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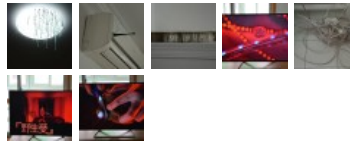
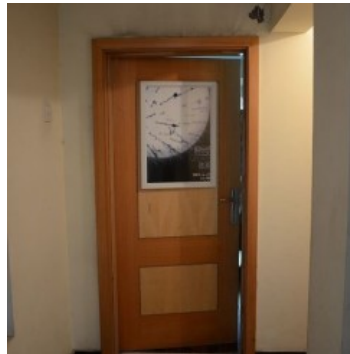
To Dream of Traveling in Anonymity

[>> print](#)**“Chen Xi: Preserved Wilderness (Ye Sheng Shou)”****A307** (A307, Hongyuan Apartment, 798 Art District, 4 Jiuxianqiao Lu, Chaoyang District, Beijing), **June 27th, 2015**

You command a mighty force, raising dust on the battlefield; with a sword on your back, you venture around the world; carrying an oxygen tank, you dive into the abyss of the ocean; riding a horse, you wander into the forest of deathly silence. You run free and wild, with lofty ambitions, but you cannot escape the courtyard of the internet, or the morning bells and evening drums of apartment living.

The dim incandescent light on the ceiling emits a hypnotic drowsiness, while from the hanging Blu-Tack drips a taste of the mysterious rainforest. Over the heater, hundreds of restless souls gather under a piece of debris, whispering, while a plane roars past the window towards its terrifying fate... Following their own trajectories, various episodes are staged in a corner of a room, or outside the windows shown on the silver screen; these places are also where Chen Xi's vision and contemplation have resided all along, whether in material form or through the virtual effects he produces with software.

Rather than put an emphasis on gay culture, as connoted by the exhibition title (“shou” means “bottom”), what is more relevant to Chen Xi's exhibition, “Preserved Wilderness (Ye Sheng Shou)”, held in Hong Yuan Apartments #A307, 798 Art District (an art space founded by curator Li Zhenhua, artist Xu Qu and media interface Ju Baiyu), are two tendencies within or ways of interpreting the term “otaku culture” as conveyed through the exhibition. One concerns the original meaning of “otaku”—an overzealous obsession with a certain cultural industry (especially Manga), pursuing perfection and disdainful of flaws—and another connotation of “otaku” involves what we might call a re-interpretation of the concept, which refers to confining oneself at home without ever leaving the house.

[See all photos \(8\)](#)**“Chen Xi: Preserved Wilderness (Ye Sheng Shou)”**, installation view

Whether one looks at Chen Xi's monochromatic cartoon drawings of previous years, or the colored works he has started producing more recently, the hallmark of his work is a paranoid meticulousness—he even mimics the action of a printer, leaving a gap before every two tiny blocks of color that he paints by hand. His turn to microcosm perhaps originates in this obsession with detail, and the representation of detail in magnified form, achieved through close-ups and increasing the depth-of-field, is the refuge of his imagination; a goldfish in a small plastic bucket is portrayed as if it were in the deep ocean; the glowing neon spots of light are not the city streets at night, but LED light strips placed in the bathtub.

The other kind of “otaku” tendency is fundamentally a representation of alienation. For an object, such as a hobby or something that one passionately enjoys, is required for any subject to experience a sense of its own existence; it is a rejection, then, of the real world, but a rejection born of the psychological pursuit of freedom and equality; or, it is a game and a battle between limitation and imagination. His exhibition penetrates the outside world with which the subconscious in a confined space seeks to make contact, and the illusion of bodily mass is precisely the means through which one's psychological projections are reified. As a matter of fact, the unease and conflict brought on by alienation are the byproducts of modernity, as depicted in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, Camus's *The Stranger*, Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, Huxley's *Brave New World*, *The Truman Show*, etc.

Just like the naked woman Chen Xi created in the room using animation software, his man-made

wilderness is a symbol of repression and anxiety, life experiences that are shared by members of an enormous population, and an expression of their yearning for the wasteland. Nevertheless, as the artist mercilessly cuts off the eyes of the stuffed toys and sticks them on the floor. You wake up from your dream. As you return to reality from an infinitesimally shrunken state, there lies the end of your seclusion in the mountain abode....



“Chen Xi: Preserved Wilderness (Ye Sheng Shou)”, installation view



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