

In the Age of the Beasts: Wang Liang-Yin's Iris Effect

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Historically, myths and stories have commonly brought people together on a large scale. Religion is one such example, as is an economic system. Economic models are constructed and capital is generated with stories compiled by those in power. In his book *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, Yuval Noah Harari advances the idea that Homo sapiens successfully defeated other human species and exist today due to their ability to think abstractly. From wild beasts, they became gods who now dominate the planet. In the thirteenth chapter of the Book of Hosea in the Hebrew Bible, God punished the Kingdom of Israel for apostasy. Thus God, the guardian shepherd, became a murderous beast. Antonio Negri in his book *Empire*, claims capital, a formless beast of unsteady and constantly fluctuating flesh, has flooded the world. It has no exterior, such that every step outside just expands the inside, and accordingly, humanity has abandoned resistance and embraced this bloodthirsty beast with open arms in a form of passive para-colonization. Caught between these two beasts—a murderous God and para-colonial capitalism—humans have generated conflicting values and turn to all sorts of fantasies to satisfy their desires, thus spawning yet another beast—the beast of desire.

Material and Immaterial Visual Fields

In the collision of these three beasts—God and theology; the economy and capital; and Homo sapiens and desire—a crisis arises because mankind has pinned its hopes on two opposing forces. One is a nostalgia striving to restore the glory of a golden age that has passed, and the other is a utopian dream relying on algorithms and artificial intelligence to create the future, but these forces will eventually concentrate power in either the hands of political or digital dictators. Standing at this historical crossroad, will we choose the path leading to the future, or to the past?

Composed of complex networks of capillaries and neurons, the iris, as an extension of the nervous system and brain, helps to create our vision of the outside world and forms a messaging system. The iris is also a map reflecting certain imbalances in the body. At this moment when the three beasts of theology, capital and desire have come together, Wang Liang-Yin uses the iris's visual function of controlling the influx of light to select her materials, and with the perceptions created by the iris's messaging system, forms an iris effect regarding the immaterial boundary between spirit and consciousness and belonging to her generation.

The overall concept of the exhibition *The Iris of Beasts* relies on the iris messaging system, and Wang Liang-Yin presents her own way of viewing the world with this system. She produces her visual perceptions of the material world, which has always been a part of her artistic context, through the iris then transforms it into the non-material with her perceptions. Her work *Glasses as Eyes* is a declaration of her intent to see the age of the beasts through her perspective based on the iris messaging system.

Desire—Soul—Time

First, she stares at the desire at the limit of her visual field, and when going from material to selfish desire, she traverses the boundary between the human and the divine, investigating the micropolitical boundary of desire. In *Sinful Forbidden Fruit*, which symbolizes the Garden of Eden's fruit of desire, thus referring to the primitive overlapping desire that straddles the human and divine, she presents the instinct of desire moving toward opposite poles: love and lust. In *Cupid*, Wang depicts the eponymous deities upside down with their heads planted in a plane of eroticism, which is being avariciously invaded. The cupids cannot pull free from this plane as they vacillate between indulging and resisting their addictions. In *A Maneki-neko Under Starry Night*, a friendly expression in a cat's eyes also suggests an atmosphere of treachery. The cat's gaze is directed straight into the pupils of the viewer, seemingly seeing through the primitive desire at the viewer's very core and summoning the obsessive greed in human nature for money thus forcing viewers into a prisoner's dilemma. In *Wink*, Wang provokes greed in a game carrying an unbearable weight. As fake bubbles are being blown, they expand in a way that suggests ever expanding lust. Due to their transparency, they barely seem to exist, are fragile and breakable but tightly wrap addiction to desire. This is not the return to or abandonment of desire, but rather confronts contemporary desire itself.

Human beings experiencing greedy desire will tend to make a deal with the capitalist beast that eliminates their souls. In *Balance Practicing*, Wang depicts two happy and smiling clowns who cannot conceal the painting's strange and aggrieved atmosphere. Contemporary relationships between people are constantly weighed on a see-saw, and a perfect balance can never be achieved. Every time the dream of this balance gets close to coming true, something shifts and it becomes false. Pushing the dream toward something unrealistic creates a state of motion that can never achieve the goal. In a capitalist society, this exercise constantly disciplines the soul such that the mode of human relationships always results in the norm for contemporary people. For *Tears of the Fox*, Wang has sealed a fox in a glass jar. People commonly think of a fox as being cunning, and the glass jar becomes the eyes and judgment of public opinion. Yoked to public opinion, the cunning fox's sadness becomes tears that are sealed in a glass jar for people to admire. Because it has lost its soul, the fox can only respond to the external world's bias with tears, and this echoes the feeling of suffocation that people feel in society. *Keep Smiling* presents a large hand grasping the pressure and violence of contemporary capitalist society, and strangling a small pig that symbolizes humanity. The pig keeps smiling because ironically, only a domesticated smile can ensure its integration into society. The rationalization of what is unreasonable is capitalism's customary method of stripping people of their critical powers of reflection. In the end, a smile is the only reaction of people as they confront the beast of capitalism and sell their souls. The human soul becomes a commodity that is sold to capitalism, and the smile mocks the idiocy of humans as they are forced to become the murderers of their own souls. That humans have started to sense the loss of freedom and imprisonment is reflected in the trumpet blowing angels who are being dominated in Wang's *Angel Chimes*. The broken winged angel being prodded along a track realizes that its body is being restrained. Under the gaze of the capitalist beast, the two angels celebrate the civilization and progress brought by capitalism. The broken wing represents the deep innocence of mankind.

These shackles have forced humans to replace their own desires with placebos, thus opening their imaginations with regard to time. *Spray and Rainbow* brings people back to the purity of their childhoods, and a tin airplane flies the young to the future. For *Little Prince's Rose*, Wang has sealed blossoming flowers in a glass jar, thus slowing time and their demise, so that the fresh beauty of life can bloom forever. For *Metal Christmas Trees and Rose* she casts several living Christmas trees, transforming them into memories, and suggests that a rose can revive a memory of time. Human beings return from desire to seek protection from their families in *Umbrella*, and from their youthful selves in *Under the Apple Tree*. Here, the apple has transformed from its original symbol of desire into a tree that symbolizes the desire to forget, so that what cannot be remembered and the unforgettable blend like reality and fantasy into a new hyper reality.

An Iris System as a Symbol of an All-Embracing Ecosystem

From desire and the soul to time, these artworks reflect the artist's return of material through the iris system to the immaterial in different layers and intervals. For example, the ark in *Angels, Apples, Beasts* indicates the artist's beliefs that coincide with Noah's. Noah faces the world that God created while the artist faces the artificial world of capital, and with the iris effect, she carries out the movement mode of perception. The picturesque disorder in the snow that we see in this work is the change left on the Earth by this age, and not the unidirectional thinking that preserved good and eradicated evil in the Bible story. For this generation, a man-made self regulating feedback system is not the only choice for the future, so they let good and evil coexist, open up all possibilities, hand over control, and strive to eliminate anthropocentric consciousness in the world. They create an ecosystem that is full of energy and operates autonomously, allow all things to work together on an equal footing, and allow life to find its own way out. And ultimately, just like Wang's work *Planet*, provide everyone with an organic universe.

So far, we have peeked at the ecological narrative contained in the movement of the artist's perception through the iris. This includes the appearance of the apple of desire, pure angels, roses suggesting time, and sealed glass jars in her paintings. Through the artist's implicit organization of context and her unique perceptual output, and also through the activation of her iris effect transducer that transforms the artist and audience's perceptions, the audience's perceptions, just like the artist's, are sealed in the iris. The irises of the beast, artist, and audience are interacting and adjusted to create a sonata of shared perceptions. This then forms an implosion of perceptions that releases the object itself, an object as a material that comes with its own soul, thus deconstructing the subject/object way of thinking. When the subject considering the object is replaced by the object considering us, the disturbance of the world temporarily stops and then sublimates into a spiritual narrative and expression of values. Then the pendulum no longer swings in just one line between two poles, and the three beasts no longer merely collide with one another. This means that through the iris effect of looking out at the world and introspection, differences and edges are made to exist by way of a fold. In the interactive fabrication of real matter and immaterial consciousness, an impact happens that creates another direction of movement that is different from our usual paths, thus opening up another spatial dimension. In intersubjectivity, the unique human mind and cosmology of this generation is reflected and looks directly at the iris of beasts.