

week1 | Translation of traditional media

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The traditional turn in contemporary art

In the context of contemporary art, “tradition” is no longer just an object to be preserved or inherited but gradually becomes a resource that can be reactivated and translated. More and more artists are no longer satisfied with the continuation of tradition but actively put it into the contemporary context and generate new visual and conceptual expressions through reconstruction, misappropriation, and reinterpretation. For example, Xu Bing’s gobbledygook presents unreadable “pseudo-Chinese characters” in the form of traditional block printing and borrows the most traditional language structure to reveal the uncertainty of language and cultural authority. This kind of practice shows that “tradition” is not only a formal resource but also an important thinking object in contemporary art.

However, in this process, in addition to the artist, the role of the curator can not be ignored. Carolee Thea pointed out in *On Curing: Interviews with Ten International Curators* that the curator is not a neutral organiser but a mediator between the works, artists, and the public. One of the important significances of curation is to transform the meaning of the work by providing context so that the audience can understand the path to enter the work. For me, this “transformation” is also a kind of “translation”: it does not change the work itself but transforms the originally closed artistic experience into a cultural experience that the contemporary public can understand through space, narrative, and viewing methods.

Let traditional media enter contemporary perception

MoMA's Woven History: Textiles and Modern Abstract does not show textile simplicity as an accessory craft but puts it into the history of modernism and abstract art to re-understand, emphasising how textiles connect the body, daily life, and visual structure. Such a curatorial way breaks through the habit of viewing textiles as a "traditional skill" or a "static sample" and transforms it into a contemporary medium that spans art, design, and social history.

Sleeping Beauties: Awakening Fashion of the Metropolitan Museum of New York puts historical costumes in an immersive environment through images, sounds, smells, and space so that the audience can not only "see" the costumes but also enter their materials, fragility, and historical life through a multi-sensory experience. Therefore, traditional costumes are no longer just preserved objects but are reorganised into an experiential event.

Judging from these cases, the so-called "translation" does not package the "traditional media" into a more fashionable form but reappears in the experience that was not easily perceived through the curatorial context. Based on this, my research will continue to focus on "the connection between tradition and contemporary".

Bibliography

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