

Curatorial Statement of “缓存在/Being Theoria”

Liu Tian

Chief Curator of 4th Hangzhou Triennial of Fiber Art

The 4th Hangzhou Triennial of Fiber Art is scheduled to open at Zhejiang Art Museum on October 18 of 2022. The theme is “缓存在/**Being Theoria**” .¹

Connecting and weaving multiple thoughts, the theme conveys inspirations that the curatorial team acquired from “fiber/textile” and in turn the redefinition and re-interpretations of “art” :

The way that “art” —as a special product of unique behavior and imagination—occurs and exists may be essentially distinct from that of stable, solid materiality in real life (such as “products” and “merchandise”), which is a kind of “Being Theoria” .

It often wanders between being and non-being, as something is on the way into existence. The “inspiration” is like an aura, and a mystical uncertainty always emerges in the course of art-creation. Things that are presently “useless” , “nameless” or even “meaningless” will be brought to life in the name of art. They stay weakly and temporarily in a “cached”

¹ There is an intertextuality between the Chinese title 缓存在 and the English title “Being Theoria” , even inside the Chinese title. 缓存在(huan cun zai) is a combination of two words: 缓存(cache) and 存在(being). 缓(huan) means slow, moderate or postpone, it belongs to the radical (部首 bu shou, lit. “section headers”) of 纟 (纟、糸, mi) which comes from the form of silk since ancient China, meanwhile 存在(cun zai) is the equivalent of philosophical term “being” . In Chinese, 缓存在 could be understood as “postponed-being” or “cached-being” , as 缓存(huan cun) is the translation of “cache” in computerese but could mean “storing/existing slowly” literally.

space, a nebulous space in between “being” and “non-being” .

This space is just like the layer between clothing(fabric) and the human body, which matters to the storage of heat that we need to survive—take the era we are in now, where a 3 seconds face-to-face encounter with someone defines “close contact” —the gap left between the mask and face: hidden, unstable while intimate and protective, constitutes a milieu that is vital to survival.

The computer (which shares a similar logical structure with jacquard looms) engineering term “cache” (缓存) also reminds us that the storage/memory will disappear once the power is off, just as the memories or the skills we got will vanish once the physical body decays. Although 缓 means slow in Chinese, cache(缓存), in reality is stored with the fastest read and write speed. It happens within the time of a glance, a flash of lightning, and a spark of fire—improvised, transient, swift, and high-frequent. In this sense, art works are just those beings that are lucky enough to obtain forms by chance before fading away, while to curate an exhibition is to simulate and construct the transient temporary space.

This brings us back to “inframince” , a concept forged by Marcel Duchamp, which refers to barely perceptible thinness, a liminal space for the transition between self and others, where identity decomposes—in other words, it is a space where creation happens. Inside a cocoon-like space of

“cache/inframince” is double “metamorphosis” : “non-being” is striving to become “being” (art works), while “self” (author/artist) is transformed into “non-self.” In *Symposium* by Plato, Socrates revealed the core subject of Eros: how can I become someone that is not I? — Through eros’ attraction and guidance, transforming and transcending the homogeneous “being” — “art” is the eros, catalyzes the double metamorphosis.

The desire for this transitional space—instead of the immediate desire for the ultimate product, is another ancient way of living and working with the wisdom of fiber/textile. One of the most classical fiber-art figure is Penelope (Πηνελόπεια, Pēnelópeia) in *Odyssey*: her name is bobbin (πήνη / pēnē), but her real technique is unraveling the burial shroud she has weaved during the day at night, in order to delay the inevitable end of time. Such a lengthy circuitous method of “postponed-being” embodies an integration of thoughts, emotions, labor, life and fate. In present context, what Penelope unravels and decomposes is exactly what tangles and perplexes everyone in this accelerating but exhausting time: the so-called “deadline” .

The English title of the exhibition, “Being Theoria” , is a quotation (re-connection) and deduction (in Chinese 演绎, 绎 originally means reeling off raw silk from cocoons). It is not just a literal translation but an intertextuality in concept. “Being Theoria” is a reflection on the meta-questions in art, which is aroused by “缓存” (cache/slow storage) as a space and “缓存

在” (postponed-being/slowly existing) as a status. Besides, “Being Theoria” also connotes the demonstration and expectation for the being of “human beings” as well as “art” .

The term “Theoria” (θεωρία) comes from Aristotle’ s categorization of basic activities of human (energeia): poiesis (to make), praxis (to practice), and theoria (to contemplate). Among these three human activities, theoria is the closest energeia to gods (theos), since, with itself as the object, it can achieve self-containing and self-sufficiency. It is perceived as the highest, fullest life—an archetypal vision that seems mythically wonderful today, but could complete the human once it comes true—which leaves no place for art that tries to create something that never existed as there is no desire for “the other” .

Therefore, the quotation here is not to bring up the myth of this theory again, but to stimulate its relevance for contemporary art:

At present, “ poiesis ” (creating) and “ praxis ” (practice) are already included inside the concept of “art” (while art used to only belong to poiesis, which is the technique/techne of “poetry-craft” , the participatory and interventionist art of social practice/praxis has become popular nowadays). By unfolding “theoria” , the notion before theory, we hope we can heal the rupture, and even realize the realignment of poiesis and praxis. Theoria, preceding the dogmatic, solidified “theory”, is in a “cache” zone that has not yet been defined (shaped). However, the unattainable mythical perfection also

brings a transcendent dimension, the "invisible" parts of the visual work—often, it is these invisible parts that decisively support and even define the work itself.

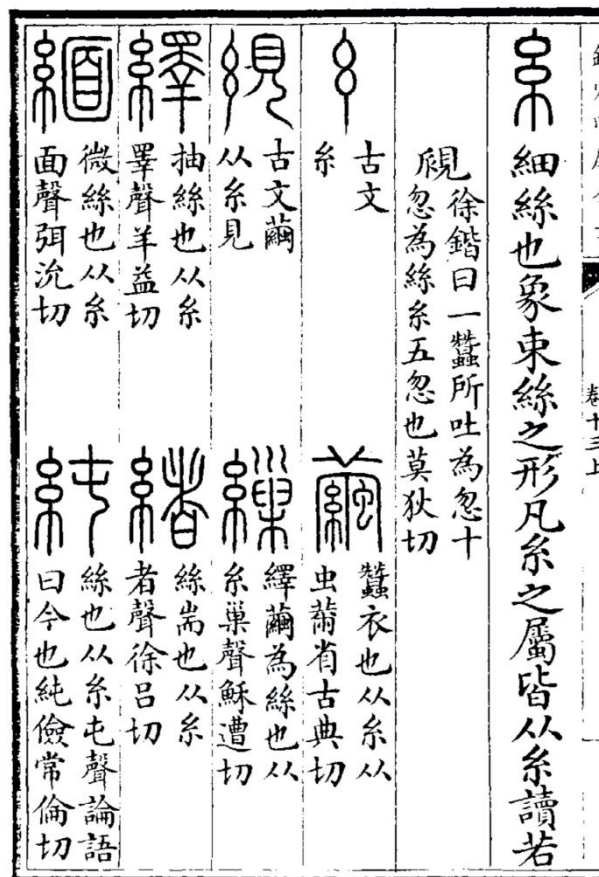
“缓存在” and “Being Theoria” attempt to interweave out a new recognition even definition of Art. And based on the perceptions inspired by fiber/textile, the deep intention of the curation of Hangzhou Triennial of Fiber Art is to arouse retrospect and reflection on these meta-questions and meta-conceptions and achieve “art” through “fiber” .

It is well known that from ancient times to the present day, fibers and fiber arts implicate extremely complex cultural threads: they are the universal structure of nature and life, an iconic invention in the history of human civilization, a daily necessity worn by all people at all times, a witness and activator to several major historical events: the Silk Road and world trade, the Industrial Revolution and labors movement (Heinrich Heine wrote *Die schlesischen Weber* in 1844), colonization and anti-colonization (with a typical image of Gandhi who was spinning), the transform from Jacquard loom to computer...

How did all these happen? What can we learn from them today? Meanwhile, there is also a fact that never ceased to be marveling: among different civilizations, text (from Medieval Latin *texus*, means weaved goods) is always associated with texture/textile, as well as in Chinese 文 (wen,

text/character) has the same origin with 纹 (wen, texture) and relates to 文明 (wen ming, civilization) and 文化(wen hua, culture).

It is through text, especially the “cosmotechnics” latent in Hanzi (Chinese character), we obtain the Ariadne’s thread to apprehend the original understanding of the world. Beginning with *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (lit. expressing text and explaining character), a classics studies work by XU Shen in Han dynasty (undoubtedly a “theoria” earlier than the “dictionary”), we start to search for a conceptual cosmos that crosses over a millennium, which is still penetrating our daily life and linguistic details.



The section of 糸(mi) in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, edition in *Si Ku Quan Shu Hui Yao*, Qing Dynasty

Among this cosmos, there are terms for archetypes of conception of the

“relation” in the world: 线索(clue)、经纬(latitude and longitude)、网络(web/network)、组织(organization)、系统(system)...

There are also general terms for colors that froze in the process of laboring(weaving and dyeing): 红(red)、绿(green)、紫(purple)、绛(crimson)、绯(scarlet)、缥(pale cyan)、缁(black)、素(white)、绘(chromatic)、绚(variegated)...²

Morphology terms about thoughts and emotions: (思) 维(cognition)、(情) 绪(sentiment)、緬(怀)(remembrance)、缘(分)(destiny)、(演) 绎(deduction)...

Terms related to actions about craft and poesis: 编(fabricating)、织(weaving)、纺(spinning)、纳(darning)、缝(sewing)、绣(embroidering)、系(tying)、缉(stitching)、缚(binding)、累(accumulating)、緘(sealing)、给(giving)、缮(mending)...

Terms for order and disorder: 综(synthesizing)、统(uniting)、纪(disciplining)、级(ranking)、缩(shrinking)、紊(harassing)、约(束)(limiting)、总(總)(summarizing)、结(knotting/ending)...

Terms about speed and subtlety: 纾(loosen)、缓(slowness)、纤(slim)、细(slender)...

Terms related to the marks of progress: 继(maintaining)、续(continuing)、结(ending)、绝(eliminating)、终(concluding)...

And also, words about the complexity and uncertainty: 纠缠(entangling)、

² The characters mentioned here and below all contain the radical silk “纟” .

缠绵(lingering)、缭绕(wreathing)、缱绻(intertwining)、绸缪(attaching)、绰约(winding graceful)、缥缈(dimly discernible)、纷繁(numerous and complicated)...

This interconnected and complicated cosmos-like system which diffuses throughout history comes to reveal the capacity to form theoria or enlightenment behind the nature of materiality. A “metaphysical” thought rise from concrete materials and specific labor—by sublimating “names” into “general terms” , a concrete universality is achieved, which organizes a general and systematic worldview.

It is the core concern of the 4th Hangzhou Triennial of Fiber Art: the “fiber/textile” as an ancient invention of human beings, which constitutes the archetype and universal metaphor of human thoughts.

Therefore, the curation of the triennial becomes an action of weaving, a shuttle-like reflective reciprocation of “learning from fiber/textile” : while acquiring perception and imagery from fiber/textile, it also expects to generate a generalized epistemology and methodology that transcends concrete materials and substantial forms. Reflectively, “fiber/textile” is both the theme and the method: it will permeate thoroughly from details in the curatorial process. The curatorial group becoming the weavers first, then further invite and lead the artists, researchers, and designers to participate and form a temporary organization of common thoughts, perceptions and actions, which will be carried through and implemented into the final exhibition site.

From this working approach, the structure of the exhibition is gradually formed, which is constructed as a number of clues and networks: “Wen/文” (text/texture/culture/civilization), “Xu/绪” (emotion/thought), “Xian/线” (lines/trajectory), “Zhi/织” (weave/labor), “Wang/网” (net/web), “Jie/结” (tying knots), and “Zong/综” (diversity/complexity). These clues are intertwined and “knotted” in the space, presenting several “theoria spaces” for people to stay and contemplate, thus hooking and capturing the broad understanding of art and creation contained in “the generalized meaning of fiber”.

As an exhibition themed by fiber, we hope to modify the classifier/unit of this exhibition: to present not only singular “pieces” (visible highlights), but also the “connections” between them (invisible lines) — just like the difference between stars and constellation. Thus, an “organization” (组织) composed of intersected thoughts and emotions are embodied. Ultimately, through the overlapping of several layers of “nets”, or like some contour sketches of “line drawings”, we will on the path towards a revealing “general view” with countless interconnection.