

JETSAM & FLOTSAM

A solo exhibition of the works of Yue Yuan
Curated by Franck Balland

July 09th - August 13th 2022

Dear Yue,

I hope you're well since we last wrote to each other. As for me, coming back to Paris and the cool air (which I hope will stick around for a while), did me a lot of good. Heat literally fries my neurons.

Sorry I took so long to send you this text. You probably didn't know, but I'm a very slow writer. I need to start over several times before finding what seems to be the right entrance, the axis on which to consider things from a position that doesn't weigh upon one's work or that isn't too austere for readers – it goes without saying that I don't always find it... In spite of everything, I increasingly avoid a generic approach, and make do with what the proposition inspires me, or what I feel it seeks to create.

In this instance, I've decided to write you a letter. Admittedly in a particular style, since it's not a letter addressed to you alone: I'm publically addressing several thoughts to you by this means (and I'm not inventing anything, it's been done before, as you know). You may ask: why this form and not another? I'd like to reply that the maritime aspect, which you allude to in several places in this exhibition, encouraged me to adopt this type of correspondence, but I'm not sure that this romantic parabola (vaguely romantic, indeed) really interests me. Let's say that I see a way of prolonging an exchange based on the pieces exhibited in the gallery: stretching out the echo of your questions by introducing other remarks in return.

Is this comprehensible? Let's take the title, for example, that you explained to me when we last met. I wasn't acquainted with the maritime signification, and even the reference to the two moray eels in *The Little Mermaid* didn't ring a bell. You told me (and it's my turn now to spread the information to the readers of these lines) that each work designates a specific type of rubbish. *Flotsam* derives from the verb to float, and qualifies objects which have surfaced after an accident or a shipwreck. These objects have been thrown overboard without any *initial intention*. The nuance is essential, because *jetsam*, on the contrary, means that the objects were deliberately thrown into the sea ("thrown", the stem of the word is still there), to try to lighten a damaged vessel, for example. This nuance is essential from a juridical point of view, because the matter is totally different. *Flotsam*, as remains of the accident, can be reclaimed by the owners of the vessel if the objects are recuperated by other persons. *Jetsam*, since the crew deliberately threw them overboard in order to save the craft, belong to those who recuperate them from the sea (if they do indeed intend to keep them, of course). I wonder if you were familiar with that particular point and, if the exhibition could consist of objects belonging, in your view, to one or the other of these categories: *flotsam* and *jetsam*. (I also thought that if maritime law was applied on land, it would be the end of capitalism, and the beginning of something that certainly wouldn't be much more cheery – but that's another story).

This would mean, in any case, that certain pieces had floated onshore here, if they really are *flotsam*. Personally, I have to admit that I don't really believe in this story. I think there is a form of honesty in your work that excludes this type of gymnastics: who would be convinced that all or a part of what is here is the result of a happy aquatic drama bailed out by the gallery? To the best of my knowledge (and please let me know if I'm wrong), I don't believe either that you are referring to concepts in order to form a décor. The small model at the entrance of the exhibition makes it clear: space, here, is constructed, materially and symbolically, and yet it's still a model, which is less formed by the works than by the place that receives them.

What I believe, in reality, is that the place (or broadly speaking, the exhibition space) allows you to highlight certain situations that, in different circumstances, would go unnoticed. It is indeed something else to store empty wrapping material in an immaculate space, designed to receive a priori precious objects, than it is to store them in the yellow recycling bin. You have to admit that it provides a certain form of elevation. However, if it's a "transfiguration of the banal", as proposed by Danto, this reveals to us less the intrinsic qualities of this scrap than the currents they followed to arrive here (the maritime metaphor once again), or drifted towards. And so the title given to this exhibition seems to reveal that which, outside the space dedicated to the monstration of the propositions you create, falls into the categories of choice or non-choice, or accidents: a way of making art that is not reduced to the cloistered space of

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the studio but, faithful to what constitutes any daily activity, is based on the given aspects of the many unnoticeable parameters.

I would like, before finishing, to go back to the notion of belief, barely mentioned before when it came to “transfiguration.” On my behalf, remembering several precedent propositions (one that consisted of stealing a wish, or a coin, in the Trevi fountain, for example, or exchanging a lemon from a Carrefour supermarket by one from a Monoprix supermarket), I feel that it occupies a central position in your practice. We can immediately eliminate the religious dimension of the term and point towards a system of thoughts consisting of attributing a particular power to a thing which, in the case of your work, is often perfectly ordinary. You alternatively (and sometimes simultaneously) assert the factice quality of this belief, as much as its almost sacred dimension. And you question this notion once again, in the basement, through your collection of imperfect objects by precisely evaluating their defects, reaching towards the quest of the perfect outcome. Belief in an industrial production that perfectly conforms to the ideal it proposes is confronted here with the logic of the product flow, in which every factory-fresh object will necessarily reach the shops. It is gratifying, and I think you will agree with me, that places of art allow this broken promise to be shown – and this failure, since it is not situated in the established way of doing things, is the unique reason of their added value as works of art. It seems to me that we are grasping the double movement here once again.

That's all for now. Feel free to make any useful corrections. Until then, I wish you an excellent preparation. We'll meet again very soon.

Yours,

Franck

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