

Essay for the exhibition catalog

“Lin Yan – Echoes in the Moment”

China 2000 Fine Art, New York, 2006

## Tradition as Visual Memory

Rice paper and ink are the basic elements of traditional Chinese painting. Lin Yan, however, infuses these rudiments of tradition with a new identity and re-casts the roles of rice paper and ink. She returns to a fundamental understanding and exploration of traditional materials by removing the act of painting and brushstrokes. Her 2005 series can be divided into two groups. In the first, she pastes layers of plain rice paper of differing sizes, textures, and colors onto a large plaster mold that is cast from the metal floor of her studio loft, creating a richly illuminated collage of complex textures and colors. In the second, she applies rice paper that has been soaked in ink to the plaster molds. From a distance, they appear to be pieces of black painted canvas, but closer inspection reveals a fascinating visual interplay between ink, texture, fibers, and subtle variations of color. Inspired by the traditional dialogue between ink and paper in classical Chinese painting, Lin offers her own interpretation of ink on paper, raising the question: can the visual memory of these timeless elements sustain the tradition of classical Chinese painting itself?

Borne out of her personal history as an artist who has lived in Beijing, France, and now resides in New York, Lin's art is not confined to her cultural identity as a Chinese woman; rather, it is essentially contemporary in its sophisticated interrogation of the use of traditional materials. She creates work in response to her own deeply ingrained exposure to ink and paper. Traces of minimalism that suffused her art in the 1990s can still be detected in her recent work. Lin, however, has now shifted her emphasis onto the theme of visual memory. Delicately abstract details: varying shades of ink and the intricate textural landscapes that emerge out of the paper's fibers reveal Lin's departure from pure minimalism to her exploration of the aesthetic depths and the cultural richness of these emblems of traditional Chinese painting.

Lin's elegantly subtle ink and rice paper creations further investigate gender roles within the elements themselves. The delicacy of rice paper and the flowing nature of ink allude to distinctly feminine qualities, which are juxtaposed against the masculinity of the rivet-like raised dots that imitate the appearance of metal joinery. Within this fusion of femininity and masculinity, or yin and yang, which has been apparent in Lin's work since the late 1980s, she instills a powerful sense of cultural nostalgia. The raised rivet-like dots are reminiscent of the patterned relief found on the doorknobs of Beijing's ancient buildings, which are quickly disappearing into the encroaching maze of modern buildings. Lin's art strives to

preserve Beijing's vanishing physical history as she invokes the memory of its traditional architecture through her sculptural compositions.

Lin's work transcends the boundaries of being Western or Chinese despite the fact that her art follows two generations of modern artists in her own family. Her grandfather, Pang Xunqin returned to Shanghai from Paris in 1930 to introduce modern art to China. After years of creating art outside of China, Lin, like her grandfather, returns to elemental symbols of Chinese cultural tradition. She transforms ink and paper within her immediate geography, whether it is the physical space of her studio's metal floors in New York or the infinite space of displaced memories infused with Beijing's traditional architecture, to establish a contemporary tradition through her poignant depiction of cultural memory.

Zhijian Qian

3. 2006

Zhijian Qian: Art historian and critic, Ph. D. candidate, New York University

作为视觉记忆的传统：林延的近作

- 钱志坚

林延从2005年开始的新作品，使用的是单纯的中国绘画的元素：宣纸和墨，但她使用的方式几乎与绘画无关。这些作品分为两组，一组是以不同尺寸、纹理、纤维和色泽的素宣纸层层覆盖地裱糊于她从工作室的钢质地板上翻制的石膏模具之上，所呈现的效果是特定的光线下宣纸的质地、纤维、形状和色泽之间，经她安排之后的美妙视觉关系。另一组是经过墨汁湿润过的不同尺寸和纹理的宣纸同样层层覆盖地裱贴于石膏模具之上。作品悬挂时，远看似乎漆黑一片，近看则宣纸的不同质地和色泽所造成的丰富的墨色效果，其美妙程度绝不亚于白色一组的作品。两组作品源出于一种关系：墨之于纸，这也是伟大的中国绘画传统中一个备受重视的问题。这些作品以雕塑的制作方式使粗造的地面肌理和排列的铆钉在宣纸上得到呈现。虽然在技术上看似与水墨画无关，但在观念上恰恰是延续了对这一问题的探讨。但林延似乎在为我们提供探讨这一问题的不同角度，也就是说，我们是否可以换一个角度来看待墨与纸之间的关系。她同时也在为我们提出问题：我们取益于中国绘画传统的方式是否可以脱离笔墨的关系？对传统的承续是否可以纯化为对某些元素的视觉记忆？

但是，林延显然并不是在中国的文化语境中探讨这一问题，也不是只关注中国艺术传统的问题。与来自不同文化背景但长期居住在纽约的很多艺术家一样，她无法遗忘她早期艺术教育中的母语文化艺术因素，但她同时又不可能漠视纽约这个交叉文化艺术中心不断上演着的一切，当然还有她在法国和美国所接受的艺术教育。但她对母语文化艺术因素的借用，并不象其他几位纽约的中国艺术家那样比较直接了当地标明自己的文化身份，而是将它融入对当代艺术的回应。她在90年代后期的作品中借取的极少主义的艺术方式，仍然是这组新作品的主旨。所不同的是，林延不再刻意追求熟悉的中国建筑因素所提示的文化记忆，而是通过加入更为抽象的微妙细节，使观者在迷恋于东方视觉之美的同时，忘却极少主义的存在。

如果说林延对宣纸和墨色的微妙处理，在很大程度上透露出很多的阴柔之美，那作品中令人想到连接金属板块的铆钉结构，则无疑是在阴柔之中楔入一种阳刚之气。这种阴柔与阳刚的结合，其实是林延从80年末到现在的作品中的一贯特点。这些铆钉也容易让人联想到京城古建筑上的门钉，因而与林延90年代以北京建筑的独特局部结构为母题的作品具有连贯性。林延对建筑因素的兴趣，使她对回访北京时所经历的古建筑迅速被现代建筑所无情取代更为敏感。中国现代化过程中对传统文化遗产的毁坏，有如强行抹去人们对特定历史的记忆。这对久居海外而特别重视传统遗存的人来说，其遗憾只能在作品中得到补偿。

林延的艺术追求，多少折射出了其家族先辈们的影响。她母亲庞涛偏向现代主义的态度，无疑直接为她打开了通向现代主义艺术的大门。而她从祖父庞薰琴的艺术中所受到的裨益也是极其重要的。庞薰琴是在中国最早倡导现代主义艺术的先驱人物之一，他在上世纪30年代和决澜社成员的活动，以及40年代致力于在中国的文化语境中调整现代主义艺术追求所获得的成就，为现代主义艺术在80年代重新被中国人所认识和接受，做出了重要的贡献。与庞薰琴一样，林延在经历了追求对西方艺术的理解和掌握之后，开始重新体味自身文化传统中的宝贵根源。他们之间的另一个相似之处是，他们并不在乎自己的作品被称为中国艺术还是西洋艺术。因为重要的是，他们做作艺术家所喜欢做的事情。

2006年3月

钱志坚：艺术史家，批评家。纽约大学博士候选人<sup>3</sup>