

SEPTEMBER 11, 2017

LÍ WEI'S CELLAR AND GARRET DEBUTS IN NY: A Q&A WITH THE ACCLAIMED ARTIST



© Lí Wei, Courtesy Klein Sun Gallery. Photo by Xiao Yun.

Now through September 2nd, Klein Sun Gallery will be showcasing *Cellar and Garret*, Lí Wei's first solo exhibition in North America. Applying Gaston Bachelard's elaboration on Carl Jung's psychoanalytic studies on space as a base point, Lí Wei's work demonstrates a seeming cellar and garret, unleashing an unorthodox conversation between the viewer's internalized desire and external facade of hypocrisy.

Whereas over-picturesqueness in a house can conceal its intimacy, Lí Wei's *Cellar and Garret* is a playground of direct collision of thoughts and beliefs. Bachelard believes a crucial role for a house is to host daydreams, and Lí Wei's exhibition, *Cellar and Garret*, will become the most tension-packed daydream delivering an anthropo-cosmic shiver. This daydream feels surreal but honest and exciting. The gallery is like waking up staring at the beams and ceiling at home; a void filled with reverberation and questions. We touched base with Lí Wei about his ground breaking new exhibit and his artistic evolution over the years.

Everyone is influenced by their surroundings. What are some things that have shaped you and this series? How has China had an influence on your work?

Of course, I changed this exhibition a lot since the beginning of the plan to the specific installation. With the deepening of involvement in this country, everything in the plan had been changed, until I was satisfied with the present state. Time is one of the factors that changed my plan. I stayed in New York for one month, if I had stayed here a little longer, maybe this series would have been very different. China has a great influence on me, the chaos and absurd relationship between humans of that place are a good training for me and it let me become calm and firm.

Do you think that this series speaks universally or could it be digested differently depending on the audience? Do you think that your series will be understood differently in New York than in other places in North America?

I never presuppose how my exhibition should be interpreted because this is not something I can control. Basically, I am not interested in things I cannot control. In fact, I am very clear that the audience, that is, many people, will understand my work based on their own logic and experience. And this is the lovely place of contemporary art—it's more fairness in some way, viewers can approach the work without the artistic evaluation to prove their "knowledge" level.

Where does your own curiosity and interest about disconnect and the subconscious stem from?

It basically originated from dealing with people. In the entire biosphere on earth, only humans deceive themselves and their peers with lies that they considered as clever in order to achieve their own purpose. Since I was a child, I liked observing other people while they were talking around me and analyzing the true meaning behind the conversations. For example, when my mother asked my father what he would like to have for dinner, her real meaning, which I knew very well, was she was tired of cooking. I also analyze myself. Whenever I say something, I analyze my real purpose after saying such words. I am still doing this now.





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How do you find your inspiration or transitions in themes of your work?

I never believed in the existence of inspiration. The word is not sincere; most of the people use it to mislead others. In fact, people use such a word because of the role of the subconscious of laziness. I am more convinced of the method or theme that comes from the meticulous analysis based on strict logic.

Though they live in separate spaces, is it possible for the cellar and the garret coexist or exist as one?

In some sense, they are coexisting as one. In the exhibition, I divided them clearly in two parts on purpose, to make them be against each other in the physical space. In fact, at the inner level, they have never been separated. This is the foundation of the absurdity of the human world.





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As an artist, you are someone placed in the spotlight, how would you describe your personal relationship to centrality and hypocrisy?

I do not think the artist is a privileged class in the world. I am a person who has all the defining characteristics of being human, but I will try to separate the relationship between personal emotion and my work. Personal emotion is a very bad thing, which will lead everything to hypocrisy. As my answer to the first question: I will analyze myself, I just try to make myself clear about what I am doing, and to be honest to myself. This is my request to myself. And I will try to rule out the impact from the outside world, so that I am in a state, which I know what I want and why.

Is it possible to absorb your art and intent by viewing your exhibition in reverse? How would the experience be altered?

Even with the order I created in the exhibition, I do not think people will be able to know my true intention. It can be read as: I do not have any hope of tacit understanding between humans, which is the root cause of variety misunderstanding and even wars. Moreover, individuals will only see what they want to see, and block out all the parts they reject. For that reason, I did not assume that they are able to absorb my intent. So I chose a very tough way: set the "cordon," commonly used by customs or government to guide viewers. I understand that people are not willing to choose in their subconscious, but need a clear instruction, which is what rulers and administrators like to see.

What has been your favorite exhibition or series of yours thus far?

That's hard to say. Usually, I will like one a lot but suddenly feel that it is worthless.

What sacrifices or compromises have you had to make for your work?

I have never sacrificed or compromised in my work. Most sacrifices and compromises are derived from the limitations of real-life factors; it is another embodiment of the real limitations of human beings, so it makes sense.

How has your artistic practice evolved since the start of your career?

It comes from my exploration and analysis of myself and other human beings. There is no one who doesn't evolve or change, so the attributes and presentation of my work always change. I am disgusted with form. The emergence of any form means death at the same time. You will find out that no one form of life is in general if carefully explored. Any generalization by form is disrespect, laziness and irresponsibility.

Could you say that the garret is a cellar? They both seem to have their own desires and problems. Is it possible that they are different versions of the same experience?

I agree with that. Actually, I answered this in the second question.

As this is your first North American Exhibition, did you feel any pressures in preparing for it versus your other exhibition experiences?

Usually, I will not be affected by location. Preparing and installing exhibitions is my favorite job. The pressure is a very good thing for exhibitions and artworks, because an exhibition or artwork without any pressure is very shallow. There are some pressures from the real-life factors, such as during the actual operation and implementation process of work, the regional trouble will appear constantly, and I am very pressed for time etc. But those can be resolved in the end.

Cellar and Garret is on view at Klein Sun Gallery, 525 W. 22nd Street, New York, 10011, until September 2nd.

TAGS

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