Xu Bing: Art Beyond the Kármán Line

The Kármán Line is a line that separates two completely different spatial fields, our Earth and outer space. The Earth’s natural and human ecology is protected and isolated at the same time, limiting our perception of space, and sealing off our actions and thoughts. Crossing the “Kármán Line of Art” then, a new field filled with infinite possibilities and the unknown awaits us …

In the early days of human civilization, when people held an insurmountable fear of the “heavens,” our predecessors left for us records of culture rich with imagination, having crossed the “Kármán Line of Art” in their own fantastical way. In light of the upcoming space age, people seem to have hastily changed their stance from being in awe of the heavens, and aerospace scientists have begun their relentless exploration of deep space. Within the context of the milestones achieved so far in space exploration, the artist Xu Bing coincidentally became an explorer of space art, and thus has led to the artistic practice “Xu Bing: Art Beyond the Kármán Line.”

The moment the art rocket was named “Xu Bing Tianshu” marked Xu Bing’s voluntary choice to cross the “Kármán Line of Art” and set off for the profound unknown of space. This could have been a journey in vain, leaving us with only the shadow of the artist travelling farther away from us. Xu Bing earnestly hopes to harness the energy of space as a means of enlightenment, and to use the methodologies of art to decipher the code of the universe. His artistic practice agitates the gravitational vortex between the two fields of space exploration and art, in which he is confused and disoriented while constantly searching for new coordinates and concepts of perception.

As China has become one of the world’s leading countries in aerospace science and technology, Chinese contemporary artists have the opportunity to seek and build an orbit into space art, triggering a convergent reaction of space with space art and reflecting on the limitations of the Earth and humanity in a cosmological way. This field of space thus gradually penetrates into the dimensional space of the earth, reconstructing the thinking model of the “Art Beyond the Kármán Line” through the energy, speed, time, and depth of space, initiating the reflection and reconstruction of concepts, consciousness, and ethics.

“Xu Bing: Art Beyond the Kármán Line” is an experimental site for the artist’s exploration of space art. Along with the audience, we are trying to enter into this site woven by the artist, this space in which the fulcrum of judgement has been lost. Together with the artist, we ask the question of who determines where the boundary of space art lies, how to fight for artworks’ right to speak in the field of space, and where art’s mission into deep space lies …

Yan Shijie