

Voon Pow Bartlett

'天下無事', and 'There is nothing new under the sun'

The economic and political aspects of globalization produce a dissymmetry that Fredric Jameson refers to as 'blindness at the center' (Jameson 1998). There are some who believe aesthetic has gone global. Previously considered as the philosophy of art and beauty, it has now lost its hegemonic power, stripped of its Eurocentric signification, and acquired new characteristics that are regional, local and transient. Still others, referring to the transmutation of the 'empire', believe that the new contemporaneity means that aesthetic today 'has no center, or rather, possesses different centers ...' (International Yearbook of Aesthetics vol. 8, 2004, p. 6-9).

The title of the ATM held this year in Manchester (Asia Triennial Manchester October-November 2014), 'Harmonious Society', translated as *tianxia wushi*, '天下無事', seems to affirm an aspect of Jameson's understanding of globalisation, that 'there is nothing new under the sun' (Jameson 1998, 54). Its aesthetic of the multitudes, with some 30 Chinese artists from China, HK and Taiwan, dazzles the audience with their wit, passion and their state-of-the-artness. At first glance the exhibition seems to reflect an aesthetic of multiplicity, hybridity and syncretism.

I propose to consider the relationship between the artworks and installations, and the title adopted for the Chinese part of the exhibition, the 'Harmonious Society', its Chinese translation, '天下無事', and finally the ATM overall title of 'Conflict and Compassion'. The idea of transience may strike a cord with Chinese artists who sit uncomfortably between their 15 minutes of fame and nostalgic ambivalence. Success is a double edged sword and the correspondence to recognition and wealth is posited in the dialectic between 'essentialism' and all that globalization brings in the onslaught of technological and cultural opportunities. The flip side of globalization is the effects of capitalism and it would be interesting to see the way some artists conflate the temporal and cultural desynchronicity, between an unmitigated and uncensored expression, and China's Hegelian legacy of the Marxist epoch, still under the shadow of its 'revolutionary utilitarianism'. This is exuded in a sentiment of excess and aggression reflective of a cultural anxiety and unmistakable convention of protest, some with humour, irony and satire. This suggests a philosophical approach to aesthetics, an engagement with their culture that for many lies between a peripatetic lifestyle on the biennale circuit, and on the periphery of their society.

# Situating Global Art

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She has taught Cultural Studies and Fine art practice at BA and MA levels, at various universities in London. She studied at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Chelsea College of Art and Central St Martins.