

Wang Chunchen, Curatorial Research Dept CAFA Art Museum of China Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing

Classics and Contemporary – On the Sculptures of Anna Chromy

At the first sight on Anna Chromy's sculptures, I was instantly attracted by the elegance of her works, which also reminds me of the European classic sculpture. However, Chromy's works are not repetitions of classical sculptures, but they are endowed with new distinctive life elements by the artist. In fact, this involves a very important art history topic, namely, how do we view traditions and the classics as arts develop to this day, and how can we draw artistic fertilities from them to nurture contemporary arts.

Nowadays, we tend to recognize contemporary arts with the standard that it is not traditional. Anything that looks close to traditions is classified to non-modern and non-contemporary; and anything that looks irrelevant, seems to be made with new materials or through new means is called contemporary arts. As value judgment, "classic" seems to belong to the past and "contemporary" somehow suddenly becomes a criterion to distinguish the superb from the mediocre. Here, classic and contemporary are both uncertain concepts, and because of different degrees of uncertainty, our understanding of things can lead to deviation and misunderstandings. Taking Anna Chromy's sculpture as an example, what should we think of them, as they appear in today's visual world in realistic modeling style? From the superficial logic, realistic sculptures are no longer first choice for an artist. This is the conclusion when we view and analyze general phenomena; however, when it refers to one particular artist as individual, the value of her sculpture's modeling and connotation will not be abated because of techniques and means used. On the contrary, after we advocate the deconstruction the relationship between forms and objects, we fall into a void; when we abandoned narration, we lost ourselves; as we are promoting a flat world, we forget the establishment and pursuit of the meaning of being human. In today's context, we indeed are looking for new concepts and methods, but real art itself means innovation and should not be trapped by such limitations of stereotype thinking. And, then, what is the real art (including sculpture)? The value of life is still the most important, while the extraction of artistic rhetoric may also be necessary. Chromy's sculptures stand tall right in the craving context for eliminating classical realistic sculptures. Chromy represents a meaning of enlightenment to today's sculpture art in China. Although realism still dominates the Chinese sculpture teaching, Chromy's realism is a different concept, which tells us that similarity does not necessary equal realism. Realism has its own strength of character and tradition, and it also absorbs and learns from other arts in the process. Although inherited from the European tradition, China's realistic sculpture did not implement the essence of realism completely. Objectively speaking, China's realistic sculptures are still quite rough, and there is historical explanation to it. Ancient China also has its own shaping and stone carving traditions, which highlight an

exaggerated and more smooth silhouette, focuses on the grasp of demeanor, and even advocates minimalist outlines, and which with these characters has also won us an honorable position in the global sculpture world. However, when we want to learn a sculpture tradition that is not ours or learned its classics, should we not learn its essence? Imitation of the shape seems not enough to get its spirit; it is not our purpose to learn its presentation, but to learn its deep essence. This kind of artistic learning and sharpening requires inclusiveness and accumulation, and this sort of learning is not aimed at personal artistic achievements but at the growth and robustness of a cultural body. Therefore, the re-recognition of realistic sculpture is not a short-term art history topic, but a long-term historic responsibility. Only through generations of study, meditation, and practicing of the classics will they generate our true tradition and our own classics.

Thus, Chromy's sculpture exhibition in Beijing brings us a great opportunity to understand and reflect on European classic sculptures. Her works are originated from the European classic sculpture traditions and is a classical paradigm of inheritance; but she does not simply inherited the classics, but instead, she has walked through the fracture between modernism and classical sculpture to once again continue such an elegant graceful sculpture heritage; particularly, she grew up in an era of a postwar rebuilt European culture for which she made annotations with her life experiences in several different cultural regions — these experiences in different regions and countries are elements of a new civilization, and Chromy used them as nutrition for her sculptures. In a corporeal world, the life experiences of art become particularly important, and Chromy indeed synthesized these life experiences with legends and myths to show the vitality of sculpture in the form of Gods revealing and acting as the source of the new culture. Although nowadays we have countless boundless artistic creations and countless artistic behaviors and results that expand into the subconscious, something that explores physical existence and experience is still very precious, and that something is still a bridge that cares and guards the human value: they are carriers that lead to our soul; based on this, we ought to have a deeper understanding about the essence of sculpture: this is not a shell, but a Dharmakaya that is loaded with the soul of life. If we cannot understand and meditate on the soul of life to this level, then the essence of sculpture is still out of our reach. The discussion of Chromy's sculpture should not be dilated on any single piece of work, but on the whole of her works collection, which presents a sculptural texture and form that is originated from a classical culture quality and is achieved by being faithful to the universal value and divinity of life. She said, "What do I look for with my sculpture? To transform every kind of empty lost face in life into beautiful dance." She is seeking the meaning of life; she has revealed that she has a mission to accomplish with such meaning; she is looking for the strength of conscience, a divinity originating from the soul. This is learning beyond the realm of techniques. We have to encourage such spiritual enlightenment and care in the Chinese context of sculpture creation and practice, which is the root to and is necessary for rebuilding Chinese new culture and civilization. Concerning the current situation in China, this is our most urgent mission facing the mourning sighs. For a good quality, we must cross the self-set barrier to learn and bring into our own use,

instead of abandoning the classics according to the current logic of modernism and contemporary art. In a wider range, we have to rethink a new cultural psychology and ability. Without an open and broad mind, there will be absolutely no arts of life value.

Comparing to her previous exhibitions, this sculpture exhibition of Chromy in Beijing highlights more of her achievements in sculpture, in order to allow us a close look at the classic heritage of European sculpture, preventing us from taking for granted the fracture in European art development, while developing our own contemporary sculpture art. Chromy's sculptures once again demonstrate the multi dimension and multi-realistic state of the historical process, and prompt us to stick even closer to the belief of arts — classics should not be abandoned, inheritance depends on the new generation, criteria should be maintained in creation, and the direction of contemporary art should remain unchanged. More importantly, the return to humanity and divinity will be a lasting movement of the 21 century. Chromy's sculpture displays the light of caring and divinity in human beings, which is not only necessary for art to return to nobility and quality, but also a necessity for the human race to revive humanity as such.

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Head and Curator

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