



《七武士，五郎》亚麻布油画
SEVEN SAMURAI, GOROBEI 27.9cm×22.86cm oil on linen



《七武士，岛田勘兵卫》亚麻布油画
SEVEN SAMURAI, KAMBEI SHIMADA 27.9cm×22.86cm oil on linen



《七武士，平八》亚麻布油画
SEVEN SAMURAI, HEIHACHI 27.9cm×22.86cm oil on linen



《七武士，七郎》亚麻布油画
SEVEN SAMURAI, SHICHIROJI 27.9cm×22.86cm oil on linen

SHIFTING PERCEPTIONS: A Play of Subtle Complexity

Max Jansons 的微妙感观戏法

撰文：大卫·帕格尔 编辑：黄子正
Written by David Pagel Edited by Max Wong

马克斯·杨颂斯 (Max Jansons) 的作品看似简单，实则不然。换句话说，他的画作带有一种微妙的复杂性。从常规认知来讲，简单和复杂是对立的，但洛杉矶画家杨颂斯将它们融合在一起，创造出令人十分着迷又难以捉摸的作品。

Max Jansons paints pictures of duplicitous simplicity. That's another way of saying that his paintings are all about subtle complexity. Although simplicity and complexity are often thought of as opposites, they come together the Los Angeles painter's exceptionally efficient—and wonderfully elusive—compositions.



展览现场
at the exhibition

杨颂斯以不着痕迹的方式改变人们的看法，更留下许多让观众寻思的空间。面对艺术家在加州圣塔莫尼卡艾玛·格雷（Emma Gray）的五辆车库展览空间（Five Car Garage）展出的十七幅油画，无论你以何种方式从哪一幅作品开始观看，在移至下一幅作品前，你对事物的看法已开始改变。这是因为杨颂斯极其擅长于处理系列内作品以及不同系列之间的关系。系列作品在当代艺术中很常见，艺术家会为某个系列设定范围，在此范围内探索各种变化，直至灵感枯竭为止。这时，艺术家通常会开始创作另一件作品。在不同系列间建立关系则比较罕见。为了做到这一点，艺术家会将一个系列当作一件单独的作品，系列与其他系列之间，就如一个系列中不同作品之间的关系。这就是杨颂斯的专长。通过建立系列内作品以及不同系列之间的关系，他的作品一环扣一环，为我们单独或整体观看作品设定了条件。

杨颂斯将成熟技巧的美妙与享乐主义的趣味性偷偷融入亚麻布油画作品中。他的作品十分亲切、平凡和直截了当，大多数观众都不会加以深思。观看杨颂斯的作品就像得到一种保证：世界正是我们以为的那个样子。在一个系列中，鲜艳的花朵高雅地摆放在画有精致图案的花瓶中，大自然的美被带入室内，为原本平淡无奇的布景增添些许华丽。另一个系列的主角则是严肃且沉默寡言的男人，这些男人们表情庄严如掌握大权的领导人，让观众看到了寡言的力量。在另一个系列中，抽象画创造了一种图形背景错视感：一个多世纪以来，这种手法赋予美国抽象主义作品以活力。

但杨颂斯的作品有其妙处。仔细看他的四幅静物画——每一幅都描画了一个装着

花朵的花瓶——你会发现，我们的大脑对周遭环境的最终理解，并不同于眼睛实际看到的景象。换句话说，我们以为正在观看的，并非实际上看到的东西。杨颂斯强调了在这个差距。他的作品突出了周遭环境中与为人熟悉的既定图案不相符的细节，以具有启发性的形式揭示了我们的大脑是如何玩弄自己的。杨颂斯所传达的意思并不是“眼睛欺骗了我们，大脑扮演拨乱反正的角色”，正好相反，他暗示大脑妨碍了眼睛对眼前事物的正确认知。

比如，观看杨颂斯一幅名为《神秘主义》的作品时，我们会立即“看到”一束带有花茎和叶子的花朵，这束花朵插在一个粗矮的黑白花瓶中，而花瓶放在一张用米白色桌布铺盖的桌子上。这看起来十分简单，我们在自己家里、他人家里、网络图片、照片或博物馆里都看到过不少类似的场景。但杨颂斯的作品又有一些离奇之处。其不甚协调的地方来自于艺术家设计图形背景错视感的方式，具体而言，就是花瓣与叶子之间的黄色色空间显得过于实质化。这个出人意料的细节让观众的大脑处于警戒状态，使大脑意识到一些异乎寻常的事情可能正在发生。

这时，在看似符合逻辑的画面中，你开始注意到更多的矛盾之处。最明显的是花瓶左边和右边的空间，即由花瓶、桌面、叶子和花朵所勾勒出来的轮廓。就好像杨颂斯犯了一个错误，将花瓶那具有装饰性的图案画在周边的地面上。但细心如杨颂斯的艺术家，怎么可能犯这种错误呢！反之，这个“错误”突出了艺术家的巧妙手法，强调绘画总是为自由发挥留出空间，尤其是在观众意想不到的地方，比如在绘画对象过

Shifting perceptions never looked better. Nor left viewers with more to mull over. No matter how you begin looking at any one of Jansons’ seventeen canvases at Emma Gray’s Five Car Garage in Santa Monica, California, before you move on to the next one you will have begun to see things differently. That’s because Jansons is a master of working both within and between series. The first is common to modern art: An artist establishes parameters for a particular series and explores the variations within that setup until the potential for discovery has run its course. Then, typically, he moves onto another body of work. The second method is less conventional. It comes into play when an artist treats an entire series as an individual work, which relates to other series in the same way that individual works relate to individual works within a single series. That is Jansons’ specialty. Both intra- and inter-serial, his paintings frame one another, setting the terms by which we see those around them, both individually and collectively.

Jansons’ oils-on-linen smuggle the beauty of unbelievably sophisticated artifice and the playfulness of unapologetic hedonism into compositions so familiar, so flat-footed, and so ordinary that most viewers won’t think twice about them. To glance at a painting by Jansons is to be reassured that the world is just as we thought it was. In one series, brightly colored flowers, tastefully arranged in elaborately patterned

vases, bring nature’s beauty indoors, where they add a splash of gorgeousness to otherwise mundane settings. In another, somber, even taciturn men, wearing the stately expressions of powerful leaders, convey the virtues of holding one’s tongue. In a third, abstract compositions create the kind of figure-ground ambiguity that has animated American abstraction for more than a century.

But there’s something funny about Jansons’ paintings. To look carefully at his four still lifes—each of which depicts a vase filled with flowers—is to see that our minds make sense of our surroundings by jumping to conclusions that are not, ultimately, borne out by what our eyes actually see. In other words, what we think we are seeing is not what we are actually looking at. Jansons highlights that gap. His paintings give provocative form to the ways our minds play tricks on us by overriding the details of our surroundings that do not fit into the pre-established patterns we are familiar with. Rather than shoring up the notion that our eyes deceive us and that our minds set us straight, Jansons suggests the opposite: that our minds get in the way of our eyes’ accurate perception of whatever is right in front of them.

For example, when we look at a painting such a *Mystic* we immediately “see” a bunch flowers and stems and leaves in a stout black-and-white vase on a table covered by a cream-colored tablecloth. That seems simple enough, like lots of similar setups



《上古刀》亚麻布油画
JOKOTO 50.8cm×40.64cm oil on linen



《古刀》亚麻布油画
KOTO 50.8cm×40.64cm oil on linen



《新刀》亚麻布油画
SHINTO 50.8cm×40.64cm oil on linen



《新新刀》亚麻布油画
SHINSHINTO 50.8cm×40.64cm oil on linen



《现代刀》亚麻布油画
GENDAITO 50.8cm×40.64cm oil on linen



《新制刀》亚麻布油画
SHINSAKUTO 50.8cm×40.64cm oil on linen

于平凡和日常、看似没有自由发挥空间的作品中。杨颂斯认为，绘画既描画了世界又散漫不拘地玩弄事实，但他并不将自己的观点强加给观众，反之，任何认可艺术能同时达到多个目的观众，杨颂斯必倾囊相授。他用静物画、肖像画和抽象画等看似过时的艺术形式来掩盖自己的意图，以创作出能够从视觉和认知方面改变我们看待事物方式的作品。

杨颂斯不哄得我们自满得意，而是偷偷地将自己的观点和深刻见解融入易为人们忽略的普通画面中。这种迂回甚至是秘密的办事态度让人想起具有高度敏感性的地下工作，言语必须用代码代替，瞒着敌方的同时，能一清二楚地将信息传达至我方工作人员的耳中。在艺术创作中，这种态度似乎过于牵强和政治化，但现实是，人们并不十分严肃看待花卉画，尤其是希望艺术以浮夸的方式展现充沛情感的观众。相比之下，杨颂斯从小处着手，以此为基础构建作品。他将重点放在面对面互动之上，引导观众，让观众发现自己总是对偏差视而不见，总是忽略图案中不协调的地方，总是匆忙下结论，最终错过了眼前的事物。更强大的是，艺术家以看似简单的静物画便做到了这一点。而且，杨颂斯将快乐置于重要位置，让我们忘了快乐和惊喜总是伴随顿悟而来。这种迂回的行事风格显得十分政

治和私密化。

在杨颂斯根据黑泽明（Akira Kurosawa）1954年电影《七武士》（Seven Samurai）创作的七张武士肖像画中，艺术家再次将自己的见解具体化。这个系列由七张11*9英寸大的作品组成，每件作品都呈现了一位武士的头肩像特写，这些武士分别是勘兵卫、五郎、平八、胜四郎、菊千代、久藏和七郎。每幅作品由带有颜色的立体面构成，未以阴影或高光加以装饰（只有久藏的衣领带有些许阴影效果）。杨颂斯用漫画的方式捕捉人物的身份，将刻画手段简化为单色平面的同时，夸大了对人物身份至关重要的面部表情。在他的笔下，这种结合“简化”与“夸大”的手法起到十分美妙的效果。仅需几根线条，杨颂斯便勾勒出人物的嘴巴、眼睛和头部轮廓，并将这些著名角色的本质传递出来。在黑泽明的史诗级电影中，这些武士对待村民的态度由原来的忽视转化为同情，最后甚至心甘情愿为村民们献上生命。尽管发现自己处于与成长环境不同的世界里，武士们也能够将过往经历中学到的东西应用于他们从未想要或预料到的情况中。这种适应与坚持、改变与坚守的能力正是杨颂斯的画作所体现的，每一幅画作都简单如卡通画，却又如名作一样能引起共鸣。

杨颂斯的六幅抽象画同样呈现了意外转变的过程。这六幅抽象画以日本六大武士刀的制作年代命名，分别是上古（上古刀，900年之前）、古（古刀，900-1596年）、新（新刀，1596-1780年）、新新（新新刀，1781-1876年）、现代（现代刀，1786-1945年）和新制（新制刀，1953年至今）。与杨颂斯的静物画类似，一开始，他的抽象画看起来似乎由简单的立体色块构成，轮廓尖锐，棱角分明。但仔细观看，你会发现你的大脑简化了杨颂斯实际描画的事物。杨颂斯坚持手绘亚麻布油画，因此，他的油画几乎全由粗糙的边缘、富于质感的表面、变化多端的笔画、古怪杂乱的颜色、摇摆不定的线条、不规则的轮廓、不断变换的空间转移和许多古怪的不协调组成。观众不安地意识到，第一次竟错过了那么多东西。

这个发现迫使你往后退一步，以思考杨颂斯的抽象画、肖像画和静物画之间以及内部可能存在的联系。这时，第一眼看到的图案开始分崩离析，习惯反应也戛然而止。我们不再急于下结论，转而在更直觉的方式来理解事物。想象力向行动飞跃，创造了出人意料、脱离剧本和不同寻常的体验。这正是杨颂斯艺术的魅力。[图]

we have seen throughout our lives, whether in our own homes, in those we have visited, or in images we have looked at, whether online, in photographs, or in museums. But there's something uncanny about Jansons' painting. Its out-of-sync oddness derives from the way he has engineered figure-ground ambiguity, making the buttery space between the petals of his flowers and the fronds of his leaves so substantial, so tactile, so present. This unexpected perception puts the mind on alert, tuning it into the possibility that something out of the ordinary is taking place.

That's when you notice even more compositional inconsistencies in Jansons' otherwise coherently rendered image. The biggest occur immediately to the left and the right of the vase, their contours formed by the vase, tabletop, fronds and flowers. It is as if Jansons has made a mistake, painting the decorative pattern of the vase on the ground around it. But he is too precise a painter to have done that. The "mistake,"

on the contrary, highlights the artifice of his endeavor, emphasizing that painting makes room for freedom, especially when no one expects it: in pictures whose subjects are so anodyne and clichéd that they seem toothless. Rather than clobbering viewers over the head with his conviction that painting both pictures the world and plays, fast and loose, with that fact, Jansons whispers this wisdom to anyone tuned into art's capacity to do more than one thing at once. He uses seemingly outdated genres—still life, portraiture, and abstraction—to camouflage his intentions: to make paintings that change the way we see things, both visually and intellectually.

Jansons does not lull us into complacency so much as he sneaks big ideas and profound convictions into pictures that seem so ordinary they are easily overlooked. That attitude—of doing one's work indirectly, even surreptitiously—bespeaks an underground sensibility, one in which it is necessary

to speak in code, so that one's enemies remain deaf to the messages one is trying to convey while one's co-conspirators are able to hear them, loud and clear. That may seem farfetched and over-politicized, but flower paintings are not taken very seriously, especially by viewers who look to art for grandiose displays of overblown sentiments. In contrast, Jansons starts small and builds from there. Putting a priority on face-to-face interaction, he invites viewers to catch ourselves glossing over differences, seeing patterns while ignoring inconsistencies, leaping to conclusions, and missing what is right in front of our eyes. That he is able to do that with seemingly simple still lifes is all the more potent. Plus, Jansons puts pleasure front and center, never letting us forget that delight and surprise go hand in hand with real insight, which is both political and intimate.

Similar convictions take shape in Jansons' seven portraits of the seven warriors in Akira Kurosawa's




《神秘主义》亚麻布油画
MYSTIC 48.26cm×41.91cm oil on linen

1954 film *Seven Samurai*. Each of the 11-by-9-inch components that make up this seven-part painting is a head-and-shoulder close-up of one of the seven samurai: Kambei Shimada, Gorobei, Heihachi, Katsushiro, Kikuchiyo, Kyuzo, and Shichiroji. Each consists of nothing but solid planes of color, all unadorned with shadows or highlights (except for Kyuzo's collar, which is slightly shaded). Jansons has managed to capture the identities of these characters by means of caricature, simultaneously simplifying his means of depiction—flat planes of solid color—while exaggerating the facial features that are essential to their identities. In his hands, that combination works beautifully. A few judiciously placed lines, around their mouths and eyes, along with the crisply silhouetted shapes of their heads, are all it takes for Jansons to convey the nature of these famous characters, who, in Kurosawa's epic, extend their sympathies to villagers they once would have ignored, yet are now willing to die for. Despite finding themselves in a world alien to their upbringings, the samurai manage to transfer the virtues of their pasts to a situation they neither desired nor anticipated. That capacity, to adapt and preserve, to change and maintain, is exactly what happens in Jansons' paintings, each of which is as simple as a cartoon yet as resonant as a masterpiece.

The drama of unanticipated

transformation also unfolds in his six abstractions, each of which is titled after the six ages of Japanese sword making: *Jokoto* (ancient, pre-900), *Koto* (old, 900-1596), *Shinto* (new, 1596-1780), *Shinshinto* (new new, 1781-1876), *Gendaito* (modern, 1786-1945), and *Shinsakuto* (newly made, 1953-present). Like Jansons' still lifes, his abstractions initially appear to be made up of solid blocks of unmodulated color, their contours sharp and hard-edged. To look closely, however, is to see that that is how your mind has quickly simplified what Jansons has actually painted. Adamantly handmade, his oils on linen are almost entirely comprised of rough edges, richly textured surfaces, wildly diverse brushstrokes, odd mélanges of colors, wavering lines, unsteady contours, jittery spatial shifts, and so many idiosyncratic inconsistencies that it's unsettling to realize you missed so much on first glance.

That discovery compels you to step back and consider the possible links between and among Jansons' abstractions, portraits, and still lifes. When that happens, established patterns fall by the wayside. Habitual responses dissipate. And, rather than leaping to conclusions, our minds turn to more intuitive ways to make sense of things. The imagination leaps into action, creating unexpected, unscripted, and out-of-the-ordinary experiences. That's exactly where Jansons' art takes us. 



《神秘主义》亚麻布油画
MYSTIC 48.26cm×41.91cm oil on linen



《单色不被察觉》亚麻布油画
MONO NO AWARE 45.72cm×38.1cm oil on linen



《文艺复兴的微笑》亚麻布油画
RENAISSANCE SMILE 104cm×91.4cm oil on linen