

GALERIE FONSWELTERS

Evelyn Taocheng Wang

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Anna Goetz: Fabrics, garments and their particular cultural history play a central role in your work – you have appropriated them to critically reflect on them as signifiers of a (admired) culture – “a projection of European sophistication and luxury from a female Asian perspective.”¹

Evelyn Taocheng Wang: I understand fabrics and garments symbolically. They are like the color of buildings, like an adjective describing its referent. They not only serve an aesthetic purpose but generate a mood or atmosphere. Thus, also fabrics serve to give the impression of something. No matter western or eastern fashion history, garments have always been a means to express affiliation to concepts of identity, however, these signifiers are culturally specific and transform over time.

AG: Apart from working with fabrics processed as clothing, you have been using plain fabrics to separate settings and/or as display modules. For this new series of works Er (2020), however, you made quilt-like banners.

ETW: I repurposed offcuts from the many Cheongsam dresses that I have been sewing. I am fascinated by how this dress represents the cultural transformation in China: Until 1949, the beginning of the communist People's Republic China, they were worn exclusively by upper-middle-class ladies and intellectuals. They adopted an early form of the dress that emerged from a traditional men's garment as a gesture to revolt against traditional values, calling instead for a democratic and egalitarian society based on Western standards, including the emancipation and education of women. However, the Communist government banned the Cheongsam, because it was considered bourgeois. Lately, since Chinese Nationalism, these „traditional“ dresses are fashionable again – the president's wife, as well as normal housewives, wear it. The Cheongsams that I sewed are not perfect, I am not a professional tailor, but tailoring dresses gives me an understanding of how to trace and comprehend a human body, a body that is constantly changing and in motion. The fabrics I used here are imitations of natural materials, like fake leather and fur, or UV Protective Compression Tricot imprinted with an animal print for example.

AG: You describe fabrics as means to give an impression or express an affiliation to a culture. By using textiles that pretend to be another material, you double that effect – the fabrics used “to make an impression to make an impression”... So you somehow travesty the potential of fabrics?

ETW: This is true. It is playful gesture, even though it is a serious act of expression.

AG: These patched banners are base as well as frame for ink drawings on rice paper, delineations of words and word fragments.

¹ Liang Khong, Critic's Guide: Amsterdam, Frieze online, 24 November 2017

ETW: Like imitating the brush strokes of a masterpiece, I hand-copied/traced other people's handwriting – how they form words – like tailoring is way of tracing and comprehending a body. I liberated the words from their (con-) text so they loose their contextual connotation. After they are painted with many layers of ink, they turn into images.

AG: Your process is like a painterly approximation to the shape of the letters and words, and perhaps their meaning?

ETW: Exactly, it is like learning to write by abstracting the words to the shape of their letters. I want to question and destabilize the fixed connection between words their related images, the signified. I want to explore an open interpretation of words and the parts they are composed of. English was my first foreign language. Then I started learning German, shortly before I moved to Frankfurt, and in recent years, I have been learning Dutch and also Japanese. Learning a language is a big challenge for me. I keep telling myself to be an attentive listener, to pay attention to how people express themselves – acquiring a language means to learn about the different ways to utilize the “same” language. In Belgium, for example, people express their ideas more traditionally; they use longer and more sophisticated formulations, unlike Dutch people from the North whose way of speaking is very direct and rather pragmatic. Although languages follow their respective “logic” based on a set of grammatical rules, they are employed in different manners. So by learning a new language, one has to find a new voice, new ways of expressing oneself, and perhaps even to construct a new identity.

[Anna Goetz]