



"Looks Like a Landscape" by Liu Wei Plateau

Art against the system

Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art, holds Chinese artist Liu Wei solo show as farewell exhibition

By Lee Woo-young

Chinese artist Liu Wei has been at the center of controversy in the Chinese contemporary art world.

In 1999, he and fellow artists put up a radical exhibition that displayed a dead fetus on an ice bed, with human and animal parts hanging from the ceiling. Liu also presented a video installation showing naked people crawling on the floor like bugs.

The exhibition prompted the Chinese government to enforce a legal ban on "bloody, brutal displays and obscenity in art" a few years later.

The radical expression that made him the talk of the town in the Chinese contemporary art world are not seen in his current solo exhibition at Plateau, Samsung Museum of Art, in Seoul. Rather, the works that span the 17 years of his career are moderate in expression, but complex in thought.

Installations that consist of building debris and old textbooks that criticize the competitive urban development in China and other cities in Asia are being presented at Plateau.

"Borders and geographical boundaries have become meaningless. Whether it's Korea or China,

I don't think there is much difference in people's criticism of reality," said Liu at last week's press preview of the exhibition.

Titled "Panorama," the show sheds light on the fast-changing landscapes in cities like Shanghai, Beijing and Seoul and the complexities of modern urban life. Liu presents large Gothic-style wooden installations that are assembled with wooden door frames, panels, metal pipes and other architectural detritus from an old Chinese hospital and government buildings.

"We grew up when things were constantly changing and nothing seemed stable. There was a turnaround in values every couple of years. Today you'd believe in one thing and tomorrow you'd believe in something completely different," he said.

Liu, who was born in 1972 as the Cultural Revolution was coming to an end, has been categorized as being part of a group of artists that are not as political as their politically-charged predecessors who experienced firsthand the pro-democracy protests and the subsequent Tiananmen Square Massacre of 1989. However, they left a "profound influence" on his future art activities, as well as on his contemporaries, Liu said.

Although political implications don't show up explicitly in his



Liu Wei poses in front of "Merely a Mistake." Plateau

works, resistance to the existing system has been an underlying theme in Liu's works.

For the 2004 Shanghai Biennale, Liu presented photographs that looked like old Chinese landscape paintings, which in fact, captured the naked buttocks of people. The photo series "Looks Like a Landscape" was made in resistance to the biennale organizers, who had rejected Liu's earlier proposal of a

large-scale installation that he had wanted to make with artists who had not been invited to participate in the biennale exhibition.

"It was a rebellion against the system. The butt was a replacement for swearing," said Liu.

Ironically, the photo series "Looks Like a Landscape" made Liu a star in the international art world. The work was sold to Swiss collector Uli Sigg, one of the most influential

art collectors today with the largest collection of Chinese contemporary art. Since then, Liu has participated in numerous biennales around the world and has held solo exhibitions at major museums and galleries.

"Panorama" bids farewell to the 17-year-old Plateau museum, which is closing in August. The exhibition runs until Aug. 14. For more information, visit www.plateau.or.kr.

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