

# Successful Breakthrough in Honglei Art Life

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## Abstract:

“I like, the devil paradise, pick red peony pattern paint box, Persian fine painting, luxuriant tight clusters of leaves, song dynasty brocade, nicola church, cloud ire winding silk fabric, Brussels, black paint screen, meticulous garden, song Huizong gorgeous feather, taj mahara, female history of worms, Hu Kaiwen ink ingot exquisite print, exhibition son of green water, the tang dynasty women's gold and silver hairpin, everything to elaborate. In addition, I also like, John Cage, Japan, iPhone, spiral breakwater of Utah Salt Lake, Japanese school, Tadao Ando, poor art, Lang church, bamboo chopsticks, Debeck thin line, Yujian Yunshan, pastoral persimmon, wide words, simple sense of emptiness. If I look closer, I have two places in my mind, at the same time of storage, often do not let each other, one is affectation (love and self-abuse), the other is reserved (clean and decadent).”

## Keywords:

Honglei, Contemporary Photography, Chinese Traditional Culture

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## 1. First Quarter. Subversion and Acupuncture One - Take the Chinese Box As An Example

Freud believed that art was a mild anesthesia of pain. After returning to Changzhou from the noisy and impetuous Beijing, Hong Lei devoted himself to the design work of advertising to temporarily forget the depression of the ideal and loss. After the heavy work, he still insisted on artistic creation for psychological comfort.

In 1996, Hong Lei accidentally saw the works of the American concept artist Joseph Cornell (1903-1993-1972). Joseph Cornell was famous for his box installation works, which presents the chaos of childlike innocence and melancholy; the conflict of spiritual pursuit and perceptual impulse; the dislocation of memory and time and space, and the artistic style is mainly surrealism and abstract expressionism. Hong lei deeply inspired, he in 95 in the Forbidden City in the song dynasty courtyard body painting flowers and birds painting page subversive ideas into practice, so please students Dong Wensheng (then running a photo studio) with a camera to record his installation and named “China box”, the seemingly grand title is actually carrying hong lei personal memory.

Hong Lei believes that “space cannot be measured, because each individual's imagination has its own independent world.” Hong Lei filled his imagination in the brightly painted box. In the box, there are pearls, fragrant powder rouge, silk, broken gems, bird broken wings, broken flowers, sad and helpless, showing a sad and sad beauty. A small square painting of the song dynasty is pasted in the center of the lid, and the surrounding edges are eroded by time: dots of green mildew, “I understand them all as cultural specimens, completely declining. So there is mildew on the box.” The objects in the lacquer box come from Hong Lei's childhood memory of Grandm's dowry, which never leads us to wonder whether the vermilion box carries his personal memory. “The China Box is my early aesthetic and subconscious, and all the things that were resisted and suppressed before broke out.” The box is not so much Hong Lei's imagination as his memory, the rest of the imagination is left to the audience. At the bottom of the Song painting is a line of crimson traditional Chinese characters: “My body does not belong to me.” This “I” may refer to the dead bird in the box, or it may refer to his dead father? Or maybe you mean staring at you? Behind this poetry is the revelation of subversion and acupuncture, a feeling that will persist in his subsequent works. Why choose a dead bird instead of a live bird? The dead bird in the box does not cause any visual discomfort, like a quiet termination of the waiting time after mild anesthesia, so that death is not a terrible thing. In 1984's death, his father's death in 1984 became Hong Lei's life. In his diary, “I think the issue of death is still the pursuit, such as reverence for death, fear and worship.” We can't help but guess that dead birds may represent Hong Lei's understanding of death and self-liberation. Who knows anything about that? This “dead bird” becomes a surrealist image, like an unsolved philosophical question, and all the questions remain on it, and because of this, it makes the painted square space unfathomable and unmeasurable.

The birth of China Box also marks the formation of Hong Lei's visual language or the determination of an artistic style of subversion and acupuncture. “Once I found my favorite thing, I tried to destroy it.” When in 1995, he saw the exquisite Song Dynasty flower and bird paintings in 1995, Hong Lei began to create with dead birds as the main body, but the lack of support from visual experience. The subversion of tradition has always been the spirit of avant-garde art, not to mention that Hong Lei's subversion has a clear doubt and ironic attitude. Just as he said, “I want to prick the tradition”. When Hong Lei borrowed his camera to record the China Box, the visual language he had been looking for showed the “subversion and acupuncture”. When 2-dimensional space transforms to 3-dimensional space, “subversion and acupuncture” is more real. Roland Bart once mentioned: “real photography should have acupuncture”, memory is wonderful, shallow memory as a breeze blowing your hair, deep memory like a mouthful of boiling water from the tip of the tongue to your abdomen, seems to be a moment of feeling, is a continuation of sense of this continuation with certain power, the power from individual memories of the past. Roland Bart sees “once here is there” (That-has-been) as the main essence of photography: “I must never deny that something in the photo was ever there, and that it contains two positions,” “the truth and the past”. The memory of the past can produce what Bart calls “thorn” (Punctum), deeper and deeper into our memory and soul.

“The China Box” was highly recognized by the photographer Rong Rong and the famous critic Shimako, and was published in the third issue of “New Photography” in 1996. The New Photography is the first avant-garde art colleague journal (private colative journal) specializing in photography in China, co-edited and published by

Rong Rong and Liu Zheng. In October of the following year, his works participated in the exhibition of “New Image Concept Photography Exhibition” planned by Shimako, which was the first comprehensive display of Chinese concept photography. The understanding of “concept photography” we can quote Klin Robbins (Corinne Robins): “Image is no longer a reproduction of reality, but a creation to show what we feel but not necessarily what we see. Concept photographers focus on creating scenes for their cameras from the perspective of their inner vision. [1]” Curator Shimako later commented on Hong Lei: “The local generation and independence of conceptual photography is an important representation of Chinese art history in the 1990s. In this context, Hong Lei is undoubtedly a pioneering image writer.” Li Xianting said in the exhibition: “Although it is called the concept photography exhibition, the real photography significance may be Hong Lei's photography works. Most of the others are behavior and other things, which has nothing to do with photography.” I do not agree with Shimako's view, photography is Hong Lei's successful breakthrough, does not deny. However, photography plays a medium role here. Writing down his concept of a “Chinese box” through the camera tool does not essentially belong to the category of conceptual photography.

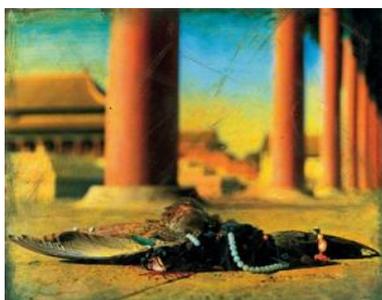
For Hong Lei, photography is a personal breakthrough. Breakthrough originally refers to the behavior of getting rid of the status quo and breaking some constraints, in order to seek a new way out. Frustrated in the painting, Kirxica and Baselitz had already completed Hong Lei's artistic ideal and difficult to reach, the first photo of photography caused a sensation, Hong Lei's concept found the entrance to his ideal with photos as the carrier. Looking back, this is not accidental. [2] 1995 was the real formation of Chinese concept photography. more and more artists realize the artistic independence of conceptual photography, and the traces of strong performance art are gradually fading, and they pursue the artistic language of photography art itself. By 1996, conceptual art works had made a great leap in both quality and quantity.

The affirmation of “The China Box” revived Hong Lei's confidence in art, followed by his continued installations, “A Chair in the Afternoon” and “An Italian Glass Vase.” Both of these works present a sad sense of sadness, “gorgeous-rotten-rotten” visual aesthetic shocks our visual experience in turn, we will think of Podelaire's symbolist poetry or Wilde's decadent aestheticism, and will think of Borges mystical novels or classical Chinese sad lyrics and songs. These works all express allusions to cultural reflection. The reform of market economy system promotes social commercialization, but it also brings great pressure to people's psychology. And consumer culture sweeping the society tends to be more infatuated with vulgar culture. [3] The photos take the common cultural and artistic references as the carrier, carrying Hong Lei's sad thoughts on the disappearance of traditional Chinese culture. “At that time, the photo studio had perfume and ate watermelon outside with a small umbrella on it. I think this modern culture has completely invaded, and I basically agreed with this society at that time, and I could not help it.”

The New Year's Day dedication of the People's Daily in 1998 was, “Successfully restore the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong and achieve the successful convening of the 15th National Congress of the Communist Party.” On February 19, 1997, Deng Xiaoping, the chief architect of China's socialist modernization and reform and opening up, died. The First Plenary Session of the 15th CPC Central Committee elected the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and its Standing Committee, and elected Jiang Zemin as General Secretary of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the CPC Central Military Commission.

[4] In 1997, Hong Lei photographer Han Lei bought a second-hand PENTAX120 (4 \* 6) camera in Hong Kong, because he clearly realized that only photography can transform images in his mind, and traditional Chinese art can only transform through photography. In the autumn, Hong Lei began to create his photography work “Autumn in the Forbidden City”. At the end of the year, Hong Lei went to the China Photographers Association to buy two books written by Ruan Yizhong, *New Master Photography* and *World Photography*, which deepened his understanding of concept photography; Benjamin’s art of mechanical reproduction, Hong Lei thought about the nature of photography: classical art is a way of worship, modern art is the way of display, social display is more important and more meaningful, for the power of graphic design work, so Hong Lei decided the future creation path.

For autumn preference is derived from his blood, the autumn of the Forbidden City (taihe hall east and west cloisters) shooting time when the return of Hong Kong, tiananmen crowd, security, so Hong lei chose in the purple city hall before the gallery, Hong lei and nguyen loyalty interview said: [5] “I took a skin, in Beijing the Forbidden City, took a week, ten volumes of color film, only two really can be established. Later, I felt that the color was not ideal, and stained with water, and then polished scratches on the negative pieces with sandpaper.” Complete photography with hand-painting and printmaking techniques was a breakthrough at that time. It was not a deliberate pioneer but a mastery of artistic skills, which was completely due to his previous learning. Bright white pearls in the picture are wrapped around the neck of the dead bird, and a pool of red blood on the ground from the quarrel of the dead bird flows out, and the neck is strange and bright blue-green, adding a sense of mystery. The “gorgeous-rotten-rotten” atmosphere surrounds the dead birds, and the tall buildings in the vermilion Forbidden City behind them, though only faintly identified by the frosted paper, could not stop the sad atmosphere. The reference here has the exact identity: the palace maid in the boudoir, the similarity characteristics between the visual image and the abstract concept, beyond the surface meaning of the symbols and to the deep meaning. Hong Lei subverts the form of literati flower-and-bird painting, with the compassion for the women in the ancient palace curtains as the “thorn point”, projected on the image of the dead bird makes the “subversion and acupuncture” add more mystical color.



*Figure 1. Autumn in the Forbidden City*



*Figure 2. The Chinese Box*

“subversion and acupuncture” is the strongest visual feeling in Hong Lei’s early art works, “China Box” lured us to look closely, mobilize the memories stored in our minds, and then burn our imagination, this is the China Box “subversion and acupuncture”; [6] “Italian Glass Vase” is like a Borges aesthetic poetry, and behind

the poetic is the loss of traditional culture mourning, this is the Italian Glass vase “subversion and acupuncture”; and in “Autumn of the Forbidden City” Hong Lei will private “subversion and acupuncture” to “subversion and acupuncture”. In the scenes, Hong Lei unconsciously plays the role of “farmer”, which was proposed by Jeff Wall (Canadian photographer): he divided photographers into two kinds of hunters and farmers. The former tracks and captures pictures, while the latter takes time cultivating the scene. In 1998, after Liang Kai, Hong Lei began to consciously arrange scenes.

## 2. Take “Imitation of Liang Kai · Shijia” as An Example

Artists in the late 1990s preferred to observe society with a personal perspective, feel life with personal experience, and express reality in a personal style. At that time, the most obvious feature of the Chinese concept art was the “fusion” and the “integration” of the and the western culture, so the Chinese concept photography was in an awkward situation of catering to the West.

Hong Lei's 1998 film is classified into theater photography. I believe that compared with the gorgeous stage presented in the middle “dream series”, [7] it is more accurately the plot of a drama. Shooting “imitation liang kai, mountain figure”, hong lei began to consciously screening role, choose props, arrange scenes, trying to tell a story, the story by liang kai (southern song dynasty painter, born in 1150) of “mountain” as the script, with hong lei “subversion and acupuncture” aesthetic style “adaptation”, style still inherited the original “horse, summer half” type composition, the original painting calm ethereal artistic conception moment by the mysterious thriller atmosphere. The original story of Sakya is a simple man for six years but does not find a real way to free the suffering, so he goes out of the mountains and ends the ascetic. In the picture, he is calm, but still can not hide his haggard look. The background and the whole characters in the painting give people a feeling of quiet. Under the lens of Hong Lei, the scene is built into a remote mountain couple, a small and strong Zhuang man wrapped in red cloth, his face is painted white, and the moment when he came out of the mountain, he was shocked, grim face, full of absurd expression. The absurd details in the protagonist and the scene make the contradiction between the birth and the world more dramatic. Hong Lei transforms the custom with harsh Buddha, and the desire for active survival bursts out of every inch. Therefore, [8] “imitation of Liang Kai · Mountain” is more like a plot in a drama. The “actor” in the play belongs to the second kind of absurd man from the perspective of Camus's existentialism. Under Hong Lei's manipulation, he is covered with a layer of mystical gauze, which is also a publicity of the mysticism flowing in his blood. The creation was inspired by Jeff Wall. Hong Lei bought Canadian artist Jeff Wall's picture album in Nanjing. Wall is a photographer who is good at using images to create a painting imagination. His masterpiece is *The Ruked Room*. “imitation is the poison of art, but here it has become a weapon”, which refers to photography.

Hong Lei repeated the style of literati painting, subverted the traditional visual feeling, stabbed the distant memory, and used his new round of traditional creation to complete with the appropriation, parody and posing techniques commonly used by postmodernism. “Due to the long thinking in 1995, the picture was naturally established, coupled with the classic nature of Song painting and the advantages of posing, I thought the work was very perfect after the work came out.” [9] “Copy (Song) (water lotus picture)” is like a visual scam, far to see the beautiful and gorgeous, close to see the delicate lotus petals stick with dead flies, his romance and

heavy into the visual beautiful and ugly. “Subversion and acupuncture” is still hong lei’s photography style, this time influenced by Jeff wall, hong lei began “old painting transplant” with ancient technique posing the song people flowers and birds, and then transplanted in the copy of the original, is the original and reproduction of painting and photography, illusion and real juxta, staggered in the same plane, and will T.S. Eliot’s poems and Li Yu’s words are respectively overprinted on these images. “Copy (Song) (water lotus picture)” accidentally died on the petals of the insect as a beautiful traveler, “imitation (Song) Ma Lin <dark fragrance thin shadow>” broken branches of the residual flowers for the bloody dead bird for silent tribute. “I was more comfortable when doing this creation, because I found my own way of expression, so the feeling of pain and anxiety was completely lost.” Broken branches of bright dead flowers, falling dead, bloody dead birds, the lotus stained by the insect body, Hong Lei’s thinking on life “hidden in things” life in the moment can have eternity.



*Figure 3. Copy Liang Kai · Shijia Tu.*



*Figure 4. Copy" Series.*

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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