

THREE PERFECT THINGS

THREE PERFECT THINGS

Curator

Umberto Buttigieg

Artist

He Ping

THE MILL,
B'KARA

Saturday 15th April
till Sunday 14th May

Opening hours
Monday to Friday
between 17:00
to 19:00
Saturdays between
09:00 and 13:00

Calligraphy, the art of beautiful writing, is a fundamental element in Chinese culture and tradition. From an early period, calligraphy was revered as a Fine Art above all others in Ancient China, and together with poetry, it was valued as a supreme form of self-expression and cultivation. Starting from the Song dynasty, in the late 10th century, and up till the early 20th century, the practice of calligraphy became intertwined with poetry and ink painting. The combination of this trinity of expression became known as 'san jue' or the 'Three Perfect Things'.¹

Born in Shanghai, China, He Ping was nourished by Chinese culture and grew up under its influence. His paintings reveal an impulse towards writing and an embedded reference towards Chinese calligraphy. Yet, Ping deliberately breaks the rules and frameworks of this strictly disciplined mode of expression and

instead reconsiders aspects and elements of traditional calligraphy to communicate thoughts on contemporary society.

Emblematic of authority and power, ancient calligraphy has been described as a "culture devoted to the power of the word."² Under He Ping's treatment, it is appropriated and extrapolated of its power of communicating words, becoming illegible and meaningless from a traditionalist perspective. As customary connotations and the knowledge typically associated with the calligraphic symbols are lost and the purpose transformed, Ping's marks become subversive and radical. His new symbols shift the balance between the recognisable and unidentified, the familiar and unfamiliar.

He Ping's works present a Derridean deconstruction, not only of perceived notions but also of

¹ <https://theculturetrip.com/asia/china/articles/the-power-of-the-word-calligraphy-in-contemporary-chinese-art/>

² http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/chcl/hd_chcl.htm

aesthetic structures and forms. The rigid formal systems of calligraphy are done away with through a performative method of painting that focuses on the spontaneous, instinctive and automatic. From the abstract skeletons with light lines to the sumptuous layers of glazes and pulpy forms or the laboured compositions of thick ink and heavy colours, He Ping's paintings find affinity with action painting and gestural abstraction with references to western Modernist idioms. His combinations of intersecting lines and thick curves propose a new balance characterised by flow and dynamic movement that captures the essence, the spirit and the soul.

Similar to ancient calligraphy, Ping's new forms reveal a concentration of the vitality of nature and the essential energy of the human body. In fact, Ping confesses that when painting, he feels "as though life and the cosmos move in

synchronization"³. His compositions transcend form and become Icons. Each gestural line transformed into a sign that simplifies the complex layering of life experiences and memory in an urbanised world.

With his combination of painting, post-structuralist calligraphy and poetic tinge, He Ping re-contextualizes the Three Perfect Things in a contemporary environment, and fuses a global contemporary practice with ancient traditions. He is representative of a contemporary movement of Chinese artists who in response to the overwhelming complexities of contemporary society, revert to traditional forms but with a capacity to interiorise, simplify, make personal and subvert our expectations and perceptions.

Umberto Buttigieg
Curator

³ He Ping's interview by *The Times of Malta* on the exhibition: 'The Persistence of Form' (25/08/2016) - Unpublished