

Chloe Ho's Beijing Diary – Beijing Being

BEIJING BEING



(Wei Ligang and I in his Beijing studio)

Is there a commonality in the nature of the artist and the experience of making art? Is "Beijing being" both a place and a state of mind? As I joined the remarkable Wei LiGang at his Song Zhuang studio to work on my new show, I was able to consider these questions. You may be surprised by my answers.

I find Beijing a teaming place. The city is a constant of rolling sounds, an irregularity of impossible architecture- the energy of people constantly moving towards undefined opportunities. Ring roads expand, contain and try to impose order on the constant extension of the sprawling city.

Wei Ligang studios is near the sixth ring road. It is a concentration of all things art - supplies. Galleries, working studios and artists. Block after block of brick buildings flow together immersing all who enter. The service stores come first. Shop fronts, some impossibly open to the elements, sell rice paper, Chinese ink, canvas, paint and framing. For

very few RMB you can chase a latest inspiration.



(Artist's energy)

Other buildings, some almost empty - some spilling over with activity, continue to draw you in. There is a natural ebb and flow in the surroundings that parallels the highs and lows of the creative process. Having "something" at hand or having a frightening void.



(Inside the studio)

I always look forward to reaching Wei Ligang's studio. It's a "cool" place in every way- in the truest sense of the word as I have chosen to use it - a real organic artist's salon. Brick walls and iron stairs- high ceilings and open space, art hung and in progress, the smell of fresh paint, ink and

paper, books and photos, nooks, crannies and rooms to work in or hide away. A pristine and powerful Harley Davidson is sitting amidst all an unexpected but perfect reference to the place, the artist, the man.

Now I must drop my bags and start to work - to tap into the energy and sensibility that is part of the Beijing art experience - to find what is common ground, and what is uniquely mine.

OUTSIDE / IN

Through the kind hospitality of my host, I found that in Beijing there is a connected community of artists - hard working, disciplined, determined and wry about the nature of life's hardships. Intensity and competitiveness is tempered by good nature and mutual understanding. Respect for both mentorship and achievement is clear.

Wei Ligang is an acclaimed master ink artist, a teacher, a motivator, a connective force between artists, students and art lovers. His studio attracts a stream of visitors: students who come to learn from a master, gallerist who represent or wish to represent him and admirers of his latest works. His dog Commander sits patiently waiting to welcome, observe or evict as needed.



(Commander at the studio)

I have met a Beijing cast of characters during my stays. Young "hungry" artists, a Buddhist nun with meditative creations and wechat, older

established artists whose paintings reflect their deep sense of connection with the physical and metaphysical China and one who told my fortune - thank goodness "artistically positive".

His studio is a crossroads and a destination. The serendipity of meeting up with "art" people I haven't seen for a while always surprises me. Here's the art experience filled with broad strokes of familiarity. For example, I last saw an American Gallerist a few years ago at Art Basel HK as we ping ponged between booths. A roving curator stopped by - last I saw her was at a Hong Kong Starbucks - she was immersed in planning a show. I remember having table envy - it's impossible to find a seat most of the time.



(Working on Beijing Being)

All this activity - connections, comings and goings - affects me. It's distracting and enabling at the same time. It makes me consider the variables that mold my work. Among them must be place, culture, history and study. Art is autobiographical, yet needs to be transcendent. How am I the same, and how am I different? What have I absorbed?

What can I add? What is integral to me?

OUTSIDE IN / INSIDE OUT

I figure that I can only answer my questions through my art. In fact, my written diary may be redundant. It's the work that tells the true story of any artist's nature.

So what is my nature? Han Ren? I am Chinese, and I am other things too. I have studied art in an Eastern and Western setting. I live both lives. I value the beauty of line and abstraction, but am drawn to the emotive power of form - a revised form moving forward with the tradition and shaping the evolution of ink art. It's a strong art, not for the faint of heart, in the "veins" of a nation and its people.

In discussions with Wei Ligang this comes up. He says "your ink work is even more Chinese than you are". I can see the deep sense of connection in your calligraphy - in your simplicity yet strength of line.

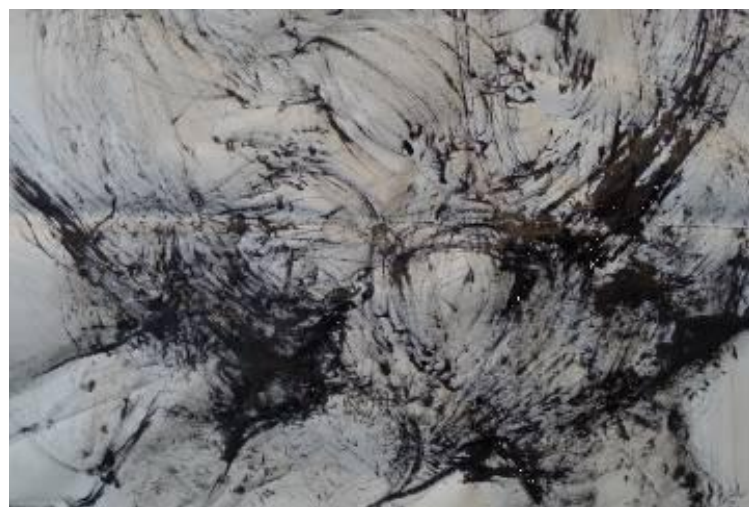


(Beijing Being)

I work emphasizing lines and texture in the more figurative "BEIJING Being". The medium is Chinese ink and acrylic. In this piece I use the ink in a confined but unexpected way - the ink's relationship to the paper is direct - it's a moment with a Chinese brush making exact lines. It references strength, surety, a cultural icon, a raw form of recognizable portraiture. There is a formative abstraction of figure as I represent trying to break free from boundaries. The subject is contained in confining strokes as his smoke breaks free.



(Heart of Stone)



(Detail of Heart of Stone)

In "Heart of Stone" I continue to look inside - still with form - to represent through strong line the essence of us all. But that essence is also as in Shan Shui millennia old that connect us with nature - our heart - rocks and roots - roots of existence tying us together.



(Breaking Blue)

"Breaking Blue" is a statement of freedom- freedom from boundaries of form. It is the energy of Chinese ink combined with the texture of acrylic to create a new vision. It is calligraphic in its rhythm and movement referring to water and natural forms - it is again for the love of Shan Shui with the bravura of future ink.



(Works at the studio)

EPILOGUE

Time and place - always defining our lives, but never staying static. I seem to leave almost as soon as I arrive, but the sensibility continues. Beijing Being isn't just the place - it's shared mutual experiences, ideas, connections and being an artist.

I can't adequately express my thanks to Wei Ligang for his mentorship and friendship and for inviting me to work at his studio in Beijing. There are a few people that will always stand out in your life - he is one of them.

I also am fortunate to work with 3812 Contemporary Art Projects's Calvin Hui and Mark Peaker. I greatly appreciate their guidance, encouragement and support. Art is essential to us all!



(Essential metamorphosis)



(Detail of Essential Metamorphosis)