

## **Graceful Spontaneity in Peter Wayne Lewis Painting Ding Ning**

My American colleague Professor David Carrier wrote to me that I might find time in my summer vacation to have a look at his friend Peter Wayne Lewis's one-person show underway in Beijing. He hoped that I could write something about the exhibition. However, Lewis is a totally unknown name to me and, as I later found, his show was to be held in a somewhat inaccessible venue and also that I would have to make a phone reservation. I hesitated to go as I hated to visit a gallery this way. Further, due to this inaccessibility and due to the painter's personal website where I would have been able to survey his works in advance, I was only able to read his resume and had no idea what I was going to see.

Lewis's show, "Booster Paintings," turned out to be in NY Arts Gallery Beijing, which bears a seemingly big name but that only really resembles a rather shabby storehouse. Surprisingly, however, when I first saw Lewis's paintings, I was almost instantly intrigued by them. His works looked extremely individual and refreshingly lyrical. Obviously, they deserved a better place to show and a much bigger Chinese audience.

On the whole, Lewis's paintings almost effortlessly acquire what other abstract painters often fail to achieve. His paintings also surpass all expectations and still testify to the appeal of abstract paintings; his improvisation is neither completely boundless nor predefined. From the original and rough conceptions to all that finally becomes embodied on canvas, there are both beforehand thoughts and unpredictable variations. His work makes me think of a well-known Chinese idiom: "Fortifications are erected every time the troops make an advance." My guess is that this painter should have had some bliss when he came across expected traces of spontaneity.

His abstract paintings open an alternative world: delicate, eye-pleasing, imagination-stirring and sometimes even touching. In most abstract paintings that I have viewed, there seems to be a tendency to seek striking compositions, vibrating color combinations or grand scales. Anyway, Lewis's approach seemed rather different by pursuing a fairly tranquil flow of mind.

He preferred strings, which do not depict or refer to any objects in reality but could subtly allow one's imagination to roam at large. Whether he painted upon a large canvas or small one, he always took it upon himself to put what naturally welled up from his heart into a well-controlled pattern of color and line, which still conveyed a pleasing sense of naiveté. Meanwhile, one will most likely not bother about what is depicted in Lewis's painting, but will instead find something within them or adjust themselves into a fitting mood in order to respond to the whole of the traces in the paint. The viewer might then step on a journey with no definite starting point or destination.

This kind of viewing experience is interesting and, in a sense, fairly close to what one goes through in viewing Song literati landscape painting. It is not at all easy for the

painter to get rid of stiff references and to manage always to imply or suggest a more poetic direction, while at the same time clinging to a coherently personal and elegant style. Lewis was masterly in organizing all of his painting elements in such a balanced way; everything looked randomly displayed, but one could not add anything else. I believe that what an abstract painter seeks is like the stage that the old master, Shi Tao described: "The top painting method is becoming of no method." Then, an open and suggestive world will emerge on canvas. I do not know to what Lewis aspires next, but, as a curator for an international biennale in Beijing, I just expect to see more of his songs of Solomon here in the future.

NY ART MAGAZINE-Nov 2006

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