Angling

Curator: Hou Hanru

Artist： Shen Yuan

Opening: November 1, 2022

Dates: November 2, 2022 – February 26, 2023

Organised by: Red Brick Art Museum

Shen Yuan’s solo exhibition “Angling” is set to launch on the 2nd of November at Red Brick Art Museum. Curated by Hou Hanru, this exhibition showcases six of her installation works, five of which were created between 2019 and 2022, which was a significant period in the artist’s personal life. The works on show resort to scenes of everyday life and intimate details of the body. They appear open, soft, fluid, and almost shapeless, with hundreds of “floating” and quasi invisible elements...

Shen Yuan sets up the seemingly modest but central work Pêcher l’air de Paris 2020 (Angling l’Air de Paris) (2020) as the milestone of the entire parcours. Obviously, she has been inspired by Duchamp’s tricks of visual-linguistic puns and word-games, notably in his well-known works Air de Paris (1919) and Fresh Widow (1920). Duchamp’s works are linguistic and psychological traps, creating an eternal myth of perception/translation/misunderstanding/ “mis-production” (forgery) of cultural objects and meanings.

Pêcher l'air de Paris 2020 is a homage to her lifelong partner Huang Yong Ping, quoting his The Saint learns from a spider to weave a cobweb( Le sage suivant l'exemple de l'araignée tissant sa toile圣人师蜘蛛而结网 )(1994), which resorted to a spider weaving cobweb as a master, shadowing Duchamp’s words, as a “homage” to him. Overlapping references to Duchamp and Huang Yong Ping, Shen Yuan carries her work further towards another entrapping game of words. It also echoing Samuel Beckett’s “Waiting for Godot (En attendant Godot)” (1948-49); Shen Yuan is angling, waiting for a fish to bite the bait. But there is perhaps no fishes at all… It is exactly in this state of endless waiting that one decides to become an artist, and art becomes interesting…

Mattéo et moi 2019-2021 is Shen Yuan's reaction to feelings associated with self-imposed seclusion after losing a loved one. She collaborated with teenage artist Mattéo, presenting their respective experiences of "self-seclusion". This work is presented in a confined space, with Mattéo's paintings displayed on the front wall and the photos he took of Huang Yongping’s and Shen Yuan's studios on the right and left, while in the middle, there is an installation of a cage created by Shen Yuan, who was inspired by images in Mattéo's paintings. Shen gave a live performance of “scrubbing one’s cage” inside this installation during her exhibition in Rome. This work evokes empathy and role reversal, provoking the audience to reconsider the definitions of "artist" and "artistic creation."

Fragments de mémoire 2019 is based on a hairbrush, an object that can stay with us throughout our lives. In the morning, it is used to comb away the dregs of last night's dreams and to open up new lines of thought. Dreams are like the new shoots of memory that break through the ground and turn into fragments, falling as lightly as if from the scalp. This work was created by Shen Yuan at the invitation of Eric Lefebvre, director of the Cernuschi Museum, and displayed in the gallery of their ancient collection to evoke our thoughts about time and memory.

Gazelles 1990-2020 is taken from the name of a student residence in Provence, France, which was Shen Yuan’s first destination with Yongping after arriving in France in 1990. This work used a double pillow made of wax, which is lightly framed on one side by the inner iron spring of a single Simmons mattress. In the centre of the iron frame is a female hand made of bronze, on which rests a dragonfly made of bronze wire, around which several other dragonflies also pass. The work tells the story of a past, but also expresses the mystery of time between heaven and earth.

The work La Jardin was created in 2017; it’s in the shape of a woman's corset, and was cut in two to create two spaces. The upper part of the corset is a closed space, and the lower half is a garden-like space in which the viewer can move through. Here the soft and fine lines making up the net-structures in other works are replaced by hard steel wires. They form a corset to tight up a woman’s body… however, natural lives refuse to be eliminated by the industrialized, masculine materials and structures and thrive “anarchically” from within to form a vivacious garden, recalling not only revenge of agricultural life in our time, but also an outcry for the vitality of everything “female.”

Dérive 2020 presents scenes of three transcontinental cruise boats (World Dream, Princess Diamond and Westerdam), with thousands of passengers locked-down in the sea for weeks due to Covid-19 infections. Happy dreams of global travels for many are now turned into nightmares. Interpersonal relationships decline, as people are guided by fear and rejection, and the path of life can change direction at any given moment. One should ask: is drifting – nomadism, or aimlessly wandering, the only way to face our time?