

Artist Statement

by Lily Honglei

Lily Honglei's recent works *Shadow Play* and *Sunken Garden* explore the new significance of art in the digital age. The two interconnected projects examine postdigital visual culture by raising questions about apparent dichotomies such as form and narrative as well as traditional media and digital technology. These inquiries revolve around the theme of the inclusiveness of the postdigital, and considers the implications for the creative power of artists and the efficacy of artworks. The projects engage with these questions through a sensory discourse that takes on a variety of immersive forms.

The *Shadow Play* project commenced in 2014 with the objective of digitally visualizing the artists' investigation into a complex socio-economic reality--the process of urbanization in China. The product, which is a culmination of several years of experimentation, integrates thoroughly-researched narrative storytelling with the sensory capabilities of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technologies. Over the trajectory of its development, the project has grown into a multiplatform project interweaving VR, AR, painting, and Chinese folk art forms. The artists created numerous visual compositions with traditional Chinese shadow puppetry motifs and transplanted them into a 3D virtual world platform, where the main narrative--the tragic tale of the village chief's family--unfolds. Lily Honglei subsequently produced a series of large-scale paintings that they dub *postdigital fine art* based on imagery in the virtual world. In *Sunken Garden*, the process becomes reversed: the artists first produced a series of physical paintings and then rearranged the painted elements in cyberspace to construct a virtual garden that serves as a sensory discourse on endangered species in North America.

In light of the artists' interest in comparative cultural studies, both projects take on an expansive scope of inquiry in order to engage with environmental issues across societies. While *Shadow Play* comments upon the relentless urbanization in China by portraying the city as a gigantic maze with no exit, *Sunken Garden* presents the natural world as a garden in need of conservation and nurture. The virtual environment of the latter

project puts endangered species into the limelight of critical consideration, and at the same time raises the aesthetic issue of restoring human connection with the primordial inspirational powers of nature.

Finally, through their practice in both new media and traditional art forms such as painting and folk media, the artists have come upon a stream of creative vitality that comes forth from exchanges between the two and gives new life to old visual forms. In this sense, both *Shadow Play* and *Sunken Garden* resonate with the theme of Renaissance 2020, a pioneering exhibition that illuminates the world of art with its forward-looking optimism in the midst of a pandemic.

Credits:

Lily Honglei is an artist collective with three team members: Xiyang Yang, Honglei Li and He Li

Shadow Play project receives support from New York Foundation for the Arts, New York State Council on the Arts, Queens Council on the Arts, and New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc. It is a recipient of Creative Capital Awards in Visual Arts, US.