

An Excerpt from Art History Writing: "Description of *Movement Field*, Xu Zhen, 2013"



The artist, Xu Zhen, turns the entire gallery space into a garden landscape with real plants and soil. Paintings, sculptures and photographs of artist's past works are standing around in the garden. Visiting the show is an experience of wondering in a beautiful garden while reviewing the artist's portfolio, the memory of movements.

This work takes up the entire space of a room in the gallery. This 3-dimensional space hosts the audience inside. The grass and small plants spreading out on the gallery floor creates the horizontal layout; and the cut-out boards of photographs like tall trees of in garden form a vertical stretch.

The *Movement Field* puts the audiences in space which compresses 2-D and 3-D sensation together – the 2 dimensional cut-out boards frame the 3 dimensional-looking photographs while the *Movement Filed* itself constructs another layer of 3 dimensional space. It is like a big bubble housing many small bubbles inside.

The sculptures, paintings and cut-out boards are works from the artist's series "True image". This series is recreations, mainly in the form of photographs, of the artist's works after he destroyed them. With the edge cut exactly according to the contour of the photographs, the boards look realistic. And they do, document the *truth*. But they are just "documents"/"images" of the *truth*, the *truth* that no long exists.

The work also conducts sensations in contrast. For instance, it conveys the notion of time, both past and present; death versus life through the destruction and the calmly breathing plants; and a combination of emotions: the zen of the garden balancing the overwhelming images of fires and man stabbed by knives.

"Movement" has been a keyword highlighted in Xu Zhen's artistic career, both physical movement and social movement. For example, his work, *In just a blink of an eye*, is a sculpture of a man that looked as if he had fallen; or, in the *Physique of Consciousness*, he hired people to perform Taichi-like movements live as part of the work. Xu Zhen says, "Everyone has the desire of accomplishing a movement", and he has named some of his works like quotes from political protests. Tough the *Movement Field*, shows neither physical movement nor visible political slogan, it is all about representations of movement. Not only has the reproduction of the "True

image” series indicated movements done by the artist himself, the shape of the garden paths are derived from maps of real street protests happened.

The Chinese name of the *Movement Field* also refers to a playground or athletic field where people do all sorts of physical movements and exercises. Xu Zhen's *Movement Field*, however, offers audience a dedicate garden space where they can't run or jump but walk carefully on the narrow meandering paths trying not to accidentally step on the plants. This design suggests that social movements should be a carefully thought-out and planed activity with disciplines and rules. By showing the history of his works, he might also suggests that people should review and learn from history before starting a movement. Beyond just a movement field, the work also functions as a guidebook of how a movement should happen. With the guidebook in hand, if the audiences “desire of a movement” is successfully triggered by this work, new movements are ready to kick-start.