

## George Y. Ho : A Spiritual Temperament of The New Age

By Zhenqing Gu

George Y. Ho is a person with cross-over capacity. His creative vocabulary spans across the visual and the musical, the spiritual and the material, the individual and the universal. He seems to be very compatible with different styles and yet not restricted to any one in particular. His works neither develop alongside the logical evolution of art history, nor are they based on the knowledge from the existing encyclopedia system. His visual and audio presentations are more like a process of spiritual journey based on his personal experience. Ho does not entangle himself in the rigid framework of theoretical and methodological research, nor does he follow the vague and general ideologies and *der Zeitgeist*. His works developed independently under the humanistic condition of international society, just like an organic plant absorbing nutrients and daylight as much as possible to best benefit its own life. Ho cares about the starry sky above as well as his personal morals. He directly inquires the connections among theosophy, Agnosticism and the fundamental questions in art. He investigates the perception and communication of all mankind's experiences that are stored in his own body, his mind and the universe. George Ho's artwork series form their own timelines, like individual documents that record the history of his mind activities. These artworks are more like moderators that dissolve the frequent conflicts between the subjective experiences and the continuously emerging information from the unknown, rather than just a display of epiphanies that light up the mental space of mankind.

On the surface, Ho's art always exude certain spiritual luster of occultism. However, he is not isolated as a result, as New Age music artists are his colleagues. Ho has lived in New York for twelve years, and thus in general his inspiration could be traced back to the 20<sup>th</sup> century modernistic culture of America and Europe, but perhaps more specifically with the New Age movement that began to flourish during 1980s. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the theory of the unconscious by Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) and the collective unconscious by Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) opened a much more real and boundless "unconscious" world that is different from this physical reality. Artists and writers of Dadaism and Surrealism in Europe affirmed such findings through art practices such as automatic writing. These artists emphasize the realness of the unconscious world while avoiding the logic and the rules of artistic production. The interaction between Psychoanalysis and the Surrealist artists, with their unconscious creational experiments and non-rational artistic methods, as well as the mutual influence among Suprematism by Kazimir S. Malevich, the abstractive art by Wassily Kandinsky, and theosophy in the Western world, have great impact on painting, sculpture, music, literature and architecture after WWII. During his study period from Taiwan to New York, Ho explored many areas of the humanities and paid attention to issues relating to religion, philosophy, mythology and spirituality of Europe and Asia. From there he cultivated diverse and compounded cultural traits and amassed cross-cultural experiences. In New York during 1980s, the New Age movement became increasingly popular in the intellectuals' circle. This new social and religious mindset focuses on a generational transcendence. The term "New Age" indicates that human beings develop from the pursuit of the material to a search of the internal. The New Age thinkers believe that despite

the external differences in ethnic groups, skin colors, languages and religions, there is a commonality in the heart and soul of every human deep inside, and with this connection, all human beings are cognate and equal. Spirituality, occultism, environmental protectionism and holistic therapy are all included in The New Age movement, and in the Western societies, it has attracted great numbers of practitioners. Generally, the New Age movement places importance on human intuition and potentials, regards the Eastern and Western religions equally while learning from these traditions. The followers believe that meditation, yoga and the martial arts are all helpful for realizing one's own potentials. Ho is strongly influenced by the New Age movement, its belief in the great universal source as well as reincarnation. He feels that one ought to elevate one's spirituality and find self-identity with modalities suitable for one's personality in order to break away from the paths and roles assigned by others. Consequently, in addition to majoring in art in college and producing artworks in his studio, Ho also cultivated himself to be outstanding in the fields of music, martial arts, tarot and astrology. Through these different modalities, he established a firm sense of self-knowledge on the journey of his chosen path. After the 1990s, he began to explore the depth of soul through different artistic media to approach and listen for divine inspirations.

*Hall of Records* from 2008 shows Ho's wholehearted yearning for the eternal space described in the Akashic records. In order to seek out total personal freedom, he has been questioning the everyday reality, its power structure, and the mechanism of its formation, with his creative life. Nevertheless, Ho is not a nihilist. He desires to free himself from the vague freedom resulting from subscribing to some particular "-ism" or authoritative view. He expresses the interaction between his own consciousness and the unconscious based on personal experiences and suggests the linkage between all kinds of cultural prototypes and the collective unconscious. In particular, the "Akashic Record" depicted in *Hall of Records*, which is the endless energy resonance field that carries all of human beings' consciousness and behaviors, allows Ho to immerse himself in a meditation and enables him to find personal enlightenment. In his artworks, he delivers all experiences, knowledge and conclusion accumulated through the affirmation of his own existence. In Ho's visual vocabulary, everything has its own place, including all kinds of illusions and imageries. They all have their own unrestrained yet self-contained spaces.

Ho does not strive for visual shock at first glance with his artworks. His palette is pure, clean, delicate, neutral and non-aggressive. His imageries are often between abstraction and the figurative, with an overall atmosphere of quietude, ease and restraint. Without spending time doing some focused viewing, the viewers would have difficulty grasping the main points. It is a sign that the artist is highly confident of his own creations. Ho has never doubted his artistic talents. His tableaus contain certain impulsive visual vocabulary, instinctive yet orderly. His composition is always seemingly effortless and very consistent: symbols at each layer are clearly and well-arranged while the visual rhythms are easy and smooth. The separate visual elements in the tableaus connect with each other and respond to each other tightly and without lag, forming an orderly and harmonious aesthetic sensibility. He often applied colors thinly on canvas of thin, non-woven polyester fabric. The finely gridded polyester fabric lends a translucency that matches well with the texture of acrylic pigments and the silk-screen patterns. The choices of canvas and color also allow the artist to forgo techniques such as mixing and heavy impasto

layering, which results in brushstrokes and color application that are clean, well-executed and to the point. The circular composition of his 2013 series, *Space of Wonder*, is like an enlarged iris and implies strongly of self-reflection. The 13 *Space of Wonder* paintings are like 13 irises of diverse colors and textures. Together they seem to suggest a “stare-off” with the viewer. Due to the particular nature of materials and the way they are hanging in mid-air in the space, this series shows off a semi-transparent effect that adds another visual layer to the images. The stratification of space created by the translucent quality of these paintings extends the viewer’s aesthetic perception and inspires more people to listen to the calling of the unconscious and to be receptive to an unlimited imaginative space through this visual experience.

Ho paints repeatedly, among many of his artworks, single-colored geometric patterns with symbolic meanings, such as concentric circles, ovals, triangles, rhombus and octagons. Those symbols appear frequently on a smaller scale in *Space of Wonder*. However, in the 2012 *Manifestations · Joy* series, those patterns are the main visual theme, as they are accentuated and appear in large numbers within the composition. In the 2012 Mixed Media painting *The Violet Embrace*, he created a rich visual presentation by covering the entire tableau with different types of rhombus shapes which are overlapping and interlocking. This particular artwork brings to attention one visual fact: Ho’s style, while lightweight and transparent, still penetrates and allows his profound, grand and magnificent inner world to come through. The circular images of Ho’s *Space of Wonder* series are consistent with the conventional ways human beings describe the universe and celestial bodies, as well as the microscopic atoms, protons and quarks. Circular form could also represent the formula of fundamental material construction behind the boundless universe that mankind could observe. The composition of concentric circles can be regarded objectively, like an ever changing universe, or it can be actively looking back at the viewer, like the iris and pupil of the eye. Ho’s creations possess high self-discipline and consistency. The tableaus may look very straight forward with no surprises, yet often they contain some hidden theories. The blossom-like circular images in *Space of Wonder* series are indeed secret gardens in the mind of the artist. The mysterious code-like core imageries at the centers of these circular compositions are not alike. The image at the core of *Space of Wonder #09* is a triangle with white dot, which obviously refers to some traditional symbol. The white dot inside the triangle suggests the triangular Eye of the Divine in art history. It undoubtedly refers to the eye of heaven, the Third Eye and pineal gland which have been enthusiastically followed in both Western and Eastern cultures through the ages. Such images of an eye inside a triangle could be traced back to God’s Eye and the All-seeing Eye of European medieval paintings. Its prototype can even be traced back to the Eye of Horus, the mystical Egyptian Sun god who literally knows everything in the world. Others in the *Space of Wonder* series bear no exception to having esoteric symbolic content. The richness of art form comes from the tight bonding between the ideal and its execution. Ho may have adopted many ancient and common symbols in the *Space of Wonder* series, but his approach and skills are very tactful, confident and not too deliberate. Every tableau is an enduring yet easy going poem, bearing witness to the artist’s extraordinary skill at harmonious composition.

Ho often uses carefully calculated golden ratio to determine the measurements of his tableaus and then takes liberties with the straight and narrow rules of classical aesthetics. *The Excavated*

*Essay* series in laminated glass is a great example of how the artist plays with the rules. On one hand, he seriously parallels the rules of conventional aesthetics. On the other hand, he composes images in an intuitive way that resembles automatic writing, focusing on fortuity between his own intuition and natural spirituality. Ho's language, consistently out of the bounds of logic, is sometimes peculiar, sometimes subtle and conformed, yet eventually constitutes a holistically balanced tableau. The glass lamination process seems to have made freeze-frames out of these classically elegant paintings. It also solidifies the clues from his investigation of the humanity's memories through history, along with the sentiments and nostalgia caused by the fading-away of these clues. Ho possesses his own eternal universe. This alternative universe originally belongs to each and every one on Earth. However, under globalization, with the culture of Positivism and habits motivated by Utilitarianism, people have developed increasingly narrow and nearsighted "tunnel vision." As a result, people's physical and mental freedom became blocked, and their insights to the external world as well as their appreciation of their inner world have gradually deteriorated, as they became blind to the truth behind the superficial reality. Ho's *The Excavated Essay* series shows a type of compressed time and space. With his Transcendentalist view, Ho does not see time as a barrier. The artist could almost travel between the present, the past and the future, cataloguing his memories and acquaintances old and new. The viewer can only see the frozen result after the artwork has undergone a process of space overlay. Without the artist's intentional suggestion, the viewer may seem only able to make wild guesses based on the clues. Essentially, Ho's creativity maintains the delivery of highly penetrative energy of positive thinking. This energy encourages more viewers to break away from the bondage of materialism and to face their own inner world and recognize their pre-existing mental freedom again. Such timelessly insightful viewpoint would undeniably compel more people to pay attention to their own spirituality.

In March of 2014, Ho will hang his spiritual paintings in midair to make an oval shape formation at Li Space, Beijing. Crystal singing bowls that the artist uses for sound healing and meditation will be on display and played inside this formation. Made by melting very fine and pure silicon sand into a mold, these crystal singing bowls are the most ideal replacement of the traditional Tibetan acoustic instrument, the Himalayan metal singing bowls. The low audio frequencies emitted from striking and rubbing the bowls resonates with the frequencies of nature and also penetrates deeply into the human body to generate consonance with one's inner frequencies. Ho intends to portray for the audience the tranquil ambience of nature and the openness of the universe with a carefully designed visual and acoustic energy field which will also evoke one's inner peace and serenity. In fact, the energy that Ho wishes to share with others is a collective heritage among human beings.

Ho's artistic output, with its strongly personal spiritual temperament, vividly and vigorously transforms art creation into a New Age-style spiritual practice. It cannot be categorized under the current local art scene nor the pyramid-structure of global art circle. Perhaps Ho's spiritual art can only be a new art, an art of the future.