



SHOE-IN

Chinese contemporary artist PENG WEI's poetry of brush art manifests itself in her latest collaboration with Hong Kong fashion retailer Joyce

PENG WEI GREW up witnessing art in the making. Her father, celebrated Chengdu artist Peng Xiancheng, is one of the most celebrated artistic figures in contemporary China for his depictions of Tang Dynasty characters in traditional guohua style. After receiving her master's degree in the year 2000, she entered the art world and never left. Her work has been exhibited all over the world and is recognisable by the delicate, harmonic and traditional technique of brush art, which she uses to tell complex poetic stories of human and natural interactions. When Peng came to Hong Kong to present her latest collaboration with Joyce, we caught up with her to talk art and inspiration.

PHOTOS _ JOYCE



Peng Wei with a work for the Joyce autumn/winter 2018 campaign

What does art mean to you?

It's my job and also my life – it's something that makes me relax.

Who are your main inspirations?

If inspirations actually exist, I would say that they only come up in my mind when I continue working. You can never seek inspiration when you're just talking without any action. I believe in a good working condition.

You have a background in philosophy and literature; how does that translate into your art? Are Chinese classics at the centre of your work?

It's difficult to say how it translates into my art. I only have a brief interest and knowledge in philosophy and literature. Every artist shows his passions and animosities in his works, and so do I. I only utilise those things I love in my work and somehow, they're all relevant to literature. I don't think of them as "philosophy" and "literature"

when I adopt them; I just make the content. I believe all readers, especially people who enjoy reading art, try to find themselves through art. I also look for myself through reading and doing art – for those who have regrets or who want to become better versions of themselves.

Chinese classics are not at the centre of my work – some of my works also borrow elements from Western Renaissance frescoes or Persian art, and some elements also come from my present life experiences, such as the fashion tastes of an urban female. I look back to the past with the eyesight of contemporary people, including Chinese and Western classics, as well as past values that are neglected by people nowadays.

What was your father's reaction when you told him that you wanted to be an artist?

He said: "What a relief, you bought a lot of painting albums but you will never waste them – and now you can give them all to me!"



Persian Capriccio, Peng Wei



“If inspirations actually exist, I would say that they only come up in my mind when I continue working”

PENG WEI



Left: Autumn of Tang Dynasty, Peng Wei
 Right: Peng Wei in the Joyce campaign
 Below: Good Things Come in Paris, Peng Wei



“I always try to look for a balance between the past and present – you can probably say that it is harmony”

PENG WEI

Contemporary art is increasingly shaping collective memories and perceptions in China, especially among millennials and the younger generations. Do you think it's very different from the past? Why has it changed so rapidly?

Contemporary art gives us an opportunity to view things through more perspectives. In the works, there are no artistic limits or boundaries at all. In my work, it's way more difficult to be “free” than having rules. It challenges us to have the ability to use our own experience and turn it into art.

However, I disagree that it's changed rapidly. It is hard to change the way human nature reacts. It's just more about showing different skills and using many techniques, and maybe it isn't entirely a good thing for artists because nowadays, producing new works becomes more important than the art itself. For me, there are only differences between good and bad.

What do you think of the art scene in the country?

I just keep an eye on it and then go back in my studio to create my own work.

Why and how did you begin to paint shoes?

I looked at the shoes and thought, “These shoes look so pretty; why not?” That's how it all began.

Tell us more about your collaboration with Joyce.

I'm so surprised and honoured that my works from 10 years ago can still be inspirational to Joyce.

Would you say that Chinese ink painting is a way to preserve old traditions?

Not really, because my style is way different from the traditional painting, from brainstorming the idea to working on the process.

Do your exhibitions represent your development as an artist and as a person?

All of my works represent my past. Of course, some of them do represent my personality, for sure. Exhibitions are assemblies of my memories.

I would define many of your works as poetic and harmonic, both for their subjects and the way they are portrayed. Do you agree?

I always try to look for a balance between the past and present – you can probably say that it is harmony...

Your oeuvre merges different media, from ink painting to installation and photography. Do you think it's important for contemporary artists to use different techniques and platforms?

Different techniques can portray different kind of expressions and feelings. From ink painting to installation, these forms coincide and connect closely with the content and the meaning. We can't separate the message from the way it's portrayed and the platform used to express my inner thoughts, which are exceptional and unique. For instance, I use a very traditional and classical style of painting to paint on the handcrafted silk shoes because it is one of the best ways to draw exquisite motifs on small garments, the canvas. The artworks are basically inspired by my own pair of flats. I put the erotic art paintings on the soles because I hope to keep them a little hidden, to have a sort of privacy when it comes to love and beauty. #