

ALLLOOKSAME?/ TUTTTUGUALE?

by Text by Francesco Bonami 2007

Alllooksame?/Tutttuguale? is an exhibition aimed at emphasizing the complexity of the art scene in China, Japan and Korea from a Western point of view. Such an approach shows how difficult it can be for a non-Asian curator to set aside his prejudices and find a thread across the different identities of the three countries, which are already intertwined on a historical and linguistic level, but completely different, or even opposed, in terms of culture and creativity. The title, Alllooksame?/Tutttuguale?, was borrowed from an Internet site that was created by a young Japanese – partly as a joke, partly to celebrate the stereotype of “diversity at any cost” while underlining the significant difference between prejudice and racism.

The purpose of this show is not to overcome prejudices – on the contrary, it is aimed at emphasizing how the West continues to be influenced by prejudices and common sense. The artists shown here are the opposite of what the title claims – yet, at the same time, their work is often untranslatable in terms of contemporary Western art. What they all share is the complete autonomy of their language, both from the West and from each other. Nevertheless, one cannot but look at them within the framework we Westerners view as the chaotic, terrifying Asian development. While the Western look focuses on the singularity of the work of art, on its uniqueness, the artists from these three nations/geographic areas reaffirm their look on the world as something completely different – they are interested in capturing the landscape in its entirety rather than its details. What is exemplary here is the constant change in Chinese culture that is reflected in contemporary art, or the linguistic simplification typical of Korean art, while Japan’s art looks at the gap between tradition and the contemporary world.

As a curator, I did not aim at creating a harmonious picture, nor at taking stock of the situation of art in these three countries, but tried to let these three languages collide, mingle and reveal themselves just the way they are, without trying to erase their incomprehensibility to the Western eye. In shaping this project, I tried to suspend my qualitative judgment, and followed other criteria. The Asian subject, in particular the subjects living in these three environments that have been reunited in this exhibition, sees the world as a circle, while the Westerner sees it as a line. So Alllooksame?/Tutttuguale? is an attempt, or better an experiment, at reading a circle through a line, or putting a line across a circle. Also, in thinking about this exhibition, I borrowed one of the techniques of Chinese literary criticism, “painting dragon pupils”, i.e. trying, as risky as it may be, to extract what to me looked like the important elements of a new generation of artists.