understanding.

张：美国对我来书最重要的给我的理解一个人价值，过去我不清楚这个。比如说我在中国的时候，我们都在一直画画。我自己也在不停的寻找新的改变，改变我自己作品的面貌，但是在精神上，在理性上我清楚就是什么原因造成的促成的。到美国以后我觉得美国的生活和美国的每天接触的人和了解的美国文化方面真正有意思对我影响深刻的就是个人精神价值的重视。包括后来我们因为在街上，摆摊儿卖画在纽约的街头摆摊卖画儿，你越口调自己的精神价值，你越是尊重个人精神，相信自己做对，你就坚持做下去，这个想法，在美国这是给我印象最深刻的。至于文化的方面都是每天去美术馆啊，看什么人作品，读什么书，或者在电视上看什么节目都会影响到我。但是真正深刻的影响是个人精神。偶尔我会跟某些人谈到自由这个概念的时候我也觉得常常会被别人嘲笑，自由是不存在的。自由是相对的。自由是在你被约束的时候，你才知道自由是什么，他们不认为这个自由在你明白。他们不认为这个自由是被独立意的去关注。但是在美国是很明白，但是跟中国都不一样。当然如果我不去美国生活那么多年我不会有这些认识。

MK: So I think up until today, meeting so many international artists in Paris and then in New York left the biggest impression on me. Meeting all of these different kinds of people made me more aware of how important the concept of regionalism is. Each individual had his or her own cultural understanding. I think understanding this relationship is most important.

In New York, as an artist, regardless of whether or not you belong to the mainstream or are marginalized as an outsider artist, it doesn't matter. I've seen so many artists, including myself, whose mentalities improved a great deal based on their experiences in New York. The work became much deeper. Every artist and his or her relationship to art became much more individualistic. This is most basic as you start to look at yourself and what you can do. So, gradually, more and more work comes from oneself, rather than from an ideology. This is

meaningful, as work can transform into a form of power or criticism. My time in New York made this all very clear to me, which is something I really treasure.

马：在纽约作为一个艺术家不管你在这个艺术的这个主流里面或者你是 **marginalized 在边检 it doesn't matter.** 我看很多艺术家包括我的工作很多很多艺术家心态要好得多，然后做得作品要非常的深入。然后每个人和艺术间关系艺术家之间的这种关系，怎么说，这种 **individualism.** 这个是一个最 **basic 的一个关注自己能做什么所以逐渐的**很多这个作品更多的是从这个作品本身而不是从很多很多的意识形态里的，很多这样的意义来作为一个权势，或者一个评判，批评啊这个角度。在那边比较清楚的意识到这点，这点也是我很珍惜的。

Ellen Larson: Li Shan, what about you? Why didn't you choose to spend time in the United States?

Ellen Larson：那李老师，您为什么也不选去美国生活一段时间？

LS: It was the US that didn't choose me! The US wouldn't allow me to go!

李：是美国不选我啊。美国不让我去啊。

MK: Four times.

马：4次

EL: Really?!

EL：是吗？！

LS: It was so easy for them to go! For example, Zhang Wei. It was so easy for him to leave. Later, I wrote on my visa application that I wanted to go to the US to be with him, but they told me I filled out my application incorrectly. You see, every time I filled out my visa application, I had a different reason to leave China. One reason was to go to the US to study English, see relatives, travel, etc. (To Zhang Wei:) So, I think that after you left, you gave me all your hardships!

李：他们出去了太容易了。比如说张伟老师吧，特别容易让他出去然后我签证写了我去找他，然后他们说我不对了。你看吧，我的签证每次有不同的理由，去美国学英语，看亲，**旅游**。（对张伟）所以我觉得你去了之后把你的困难都给我了。

EL: Then why did you two decide to go to the US?

EL：那您们俩为什么选去美国。

ZH: Me? I liked the American way of life. I liked American culture. I was really interested in the United States in the 1980s. Even now, I think the United States is a good place because Americans are generally not narrow-minded. Typically, they are very open-minded. Also, everyone is entitled to his or her own ideas and can speak freely about them.

张：我吗？我喜欢美国的生活方式，喜欢美国的文化。我对美国所有的东西都感兴趣。在八十年代的时候。现在我也觉得美国是一个很好的地方因为它的，美国人都一般不狭隘，一般都很开放的形态，也包容给别人存在的权利，你有你的看法没关系，你说你的看法啊

EL: I mean, many artists went to Europe, like Paris for example. So, why did you choose New York?

EL：就是不少的艺术家长欧洲，巴黎啊，所以你为什么选择纽约呢？

ZH: I was invited to go to New York to participate in an exhibition called *Chinese Avant-Garde Art*. There were ten artists in all who participated in this exhibition. They were all from Beijing. At the time, I thought this was a great opportunity to go to the US. Otherwise, I wouldn't have had an opportunity to go.

张：我就开始被邀请去纽约做一个展览叫《中国前卫艺术》其实有十个艺术家都是北京的我是其中的一个，然后我觉得对我也是一个机会可以去美国，不然的话没有机会去。

LS: If you could have gone to Europe, for example, Germany, you would have gone there, too. Right?

李：如果让你去欧洲，比如说德国你都会去。

ZH: I would have gone anywhere. But I really wanted to go to the US. I didn't really know a lot about Germany or France, and I wasn't as interested in these places.

张：我都去，但是我真的是最喜欢美国。德国，或者是法国我也了解不是很多，而且兴趣不是很大。

Gao Minglu: *The Stars* seemed to all go to France, right?

高名潞：星星都好像去欧洲啊。

ZH: Yes.

张：是

LS: In the 1980s, I think everyone really wanted to leave China. They wanted to free themselves from that environment.

李：八十年代的时候我觉得大家都是特别愿意出国，愿意摆脱当时的环境。

ZH: They said that China at that time was a sinking ship. People all wanted to find another ship that would be safer for them.

张：他们说中国是一个快要就要沉下去的船，然后船上的人都喜欢到另外的船上更安全。

LS: Then I was this ship's bravest person.

李：我是这船最勇敢的人

ZH: Other countries were all other ships. Everyone wanted to run away to them.

张：其他的国家是另外的船，当时大家都在逃跑

MK: I left two years after (other artists). I had a lot of friends who came back to China that asked me, "what are you still doing here?" In the 1980s our reason for leaving China was not really to study abroad. The thought on everyone's mind was if you could find a way to leave, you would leave. Therefore, some went to study, but we didn't. We left to see the world. At that time, we would go wherever we could. When I finally left, I first went to Germany. After that, I went to Sweden. At that time, I didn't know if I could go to the US because of the visa issue. I would really go anywhere. I brought a little money, but I really couldn't move around because having a Chinese passport was as good as waste paper. I had to always return to China to apply for a visa. When I was still in China, I met a former deputy ambassador to the United States. He

told me if I ran into any problems, I should let him know. When I was in Sweden I remembered this and wrote him. Later, my friend told me that I was granted a visa.

So, this all happened by chance. I really didn't know where I was going to end up. Before I left China, I thought I understood the mentality of most Chinese people. Before I left China I studied Chinese classics. My teacher was Zhang Zhixin's brother. So after I got my visa and was applying for my passport, it got held up. The Security Bureau wouldn't give me my passport. They came to my home six times to talk with me. But finally, they gave me my passport. But then they wanted to take advantage of me and rejected my application. Finally, after I received the visa, I quickly left. Before I left, my teacher told me, "leave and don't ever come back to this place." At that time, a lot of people, in fact, had this same idea. If you could go, you'd go and never come back. So despairing.

马：我呢是比他们晚出去两年，我有很多朋友出去再回来都问“你怎么还在这儿呢？”八十年代的时候我在这儿呢我们那个时候并没有说出去是上学，他也是，我也是。所以就是基本中国人的精神状态就是能够走的就走，然后呢，有的是出去攻读，我们没有这个读书的这个，就是出去看世界。然后走到哪儿就是哪儿。我才出去的时候先到德国，到德国然后我也去瑞典，那个时候我不知道能到美国只不过那时因为有签证的问题，我还到什么地方都想去，带点儿钱，但是呢走不动因为中国的护照像一个废纸一样。我要回中国再去请。所以呢，正好我在国内的时候，见到这个原来的美国副大使在我出国之前然后这个跟我说了，就是你要遇到什么问题，然后给我写信。然后我就想起来了，想起来了以后我就写信，我在瑞典收到了他的信。我的朋友说你拿不到签证。所以都是不知道的都是未知的，能走到哪儿，就走到哪儿，因为我出国之前我觉得中国人普遍形态啊从一点可以看出来啊。我出国之前我学古典的。那么我的老师是谁呢？是张知新的哥哥。然后我在拿签证我在申请护照的时候，耽误了八个月，治安局就是不给我护照，六次到家里去，找我谈话，但是到最后呢，他们还是把护照给了我。然后他们想利用我，最后我也被我拒绝了。最后呢，就是我拿了签证以后，我想赶紧走掉了，这个时候我的老师呢去跟我说，说“你出去，永远不要在回这个地方来。”就是他那个时候 88 年我出的时候。张知新的哥哥。他那个想法实际上都很多当时的中国人的想法。就是能走就走。不要再回来这个地方。是非常绝望的。

EL: What about you? At that time, did you think you wouldn't return to China?

EL：那您呢？您当时出国之后也觉得不要再回来吗？

MK: I never had that thought. No, really, never. Because of my situation, I never thought I would not return. I had a wife and child in China. At that time, I didn't think I had the ability to move them abroad. Also, I didn't know where I would end up. Later, I gave myself a fixed number of years. I wasn't like some artists who said we were like poets in lifelong exile. I never felt this way. I thought that I would give myself twenty years. I actually came back after nineteen years. But after I left China, I felt that I would go wherever I could go. I first went to the Netherlands where I had a friend. He said, "It doesn't matter! You can come in my car!" He was from Paris, but worked in Holland. He was a come-and-go kind of guy. He said that I could just go with him in his car, but I thought that if I was ever arrested, he might also get in trouble, so I finally decided not to go.

马：我并没有那么想。没有。真的没有。我的情况，我没有，我有爱人孩子在，我这时候还没想到我有能力把他们搬出去，我也不知道我最后能够在什么地方。后来我还给我自己一个年限，跟自己说过，不象有的艺术家说我们是这个诗人，我就终身流亡了，我从来没有这个想法。我是曾经想过二十年的想法。结果我十九刚年以后回来的。但是出去就是能够走哪儿，就到哪儿。我在荷兰的时候有一个朋友，他说“没关系，你坐在我车的后面。他是巴黎人。但是他呢在法兰副西的银行工作。他总是来来去去，他说你在我车就可以，可是我说如果我被抓，会对你有影响，后来就没了。没有去。

Madeline Eschenburg: When you were young, none of you attended the academy, right? So, I would like to know if this had any influence on your work. Do you think not studying within the academy had a positive or negative influence on you?

Madeline Eschenburg：我有一个关于你年轻的时候，都没在艺术学院上学，对吧。所以我想知道对您的艺术有什么影响，好处还是坏处？

ZH: Not studying within the academy is great! Before, they called us outsiders. We all accepted this identity. As an artist, this outsider position can bring you more opportunities and good fortune. Belonging to the mainstream is not as interesting. In the mainstream, you are confronted with more interference and outside influence. With this (mainstream) identity comes a sense of responsibility. When an artist takes on this kind of responsibility, he commits himself to society and is not free. He only serves society. He only works for others. When you look within your heart and do things for yourself, soon you discover that society matters less and less. To answer your question about whether studying in the academy is good or bad, from my heart, I am very glad that I didn't study art within the academy.

张：不上大学是非常好。以前他说我们是边缘的。我们都认可这个身份。作为一个艺术家如果能是边缘是你的机会你的幸运。如果你是主流的，就没意思了。就会受到很多的干扰和影响。和你自己会对这个身份的认同之后你会一种责任感。我认为作艺术家承担的社会责任感的时候它就不自由了。它就是为社会做。为了别人做了。发自内心做自己的事情往往跟社会没什么关系。还有就是你说的这种去艺术学院对你好还是不好。我从心理始终认为我很庆幸没有到学院学艺术。

ZH: I think that art is actually something that you cannot study. Even if your teacher is a big famous artist, he cannot teach you the trueness of art. If you do not possess this ability yourself, you will not become a successful artist. Also, I believe that the word "artist" really sounds bad. I don't like this title. I like how Americans use the term 画家 (painter) to describe someone who paints. My friend, another abstract painter, likes to be referred to as a painter, or simply put, 一个画画的人 (a person who paints paintings). Also, another friend who passed away said that being called an artist was really annoying. Therefore, I call myself a 画画 (literally, paint painting). I think this is the most appropriate. In this most natural state, you are able to do the things you like best. Being called an artist is a real headache. It's really annoying. Things that involve the term 家 (specialist) are really foolish. But if you want to talk about the difference between 画画 (paint painting) and 画家 (painter), artists are really annoying, but 画画 (paint painting) is good.

One of No Name Painting Group's teaching figures talked about 画画儿 (paint painting) adding that Beijing "er" (儿) sound. This sound adds 玩儿 (fun or playful) meaning. He said that if painting was a serious or somber job, you won't ever be able to paint anything. If you become a student of the academy, you will become an art student. After you graduate and begin some sort of art related job, you will find it very boring. With our outsider status, of course we have encountered a lot of hardships; many opportunities have not been made available to us. But we have always been free. Today we may sell paintings. But tomorrow if we don't have money, we can borrow some from a friend. We do what we can to survive. But we have never racked our brains to force ourselves into the market. Now all of the paintings we sell are earlier paintings. People are interested in these paintings because they have a very unrestrained spirit. The new paintings are hard to sell, which is very likely because they have been influenced by the market. Today I paint to make money, as a way to make my livelihood. So you will definitely see these motivations in (my paintings). Possibly some people may be able to see this in my works, too.

张：我觉得就是艺术实际上不能学的，不管是你的老师是什么大艺术家他没有办法把艺术真正的东西教给你。你要是自己没有这个能力你做不成艺术家。而且我也觉得首先这个艺术家这个说法挺不好听的。我不喜欢艺术家这个名称。我喜欢美国人说英文这个 painter 就是画画的，我的朋友说的比较强调这点，另外一个抽象画家，他喜欢被别人，他自己也说他是一个画者，简单说就是一个画画的人。还有过去有一个好朋友他去世了，他说他要说我也是一个画家觉得很烦。我宁愿说我就是一个画画我觉得这个最好。你在一个最自然的状态做自己最喜欢的事情。一个艺术家就挺头疼的。挺烦人的。什么东西一有家我觉得挺无聊啊。但是如果要说画画和这个画家有区别，画家也挺烦人的。就是画画挺好的。

《无名画会》的一个老师，人物，他说画画儿。北京话要加一个儿子。这个儿音带有玩儿的这个意思。他说这个画画如果是很严肃的是一个工作，你画不出好东西来，但你要是去学院里你就变成艺术学生。艺术学生毕业以后去做什么艺术相关的工作，艺术工作者都是挺无聊的事。我们那种边缘的状态当然生活遇到很多困难，好多机会可能也不属于我们。但是我们从来都是自由的。今天会卖画的生活好一点。明天没钱了就想办法让朋友借了，或者怎么样，都是度过了。都还是走过来了。但是从来没有为了别人为了生存，挖空心思去挤在市场里面。现在我们卖画都是卖过去的画。这些画是被人认可是因为这些画里有非常自由的精神。而新的画

都比较不好卖那很可能这些新的画都有这些市场的影响。那我自己今天画的画里边很可能有这些为了赚钱，为了生活。难免会带有这些东西在里边。很有可能有眼力的人能看出来。

LS: Ah! I don't believe that's completely correct. I think when we were painting back then, we didn't sell paintings. No one was interested in them. People didn't say these paintings were any good. They said, "What is this? The color is all wrong. This composition is wrong." People said these things because we were not part of the mainstream. Also, it took a long time before we were even recognized, so paintings were not sold immediately.

李：哎呀！我觉得也不是完全是。我觉得你看你当时咱们那个时候画画不但别说卖了，连说好都不会有人说。不会说你的画好，人说这是什么呀，这个颜色不对吧。什么对结构不对吧。都这样被说，因为咱们不主流，您卖的若干年以前的画也是经过了那么长时间。也是过了很长很长时间才逐步被认可。不是说立刻就卖出去。

ZH: I have a friend who wants to make a documentary about the 1970s. I asked him why he wants to make this documentary. He said that he thinks it's interesting that in those years, he rode a worn-out bike, carrying a worn-out bag with rolled up paintings all sandwiched together. He never thought that he could sell these paintings or that they would receive any sort of notoriety. At that time we were simply concerned with painting and its own spiritual sustenance. We weren't concerned with any other elements. Our paintings never included a signature because we didn't feel we needed to sign them. After you finished a painting, you kept it yourself. There weren't other people who liked them or wanted them, and there definitely weren't people who wanted to buy them.

张：我有一个朋友他说他要做一个纪录片七十年代。那我说为什么你要做这个。他说有意思就是当时骑个破自行车，然后背一破包，里面呢夹着一卷画，从来没有觉得这个画可以卖钱或者被认可。被关注能怎么样，纯粹就是为了画画，为了自己的这种精神寄托，没有任何别的因素。我们画画都没签名，所有的画都没有签名。因为没有必要签名。你画完了只能在自己手里也没人喜欢也没人要。更不用说卖。

MK: I think signing one's painting just isn't appropriate. Too sensitive.

马：还有就是签名我觉得不合适，太敏感。

ZH: We painted for ourselves or to share with our friends. We never thought that we needed to sign our paintings. But after we entered the market, we found that if we didn't sign them, people wouldn't want to buy them, so we were begged to sign our paintings. Now, we will only sign the backs of paintings before we give them to people. But when we are painting we don't sign the front of the paintings because we think that they are already complete. They don't need a signature. Adding a signature would be too much. When Zhao Wenliang paints, he uses thumbtacks. This creates small holes in his paintings, so he spends several hours repairing these holes because he wants to preserve the original integrity of the painting. For us, signing our paintings would ruin the integrity of our paintings.

We were not willing to become students of the academy, not willing to become 艺术家 (professional artists), not willing to sign our paintings, and not willing to enter the mainstream. We don't have those abilities. Actually, entering the mainstream is not freeing at all.

张：都是为了给自己看，或者朋友看一看。没有想到过从来画画我们想到需要签名。但是自从有了市场以后，你不签名就没有人买你的画，都会要求你签名。现在我们只好签在画的背面才卖给别人。但是都不能在画的正面去签因为这个画面的感觉已经很完整的。多一个签名就很多余。赵文亮的画因为画画时需要用图钉，会给画面造成缺口，他要用好几个小时来补这个缺口，因为他要保持画面的完整性。我们的签名也会破坏画面的完整性。

我们不愿意作艺术学生也不愿意去做艺术家也不愿意在画上签名也不愿意进入社会的主流，我们也没那能力，确实进入主流不是什么很自在的事情。

MK: If you have a certain kind of temperament, your paintings will reflect that temperament. You can say that studying within the academy is good, tradition is good, knowledge is good, but without this kind of temperament, it can all go to hell. This is one part. Another part is, I think that after forty plus years of painting experience, I have realized that I have never stopped studying. This is a very conscious effort. There is no other push. This “teachers are good, everything is great” attitude is impossible. This has already formed into a work pattern. A good aspect of not attending the academy is that I don’t remember experiencing any kind of process for studying painting. Of course, there is a process. At the very beginning, you want to encounter a kind of condition towards art making, but this condition should always be independent. You don’t want this to be a type of homework. When we were making *en plein air* paintings, our most fundamental motivation wasn’t to go study, but to connect, a kind of exercise.

马：如果你有非常好的那种气质，那你做下去就能成个样子，最后的结论是，所有的学院也好，传统也好，或者知识也好，见鬼去吧。这是一个，另外的呢，我觉得在到四十多年画画的过程始终是一个自我不断学习。这是一个非常自觉的事情。没有任何这个其他的 *push*，老师也好，什么也好，不可能的。这点已经养成了这种工作方式。好处就是说我记不得我有什么学画的过程，当然有，你在最初学画的时候你想进入一种做艺术的状态，这种状态始终是自主的，不是去做功课。在做那个 *plein air painting* 的时候，这个最基本的这种 *motivation* 也不是去学习，联系，一个习作。

LS: I started painting with my cousin. She painted according to early Chinese painting thought, which incorporated line drawing. We would go and sketch together, but I was very disinterested in this way of working. My line drawings were so time consuming, I could never finish them. This was so exhausting. I couldn’t paint like this. Later, I just painted with color. I remember in January of 1971, the first time I went to Purple Bamboo Park (in Beijing). It was then that I first met other No Name painters. Then, I was only painting color without first making any sketches. To this day I don’t make sketches. Before, I thought this way of working wasn’t that good. But then, after chatting with some friends, I realized this was a great way of working. Why? These friends were all really good students with professional experience. They all graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, all really great students. Studying in the academy, it was really painful for them to rid themselves of so many years of academic training by their teachers in the Academy. It was difficult for them to get rid of these things because they practiced them day after day. They wanted to free themselves from everything their teachers taught them, but this was incredibly difficult. My friends told me I painted very well. I asked them why. They said it was because I didn’t paint lines on the surface of the paintings. After that, I felt that the Central Academy couldn’t teach you because their set of conventions required you to copy others. The Academy absolutely wasn’t for you to develop your own specialty, your own talent, or for you to develop your individuality. I have a friend who taught in Germany. He said that for the first year, students are not allowed to paint physical things. Teachers all critique students’ personal work. They don’t allow students to copy others’ work. This allows students to become their own people. This makes me glad with myself.

Recently, I had some friends who wanted to paint. They asked me how to paint. So I told them that painting is actually quite simple. If you want to paint, just paint. Number one: You shouldn’t care whether or not your painting resembles anything. Of course it won’t look like a photograph. If you care about this, just take up photography. Don’t bother painting. Number two: Disregard others’ comments or critiques. You should just paint to make yourself happy. If you are happy while you are painting, you’ve already achieved your goal. Doing something without professional training is a really freeing experience.

李：我呢是一开始跟我表姐一起画画。她按照中国人以前的那种思维然后画素描的，然后我跟她一起画素描，但是我觉得这极无趣的事情。一张素描还没画完，然后就画了夜里面，特别困。我画不了了。然后就画颜色了。我记得我是七一年十一月，去画第一张写生是在紫竹院公园。后来那个我就跟《无名画会》认识了，只要一开头画颜色，我就不会画素描了，我到今天我**看素描，我就画不了。我以前觉得这样是不是不太好。**

后来我跟几个朋友聊过以后我发现特别好，为什么特别好？他们都是非常不错学生。或者说专业的学过，美院毕业，就是一个特别好的学生。他们在那儿特别痛苦要摆脱老师那么多年训练他们这套东西。他们特别难摆脱，因为天天练的就是那个。他就不要那个了。他想挣脱老师给他们的那些东西。特别难，然后就跟他们聊，他们说画得特别好，我说为什么，他说因为我不画点面线块。后来呢，我的感受就是在美院专业系统里面它不可能教给你，因为它的一套东西是一个模式的东西。它根本没有为你的特长，为你的天才，为你的能力去发挥你的最个人的东西。我有一个朋友在德国教过学生，说在德国教学生第一年，老师不允许你画有形的东西。老师在那儿批评的都是个人的东西。不让你去按照一种模式，最后变成一种人。所以我特别庆幸我自己。

然后我最近有很多朋友，他们一要画画。就问我怎么画啊？后来我跟他们说画画其实特别简单，你想画你就画。第一：你不用介意像不像。肯定没有你照相机像。如果你要介意像不像那就拍照吧。就别画画呗。我说第二：不要别人怎么评论。你就是为了你自己高兴。你画就什么样你高兴了，这个目的就达到了。没有受过专业训练是一件特别自由的事儿。

GM: During that time, I was a teacher. In Inner Mongolia I taught painting beginning in 1973. I taught art history and a little line drawing. I believe toward the end of the Cultural Revolution, art academies started paying attention to more of these techniques, this type of training. But in Inner Mongolia, this teaching academy that I taught at was not a mainstream school. There was relative freedom with few rules.

高：我那个时候当老师。我在内蒙古当老师教画画。七三年开始。因为我教艺术史也教点素描。好像文革后期有点开始学校里面注重一些技巧啊，一些这方面的训练，但是我那个算是内蒙古的一个师范学校不是那种主流的大学，相对自由一些也没那么多规矩

ZH: You were reeducated (during the Cultural Revolution) in Inner Mongolia, right?

张：你在内蒙古插队，对吧。

GM: Yes. So at that time, my paintings were all influenced by Soviet realism. This is what all painting was in China at that time. However, (Li Shan) studied herself. She studied her own inherent nature, very innate. (To Li Shan:) Your creative elements use your own sensitivity. So the things that you paint are all your own.

高：我在内蒙古插队。所以我当时我画的那种东西都是俄国的学院派的传统下来的。中国的都是这样的。她(李珊)的就是学自己。她学个人那种天生的。先天的。你的天才因素也有你的那种敏感啊。所以你画的东西都是自己的。

ZH: After all these years of being outsiders, we are all pretty relaxed. If we had other interests at hand, we would not paint this way. Now I understand more and more that it is only when you are relaxed that your paintings will truly be free and unrestrained. The more you see these intense things from before, the more you cannot free yourself from them. If you always paint like you did then, your paintings will be no different from before.

张：《无名》的这么多年都是比较边缘，比较放松。如果要是为了利益的话，我们画不出这样的画来。现在更多都越来越明白你只有放轻松的时候你的画才自由。你越是看过去的那些很紧张的话，越离不开那个。老是在那里面画。画的跟那个原来一样。

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