International Travel Report
Yuan Ma
May & August, 2011

Introduction:

After two years study and work, I found my interests are mainly in the following fields: logic, philosophy, Zen, and the surrealist art genre. Because of these interests, my past art practices became more and more close to these topics. However, facing my third year, I want to focus on one direction out of the large range of choices and develop my thesis work. Therefore, my main task of this trip was to study more about the areas that I found I am interested in, and then try to focus my third year’s work on one direction.

I have spent nearly two months in China and Italy. I dearly appreciate the support from School of Art & Design, international institute, and all the people who have made this trip possible. With this report, I would like to share what I have seen and learned during this amazing trip.

In China:

I have spent the whole month of May to study Zen philosophy and take logic classes simultaneously in China. I was very lucky to get greatly help from the local academic institute: The “Shandong University.” In the mother language environment, everything appeared easier to me. My learning experience turned out to be very efficient. I went through the logic lectures and academic discussions smoothly. After all the activities and classes, I have accumulated a lot of notes that could provide inspirations or clues for my future work.

I was very lucky to be connected to the “Zen Society of Shandong University.” It is an institute aims to let university people learn about Zen by building personal experience through weekly activities. I have participated in all the activities that organized by them during my stay. The most memorable activity I have experienced was the visit to the “Guang Ji” Zen temple. We went to listen to rabbi Zong Xian and Guang Xing’s lectures about “Zen in life.” According to their talks, I learned that from the Zen’s point of view, “every flower, every leaf is a world.” The philosophy included in Zen could be mind’s guide for people to investigate this world. It
tells people to respect the nature, discover the beauty of the world by paying attention to small things. As a part of Buddhism, Zen certainly has some traditional religion views of Buddhism from India. However, the philosophy content of Zen was originated from China. It represents the austere humanistic thoughts from the ancient Chinese culture, which is also the most valuable and useful part of it that I found to me.

<Photo-1> A far view of the Guang Ji Zen Temple:

<Photo-2> A near view:
<Photo-3> An inside view:

<Photo-4> Rabbi Zong Xian on his lecture:
<Photo-5> Rabbi Guang Xing on his lecture:

<Photo-7> A “pure” walk with rabbi around the temple:
I love the mysterious feelings that paradox phenomena could bring to us. Paradox is closely related to science, but it is also an art. Thinking about paradox puzzles is a good exercise to our minds. I found it is very fun to create visual works to represent paradox phenomena. In the past, I explored video and installation works to visualize paradox phenomena, but I always feel has been limited to create new works because of my lack of paradox knowledge. I was in dire need of learning about paradox systematically.

I was extremely lucky to be around Shandong University at a right timing. The “School of Philosophy and Social Development department” had just started to give lectures on paradox topics when I was in Jinan. I got permission to join in one of their logic classes and started to learn about paradox as I wished. Professor Shiling Ma and lecturer Liwu Rong were in charge of the lectures. I was even luckier to have a lot of conversations with them. They kindly answered all my questions and recommended many books to me for further study. After the two weeks class time, I am able to distinguish paradoxes, have got an overview of the paradox research history, and have had a list of classic and new paradox puzzles, which would inspire me for new works.

<Photo-8> on the logic class:
During my stay in China, I spent my time in Beijing, Jinan, and Wuhan. I attentively collected life stories from ordinary people in these cities and small villages, as well as to record my own observations of the living environments around. I didn’t focus on to collect any special ideas from the people, but only listen to their talks about the everyday lives. The process of collecting was interesting. I believe that this collection would be a good resource for me to get new ideas and start new works.

<Video shot-1> Publisher editor (in Beijing):

<Photo-9> Fruit famer (in Jinan):
<Video shot-2> Street fruit seller (in Wuhan):

<Video shot-3> a bus station in non-rush hour in Beijing:

<Video shot-4> The Hankou train station in Wuhan:
In Europe:

Going to the Europe was a dream of mine since I could remember. I feel so lucky to have this chance to visit several cities in Italy and Paris in France.

The core of my Europe trip is to work as a resident artist in Palazzo Rinaldi Artists’ Residence, a family running institute. This institute is located in a very small village on a mountain of Noepoli. The village is so small that it only with one Tobacco shop, two bakeries, several small bars and two restaurants. The population is very friendly. Local inhabitants of all ages are not used to welcoming foreign visitors, and I was luckily to be the first Asian face they have ever seen. The resident house, which is own by the family, has a history of over a century.

<Photo-10> View from the resident house balcony:
<Photo-11> Mountains round the village:

<Photo-12> The traditional stone house in the village:
Both the culture and life style of this village are very traditional. It is also a very safe place because everyone knows each other. Because of its location, the village has super strong sunlight during the daytime. Therefore, they developed their own time schedule: working in the early morning before the sun rise high, sleeping inside from 11am to 4pm to avoid the sun damage, and then enjoying a long night from 4pm to midnight or later. There is also a public ring of the bell to show the time every 15 minutes. I always feel that the time in this village is a 24-hour loop. People don’t need calendar to count the days, and everything has always been done that way and will likely never change. Based on my observation during the stay, I created a video series called “Mysterious Village” to catch the special feelings of this interesting place. When I left there, the family asked for a copy of my work to keep for their collection.
I used the rest of the time in Europe, which was around two weeks to travel to Paris, Florence, Venice and Rome. Along this journey, I went to a lot of my dreamful places. For example, the modern art center Pompidou, the museum of Dali, the museum of Rodin and Dali, The Uffizi, The gallery of Modern Art, and many other famous museums and galleries. Before I could actually stand in front of the master art pieces, I have had only glanced them once or twice on the television or books. Without enough commanding details, all the works were flat and unreal to me, and I even don’t know why these works mean a lot to the world. However, when I saw these works in person, my attitude dramatically turned around. I immediately understood their value, because their beauties were so obvious when you watch them in person. For example, when I first started to learn drawing, I practiced many times on sketching the plaster model of “Agrippa”. Before I actually saw it in Uffizi, I would never know the true sculpture of Agrippa has so many details in his face and hair. I was over excited to find out this and so glad that I would not die without knowing the truth. The same things happened again and again during the whole Europe visit. The scientifically built human figures, the exquisitely described body details, and the gently expressed beautiful painting colors... all of these experience let me truly felt the humanism spirit in the western culture that is represented in art. My heart was full filled with exciting feeling and satisfaction. I still could feel it every time I think about the journey.
“Agrippa” plaster model that I used to use (picture from Web):

Dali’s sketches - huge inspirations to me:
Conclusion:

This trip to me is a very interesting, challenging, productive and rich experience. I believe that what I have learned and experienced during this trip would become to my great wealth. I am going to remember this journey, and benefit from it in the rest of my life.