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## Handwritten Diary

Yu Zhenli

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# Handwritten Diary

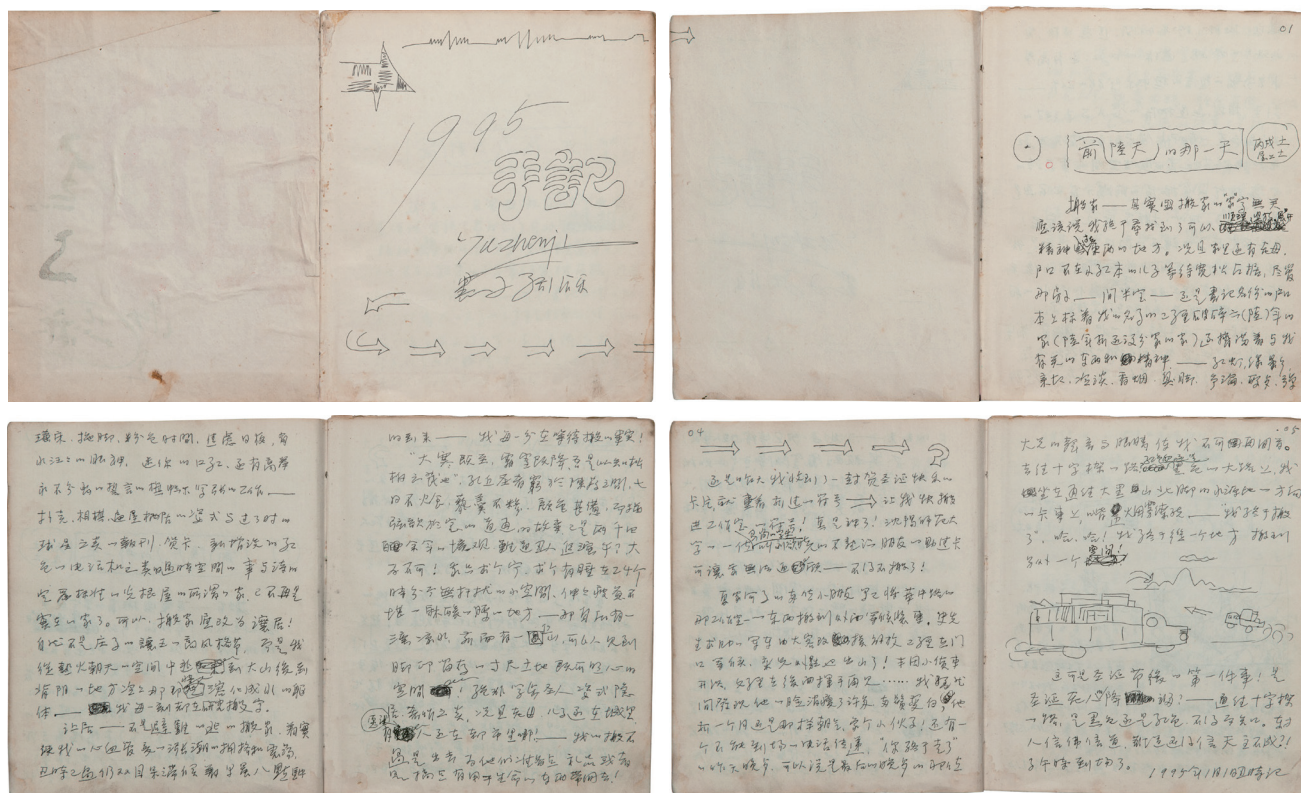
Yu Zhenli

## The Day Six Days Ago

1995, Born in the year Cuxu ( 丙戌土 ), House of Soil ( 屋上土 )

Moving—actually, it has nothing to do with the character “家” (home) in moving. I should say that I finally found a place where I can logically, safely, and peacefully settle down and unfold my spirit and the things from the past. Besides, there’s still my elderly mother at home, and the son not registered in the household registration is waiting

for a relaxed occupation, although that house—half a room—still bears my name on the household registration, a home shattered six years ago (before the family split). It is still packed with things and spirits related to me—red lights, green shadows, warmth, indifference, cigarettes, stinky feet, arguments, gatherings, spring beds, slippers,



Figures 1, 2, 3, 4. The first entry of *Handwritten Diary: The Day Six Days Ago* by Yu Zhenli, upon moving into the Daheishan Studio, January 1, 1995.





Figure 5. Photograph taken when Yu Zhenli was building the studio on Dahei Mountain, 1995.



Figure 6. Photograph of Yu Zhenli with the early established studio, 1995-1996.



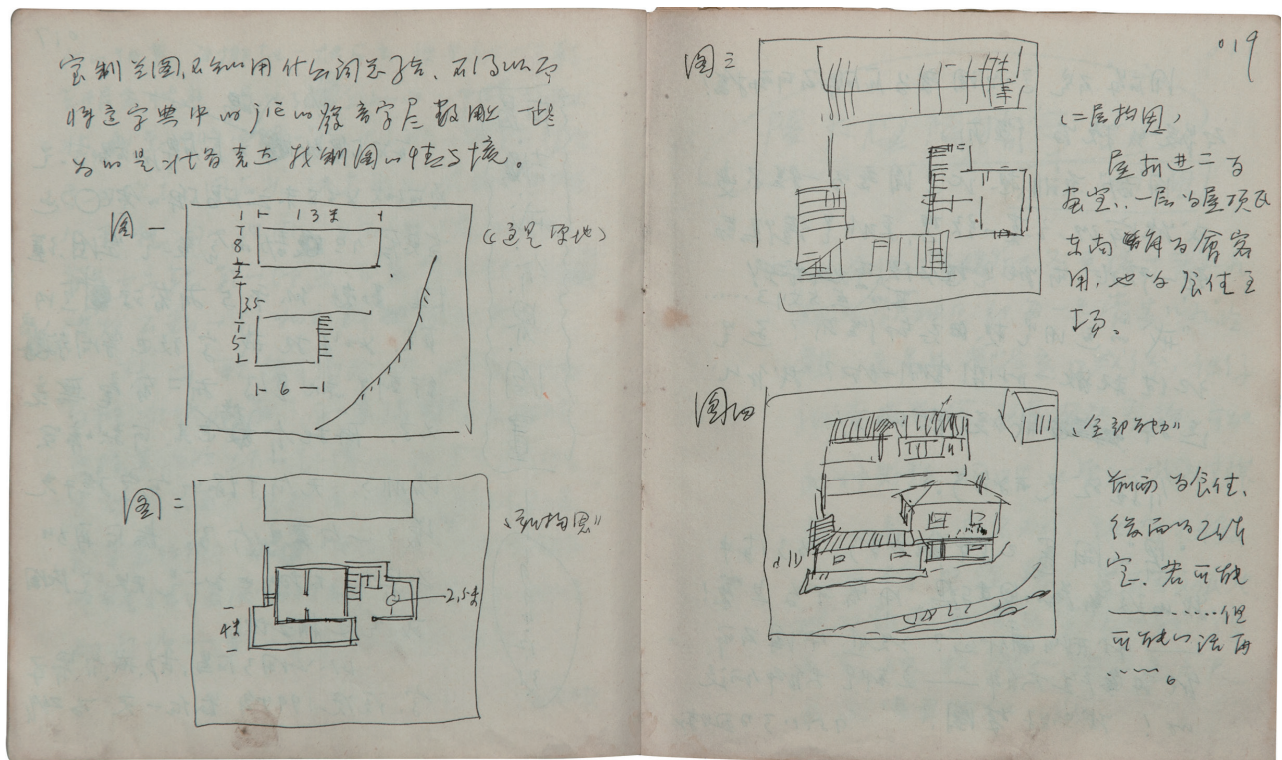


Figure 7. Early studio design drawings in Yu Zhenli's *Handwritten Diary*. August 19, 1995.

pink time, anxiety day and night, watery eyes, mini lipsticks, and flags bearing vows of inseparability, as well as nonchalant work—poker, chess. The posture of dwelling throughout the house, and magazines and greeting cards featuring outdated sports stars and the like, newly added red telephones, and other outdated elements that make up the so-called home of the standard bachelor pad, are no longer a real home. Therefore, moving should be changed to letting go! It's not the high-style elegance of Zhuangzi letting go of the king, but rather, I escaped from the bustling space to the mountains, to a place with the sun at my back, cold, where my body is about to melt into water—I've been studying moving every moment. Therefore, moving should be changed to "retreat and settle"! Retreat and settle—not a move to seek refuge, but indeed causing my cardiovascular system to become congested and oscillate like a rising tide. Although the ugly hours have passed, my eyes still stare blankly, waiting for the arrival of eight o'clock in the morning—I am waiting for the reality of moving every minute. "With the arrival of the great cold, frost and snow have descended, and thus I understand the flourishing of pine and cypress." The sage Confucius, impoverished between Chen and Cai for seven days without a hot meal, his gruel lacking starch, his complexion extremely fatigued, yet he still played the strings and sang in the room. This story of

Dao Tong's perseverance has been a state of mind for more than two thousand four hundred years. Could it be that an ugly person is trying to reenact it? This is greatly unacceptable! Home, I only seek tranquility, a place for peaceful sleep in a small space undisturbed throughout the twenty-four hours, a spot to stretch my weary and sore waist—behind me, there's a cool stream, and in front, there's a small hill. A space where I can see the inch-by-inch land with footprints preserved, providing a comforting atmosphere, is definitely not in the style of the reclusive posture and writings of a learning sage. Moreover, my elderly mother and son are still in the city, and those with aspirations are still in urban areas! My move is simply to go out and prepare some gifts for them or bring back something useful for life.

Yesterday, I received a Christmas greeting card, adorned with symbols of progress, urging me to quickly move into the studio. It's truly magical! A student named Liu Yuxiao, an unfamiliar friend of Ma Shang from Shenyang Normal University, sent a card encouraging my move, making it impossible for me to ignore—I had no choice but to move!

The two children from Xiajiahe have already moved the belongings from the studio on Huazhong Road outside, waiting for the truck. The military vehicle Mr. Shi sought the help from has been changed from a large passenger car to a liberation truck, waiting at the door.



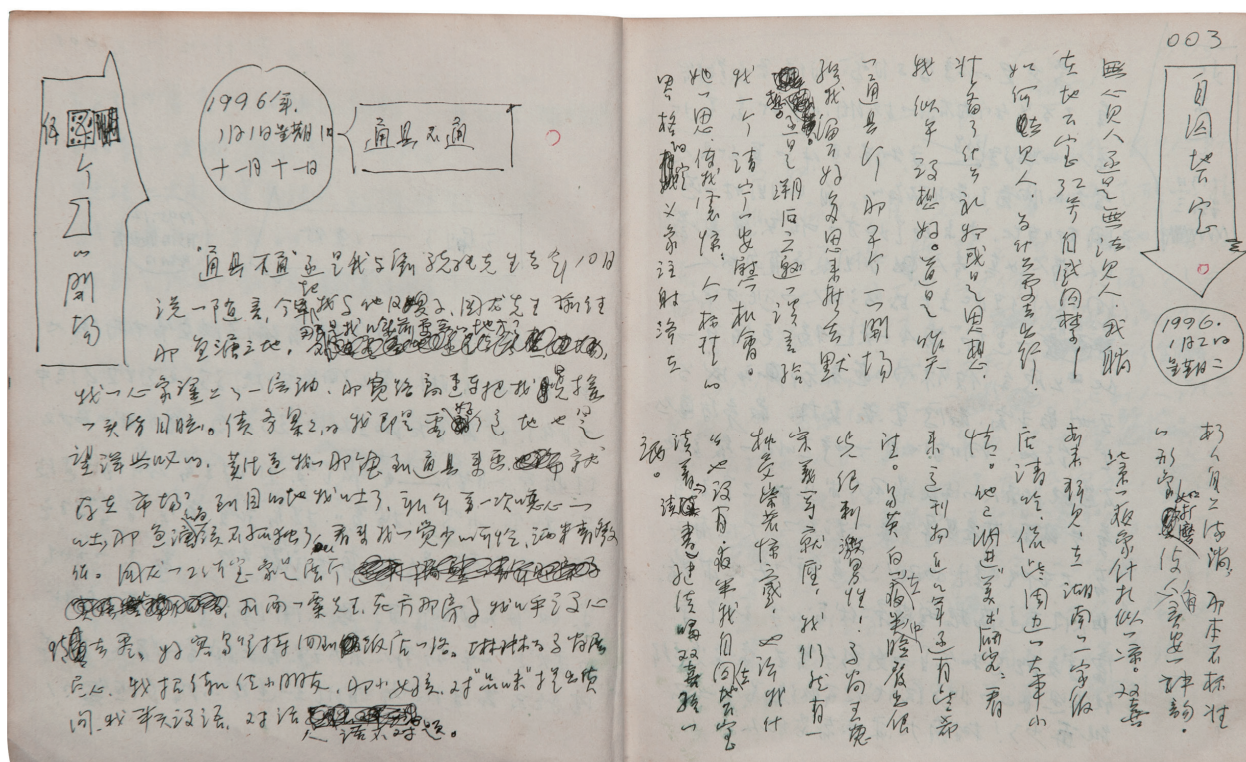


Figure 8. Yu Zhenli's Handwritten Diary. November 11, 1996, "Tong County is not Accessible: The Opening with Five 'One's'." and November 12, 1996, "Imprisoning Oneself in the Basement."

Luan's nephew has also come down from the mountain, leading the way in a Toyota van. Wenjing waves goodbye from behind... Suddenly, I noticed that his face had slimmed down a lot, with white temples. Just a month ago, he was still so energetic, like a young man! There was another call from someone who couldn't be present, "You finally left." During yesterday's dinner, which could be considered the last dinner, the voice and eyes of that elder brother made it impossible for me to look back. On the road to the cross? Whether it's on the red road of blood or the black road, I sit on a truck

headed towards the water source in the northern corner of the big black mountain, with smoke swirling by my mouth—"I finally moved." Ha, ha! I've finally moved from one place to another space!

This is the first thing after Christmas, a blessing from Santa Claus? The road to the cross, is it black or red, remains unknown. Easterners believe in Buddha and Dao, must they also believe in God?! The midnight hour has arrived.

Written at the hours of the ox on 1 January 1995.

### Tong County is not Accessible: The Opening with Five "One's"

January 1, 1996, Lunar November 11<sup>th</sup>, Monday

The phrase "Tong County is not accessible" is either a casual remark made by Mr. Liu Xiaochun and me last October, or a reflection on the fact that Tong County remains inaccessible. Early this morning, I, along with him, his sister-in-law, and Mr. Guolong, set off for the location of that fish pond. Wasn't that a place I intended to visit several years ago? My heart felt as if it had been coated with oil. The wide road and high-speed vehicles

swayed my dizzy head. Despite my accumulating debts, am I simply optimistic about this place, or am I sighing over something beyond my reach? Could it be that my paintings, when brought to Tong County, would find a market? Upon reaching our destination, I vomited, the first nausea of the new year. The fish in that pond must not feel lonely anymore. It seems my tolerance for alcohol has diminished. Guolong's studio resembled an



exhibition hall. I almost had no interest in Mr. Li (Li Xianting) and Old Fang's (Fang Lijun) house in front. It was a struggle to return to the hotel, and Linlin devoted herself to Ma Shang's exhibition. I entertained a few chil-

dren. A little girl questioned the concept of 'taste', leaving me speechless for a moment. The conversation went off track.

### Imprisoning Oneself in the Basement

January 2, 1996, Tuesday

Whether it's unwillingness to meet people or an inability to do so, I lie in basement No. 32 and feel self-imprisoned—how can I face people? Why bother going out, what gifts or thoughts have been prepared, I seem to not have figured it out. It's the trip to Tongxian yesterday that left me with a lot of contemplation on the opening scene of "Five Ones". The invitation from Su Shi, on the other hand, gave me a chance for quiet comfort. Her thoughts shocked me, the definition of human standards and boundaries flowed like an injection into the decaying body. The originally non-standard image, like polishing, gives a sense of peaceful charm.

Beijing's night is cool, like needles. Yin Shuangxi came to visit, treated me to dinner at a restaurant in Hunan, and we chatted about major events and minor matters around. He has transferred to *Art Research*, it seems that there is still some hope for this periodical in recent years. Yi Ying's fair skin emitted a silver light on his face in the middle of the night, quite stimulating for men! Ma Shang, Wang Wei, Song Yi, and others were present, and we felt a pleasantly surprised sense of being favored. Perhaps I have nothing—at midnight I imprisoned myself in the basement, reading 'Reading', and continued to drink the wine given by Yin Shuangxi.



Figure 9. Yu Zhenli's *Handwritten Diary*. November 11, 1996, "Tong County is not Accessible: The Opening with Five 'One's'". And November 12, 1996, "Imprisoning Oneself in the Basement".



## Recoairng Inside and Out Again

October 15, 1997

Xiao Zhao led a few “warriors” to tidy up the road in front of the gate, and Xiao Gu brought two cars of stones for building steps. I will buy another load of sand, two tons of cement, and repair both inside and outside. In early spring, we laid bridges, repaired toilets, and tidied up the land. Today’s major adjustments seem to be beyond

the workload of a year. It’s better to pack the apricot tree planted with my mother. Second sister’s husband came to help, greatly reducing my workload. If it weren’t for the shortage of funds, hiring two laborers would be an easy and natural thing. Alas! It can’t be rushed, just like creating a painting without shortcuts.



Figures 10, 11. Photographs taken during the renovation of the Yu Zhenli Studio, 2008.



Figure 12. Photograph taken at the Yu Zhenli Studio, June 5, 2009.



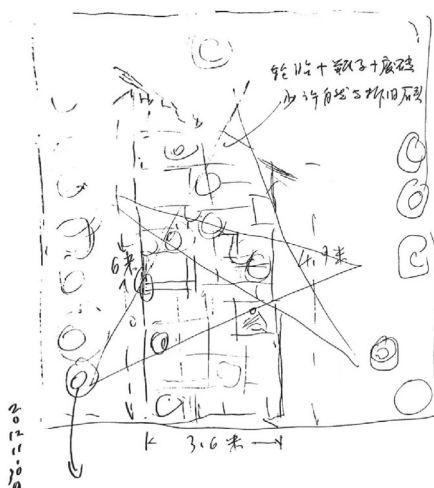


Figure 13. Yu Zhenli's *Handwritten Diary*. "Tire + Bottles + Scrap Bricks, a bit of nature and dismantled old stones." November 30, 2012.



Figure 14. Photograph of the studio exterior wall modified according to *Handwritten Diary*, 2013.

### The Dam Wall made by Er Wang for the Tires.

May 5, 2014, Lunar April 7<sup>th</sup>, Monday.

Note: The Southwest Tire Studio, made from car tires, completed half of its solo exhibition on the outer wall of the garage in late October last year. Now, the tires that were originally fixed among flowers and plants have been removed and filled with stone and cement as the

necessary preparation for the artwork *Wall of Tires*. It is estimated that an additional forty-two tires will be needed. The final wall will consist of a total of seventy-two tires. If everything goes smoothly, it is expected to be completed within about ten days in May.

### More Care Equals Prosperity

May 21, 2014, Lunar April 21<sup>th</sup>, Wednesday.

Considering things that require care as "prosperity", then many of these matters inevitably have points that may be overlooked, allowing them to be temporarily set aside for quite some time. Seize the opportunity to attend to matters, whether big or small, that are beneficial to one's well-being. Certainly, one should choose to do what is within their capabilities and capacities. In the past two months, personally bending down to undertake some repair projects, although not significant individually, each one contributes to the overall well-being, attending to every detail for the sake of life's health. Certainly, this not only refers to exercising the body, building physical strength, and healing illnesses but also, at the same time, engaging in reading articles, understanding the construction of the main subject, and, in the comforting harmony and affinity with the environment, doing things

spontaneously. There's nothing to refuse to attend to, whether it's eating, drinking tea, watching TV, taking medicine, or even the reason for washing your face or soaking your feet. Even though I haven't entered the studio for a long time, it has never been abandoned in my thoughts. Because more care equals prosperity, not doing something promptly doesn't mean it's not being contemplated or considered. Last night, I finished reading Xu Xiaolou's *A Study on Mitchell's Image Theory* and felt a great clarity. Of course, there are also significant and trivial matters attended to in the first four months of this new year. These have transformed my body and mind from a state of extreme decline or languishing crisis to a gradual transition from agitation to tranquility, from fiery to balanced. With each care, whether big or small, emotions gradually open up, dissolve,





Figure 15. Exterior view of Yu Zhenli Studio. Photographed by Zhu Lizige, November 6, 2023.





Figure 16. Southwest view of the Yu Zhenli Studio, photographed by Zhu Lizige, November 6, 2023.

and focus. Attend to things that are necessary or within your capabilities, benefiting both the body and overall health.

What's noteworthy is that yesterday, I initiated the project of repairing, dismantling, moving, and constructing at the southwest corner of the studio. The

process unfolded naturally, attending to the repair of the coal yard, tire walls, and steps, as well as the removal of obstacles such as surplus embankments and installation sculptures. Of course, there is also the work mood of Er Wang, inevitably bringing a more joyful atmosphere. The most important thing is not to be tired.

### Western Modification, Repair, and Demolition of Guardrails

May 22, 2014, Lunar April 23<sup>rd</sup>, Thursday.

The studio on the west side has been officially adjusted.

This is the third major change and remedial demolition



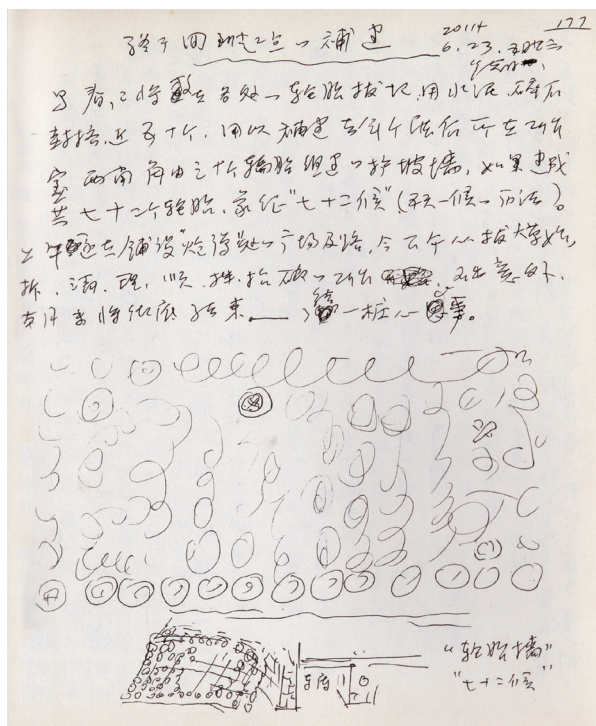


Figure 17. Yu Zhenli's Handwritten Diary. June 23, 2014, "Rebuilding Back to the Starting Point at Last".



Figure 18. Southwest tire wall of the Yu Zhenli Studio, photographed by Li Yang, November 6, 2023.

and construction. Following the exhibition in mid-October last year, a garage was built outside the garage tire wall to make the steps to the west smoother and more convenient to walk on. It has been invested in for three days, and another two days will be enough to finish

the upper part. By the end of the month, the visibility of the tire wall will be roughly improved. Great! Reading enriches the mind, labor strengthens the body, and exercise invigorates the spirit.

### Rebuilding Back to the Starting Point at Last

June 23, 2014, Lunar May 26<sup>th</sup>, Monday

In early spring, I pulled up the tires that were scattered around and sealed them with cement and crushed stone. There were nearly fifty of them. These tires were used to build a retaining wall at the southwest corner of the studio where my individual exhibition was held last year. If completed, there would be a total of seventy-two tires, symbolizing the "72 Pentads" (a pentad for

every five days in the ancient Chinese lunar calendar). In the morning, I was still laying the square and road at the "shell" site. This afternoon, I started dismantling, cleaning, sorting, mixing, lifting, and laying the walls. Unless something unexpected happens, the project will be completely finished by the end of this month—marking the conclusion of a matter of concern.

### Life Paradise

July 26, 2014, Lunar June 30<sup>th</sup>, Saturday

East Slope bottles and glass installation sculptures — expanding space for the Earth, with plants adorned in a

feast of flowers and greenery. A poetic dwelling for life, whether singing collectively or murmuring alone, is it a





Figure 19. Yu Zhenli's *Handwritten Diary*. July 26, 2014, "Life Paradise".



Figure 20. Northern shadow screen installation at the Yu Zhenli Studio, photographed by Zhu Lizige, November 6, 2023.

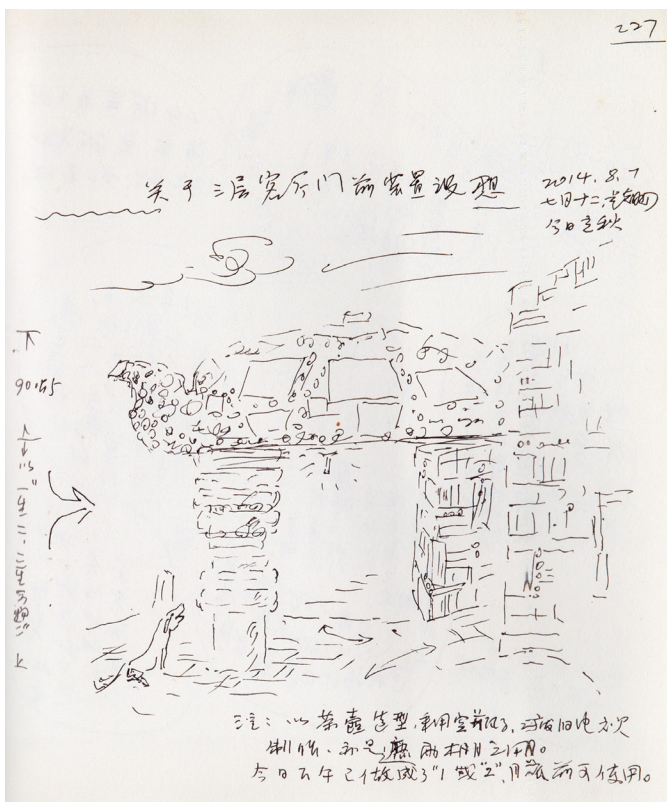


Figure 21. Yu Zhenli's *Handwritten Diary*. August 7, 2014, "Three-tier Living Room Entrance Installation Concept".



Figure 22. Teapot installation in front of the triple-layer living room door, photographed by Li Yang, November 6, 2023.



kind of heroism, a celebration, or a text left by countless

histories?!

### Three-Tier Living Room Entrance Installation Concept

August 7, 2014, Thursday, Lunar July 20<sup>th</sup>; today is the solar term of Liqiu

Note: Shaped like a teapot, made from empty bottles and old TVs, also serves as a rain shelter. One or two have

already been made this afternoon and can be used by the end of the month.

### The Final Wall of Trouble Invested

November 8, 2014, Lunar September 16<sup>th</sup>, Saturday

After rebuilding the north and south slope walls, my body has completely collapsed, and summoning the courage to stand up again requires a great effort. The wall of the neighbor Wang's house to the north of the downhill, about ten meters long, with wooden poles planted for over fifty or sixty years, has long since leaned in all directions. Numerous decayed wooden poles, along with various rusted-through iron wire mesh, hang on it, resembling an abandoned prison, creating a rather embarrassing sight with the fruit trees inside. With mutual agreement to dismantle and rebuild, trouble is inevitable.

Helping others should involve choosing a directly

evident benefit, such as receiving tangible rewards like delicious food or enjoyable spending. However, aiding them in correcting wrongs can be much more challenging, and it may not be appreciated, sometimes even resulting in unacknowledged efforts.

Yesterday morning, I demolished the old wall. It took a day and a half, during which I exerted almost all my willpower and strength in relentless determination, enduring challenges and stringent demands. Well, since it's a reconstruction, I won't dwell on the effort. I constructed several piers, inserted the saved iron pipes into the cement-filled piers, and after they dry, I will hang new iron mesh on them. It is bound to be neat and tidy.

### "M Theory"-Tire

December 28, 2014, Lunar November 7<sup>th</sup>, Sunday

"M Theory" is a fundamental theory in physics and is a candidate for a theory of everything. In the book *The Grand Design* authored by Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, it is concluded that "M Theory is the unified theory that Einstein was hoping to find...If the theory is confirmed by observation, it will be the successful conclusion of the intellectual quest that has lasted for over 3000 years. We will have found the grand design."

So, this autumn, the accumulated discarded car tires

(seventy to eighty of them) gathered inadvertently—do they fall under the concept of the "phase" in the discourse of "mesons" in the "M Theory", where they are placed in the cycle of waves?

Every time Sun Wei brings a few discarded tires, it greatly adds a poetic 'singularity' to my design. Respect for that.

[Yu Zhenli Art Museum provides the article]





Figure 23. The living room of Yu Zhenli Studio. Photographed by Zhu Lizige, November 5, 2023.



## Editor's Notes:

On December 26, 1994, Yu Zhenli moved from his residence on Jinan Road and his studio on Huazhong Road in Dalian City to a farmhouse in Dahe Mountain, Dalian. During more than 20 years of self-imposed exile, he gradually transformed several farmhouses on Dahe Mountain into the current studio. The materials used were all urban construction waste, discarded car tires, empty bottles, television screens, old grinding wheels, and various found objects. Over the course of more than 20 years, the studio has been constantly dismantled, rebuilt, and renovated. Yu Zhenli refers to this behavior as “self-imprisonment”. The ongoing construction in an unfinished state, along with the materials he uses, seems to reflect a societal issue. He is continually shaping a state of societal exclusion, employing discarded items from society to engage in a labor that has already been cast aside. Employing a creative approach that perplexes the art world, he engages in a “struggle” between art and society, as well as life. Clearly, this construction has completely transcended the commonly accepted notions of what is aesthetic, marketable, and enjoyable—falling outside the realm of the “superstructure” derived from economic foundations, namely, artistic works. His practice has also shaped a kind of displaced specimen belonging to the present, existing as a form of “heresy”. However, this “heresy” emerging in the acceleration of art and society will not become a prototype of common phenomena. Instead, it will may be a necessary damping factor in the currents of history, preventing the avant-garde from slipping past the modern era and ensuring that inferior art does not leave a trace.

This issue marks the second installment of artist Yu Zhenli's research-oriented essays. The first piece features a critique by the critic Shui Tianzhong, using “social sculpture” as the starting point, retrospectively narrating the social and artistic values of Yu Zhenli's studio construction after his retreat to the mountains. Yu Zhenli began hand-writing his first *Handwritten Diary* on the eve of New Year's Day in 1995, after going up the mountain, documenting his daily reflections, reading notes, social interactions, philosophical musings, artistic considerations, as well as his conceptualizations and sketches for the transformation of the studio at different stages. This issue includes several of Yu Zhenli's studio-related *Handwritten Diary* entries from different stages, accompanied by photographs of the studio taken at various times. Recently, the editorial team of this publication went to Yu Zhenli's studio on Dahe Mountain to collect materials. A series of on-site photos were taken based on the sketches from the *Handwritten Diary* and will be published alongside the featured articles in this issue.

Editor: Li Yang

## 編者按：

1994年12月26日，于振立從大連市內金南路的家以及華中路的工作室搬入大連市大黑山的農舍。在20餘年的自我放逐中，他將大黑山的幾間農舍逐漸翻蓋成如今的工作室，所用的材料皆是一些城市建築垃圾，廢棄的汽車輪胎、廢酒瓶、電視顯示幕、舊磨盤，以及各類的拾得物。工作室在這20餘年中不斷地拆建、改造，于振立將他的這一行為稱之為“自囚”。這一未完成狀態的修建行為與他所使用的材料似乎體現了一個社會問題，他在不斷塑造一種社會淘汰的狀態，運用社會淘汰的物品，進行一項已被淘汰的勞作，運用一種被藝術界所困惑的創作方式進行一項藝術與社會、與人生的“抗爭”。顯然，這一建築已經完全超出了大眾所認知的可審美、可售賣、可享樂的，屬於經濟基礎所派生出的“上層建築”——藝術作品。他的這一實踐也塑造了一種隸屬於當下的錯位樣本，成為了一類“異端”而存在。但這種在藝術和社會加速中出現的“異端”並不會成為普羅現象的範本，卻可能會是歷史洪流中搖盪與振動所必要的阻尼因素，它使前衛的不會滑過現代，粗陋的不會留下痕跡。

本期為藝術家于振立研究性推文的第二期。第一篇採錄水天中的評論文章，以“社會雕塑”為契入點，回顧性地述說了于振立隱居山林後進行工作室修建的社會與藝術價值。于振立在1995年元旦前夜開始手書上山后的第一本《手記》，《手記》中記述了他每日的隨想、讀書筆記、社會交際、哲思、藝術思考等，以及各個階段對工作室改造的設想與草圖。本期編排了于振立幾篇不同階段的工作室相關《手記》，並搭配刊登了不同時期的工作室留影。近日，本刊編輯部前往大黑山于振立工作室進行採編，參照《手記》草圖進行了一系列實景拍攝，與本期推文一同搭配刊登。