

Valuing The Time and Authenticity:
A Preliminary Review of The Jewellery Work of Li Yi

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> Keywords & Abstract

> **Keywords:** Time; Authenticity; Author Jewellery; Authority and Anonymity; The Current Sense of Authenticity

> **Abstract:** It is known that Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault raised the question of authorship in the 1960s (The Death of the Author and Who is an Author) with a profound influence cross the field and the globe. This essay, however, through a brief review of the development of the notion of "**Author Jewellery**," consciously incorporates the artist, Li Yi's latest practise produced in the period of COVID-19 lockdowns, into this framework. With the analysis of the cause of valuing time, the essay aim to point out how the authenticity that sculpts the core of an artist's work is derived and how the autonomous consciousness of the individual artist is shaped. This contextualised discourse is a deep concern for the society we are now living in, in which the truth and lies are hard to distinguish, so the reinterpretation of authenticity in today's context is reasonably crucial. That finally generates a conclusion - the **birth and death of authorship are two sides of the same coin**. As in an artist's work, both one-off design and batch-produced art pieces are the evidence. In some ways, the new tonality and proposition of generalised authors are aroused. As the involvement of a wider range of authors, **the current sense of authenticity** becomes the key to contemporary expression.

> Main Body

| Foreword |

As some of us might be aware, the diverse discourses on contemporary jewellery are rapidly spreading out, in a variety of languages, approaches, and means, from Europe, where the culture began, to other regions at large. But a few terms, in the meantime, still need to be more rigorously clarified as they are deeply connected to the foundation of practical research. The identification of the mode of jewellery design that is made by an indie artist with limited production has always been a contentious issue both within and outside the jewellery communities.

The terms *"Author Jewellery or Autorenschmuck (in German) or Auteur (in French) Jewellery"*, however, is an exclusively discussed and culturally accepted expression, not only in the German-speaking jewellery scene but also at the international level, particularly endorsed by those who have been engaged in this field for ages, such as jewellery experts, designers, artists, and so forth. Rather than

emphasising the materiality of research, this approach serves as a medium to suggest that the enhancement of autonomy and disenchantment is critical because it emphasises individuals' motivational ideas and enables an aesthetic ethos that oscillates between being art and remaining adornment (restrained adornment) at the same time.

If we trace back to the origin, this branch of art was started in the 1960s, rooted in western culture and highlighting the non-utilitarianism of the media. In this sense, making jewellery means breaking free from the constraints of thinking about precious metals and gems. Today's author jewellery is more committed to exploring the autonomy of a new value system instead of monetary value. This consensus is conducive to the shaping of visual tension and cultural texture; that is, the artistic concept determines the form, the material selection, and the technique of creation. On the other hand, it also confirms that the jewellery maker is the artist.

Very recently, a book published in English claimed on its front page that the term "author jewellery" is a no-need-to-argue terminology that makes today's jewellery more artistic than ever before. Although such a propaganda tone sounds like a hard sell, it could be a reminder to reveal that a certain voice within the community should not be underestimated, as people have already realised that this remarkable art, like any other art form, is evidence of man's embracement of intelligence. History may not repeat itself, but it does rhyme a lot, sometimes in a positive manner. Today, while we discuss the notion of the author jewellery, just like the French critics celebrated informal films in the 50s and 60s of the 20th century, which devote a strong interest to a genre of film that particularly reflects the unique views of film directors who have full creative control over their work, for example, the films of Jean-Luc Godard, Francois Truffaut, Agnes Varda, and even extended to the films of British American director Alfred Hitchcock at that time. Author Film and Auteur Theory (created by André Bazin, a French film critic and

theorist), for example, are thus discoursed terms. In many ways, the consensus built up by both industry and academia created a prototype opportunity for the director to get rid of the ideological constraints of outdated conventions, so the term *French New Wave* (*La Nouvelle Vague*, in French) became a watershed between general film and **author film** that incredibly changed the history of film in the modern era.

Indeed, the consensus promotes collaboration. As it stands today, the authors of film directors, writers, musicians, photographers, jewellers, and so forth from all over the world generally agree on the comprehensibility of the English (French) term "author" (auteur), as it not only reveals the copyright of the originator in legalistic discourse, but also refers to the person who begins or causes or initiates something independently. In the contemporary jewellery community, it fundamentally authored an inclusive, flexible, and transparent identity of the artist with:

- *High degree of autonomy,*
- *Expression of concept and characteristics that is clear and strong,*
- *One-off design,*
- *Construction of independent means.*

Through which both practical and theoretical foundations are widely addressed for the development of the word's meaning. On top of that, the inherent connection that links up jewellery, people, and time-space urges people to be involved in this specific field to remain a constant force and to prospect an expanded and located potentiality of transformation towards a future that is highly unpredicted.

| Text |

When we approach Li Yi's work from the perspective of a spectator as well as a critic, by briefly reviewing the cause and development of the

concept of author jewellery, it is because we intend to incorporate the latest practise of the artist into this cognitive framework. With a deep concern for contextualisation, we must access an artist's practising trajectory with the same rigorous attitude as we do to contemporary art - keeping a cautious open mind - to seek genuine and responsible two-way communication between people. Li Yi, as an emerging artist who has just stepped into society, is not only an indie artist but plays multiple roles in society. At the Chinese National Academy of Arts, where she serves, she is a young scholar, a project coordinator, as well as a social media specialist ... The most obvious characteristic of a multiplied role is that she is literally busy with trivial work. A full-time devotion to art practise is, indeed, a luxurious way of working and living. However, unexpectedly, from around the end of 2019 to the middle of 2020, the period of global lockdowns due to the pandemic, a real-world retreat circumstantially made it possible for her to regain a long-lost identity. In the dark winter of North China, where both physical and psychological chills are hard to release, art experiences are re-built. The time of global lockdown seems

controllable, but the suddenly gained 'liberty', for many people, is something that they cannot cope with, so the time flies as the sands slip through the fingers much faster. An artist's capacity for self-discipline reveals rationality and sagacity - a kind of innocent depth that is not quite commensurate with her actual age of 30. Because of the sentimental instinct to seize the day, she was slightly stubborn, holding a timer to calculate the days, hours, and minutes precisely and faithfully. Finally, we could not only see and touch the concrete pieces or samples (she treats and themes her jewellery piece as *Samples of Moments*, reflecting each moment of the day) she created, but surprisingly, the invisible time acting on the concrete samples is deliberately documented.

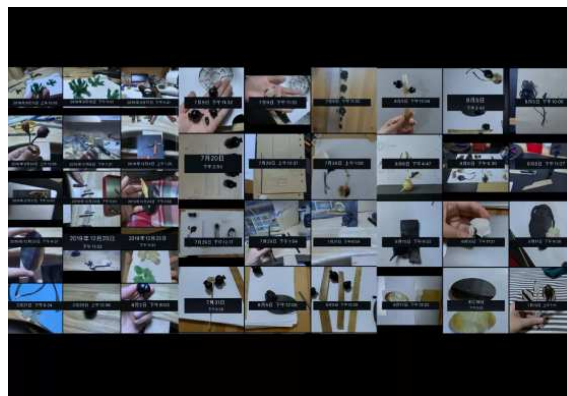


Fig.1: The photo documentation
(Partially details) , Photo credit: Li Yi

The total hours spent was 76, spanning more than seven months. Over 76 hours, a relatively lonely, trial-and-error, and contemplative progress. Beyond 76 hours, a return to daily routine for mental rest and energy transformation. Therefore, a bit different from the feelings of most people, Li Yi, in the critical time of global crisis, chooses to meditate for a while, as the state of relative disconnection provides the way for the art experience that the individual values and time endows to be practicably shaped. Internalised authenticity thus becomes an aesthetic gene, delicately sculpting both object and character of her pieces.

The authenticity of art, as a key concept in contemporary cultural discourse, produces a seesaw between fiction and reality, originality and simulacra, and edge and centre, from which the cultural texture and visual tension are incredibly generated. To address Li Yi's latest collection, which reflects a similar quality, we might approach it from the following angles:

I. The Authenticity of Experience

For the spectator in general, the authenticity of experience is highly related to the emotional sentiment of the people. However, in the context of first contact with the pieces, it is difficult to generate this significant sentiment. This may appear strange because most people assume that the sentiment is the first projected, intuitive touch, dominating most people's cognitive solutions. However, the unattainable authenticity implies that what the spectator sees is, in fact, a simulation of the original environment that was triggered by the discursive institution (e.g., art gallery or art museum). This exhibition, *Samples of Moments*, is no exception. The elaborative curated show is an aesthetic presentation co-arranged by the artist and gallerists. So, the authenticity that the spectator cannot easily see lies in a well-selected material - bison horn - that could be sculpted but is hard to engrave readily, referring to the responsibility and determination of seizing the time as a metaphor. The act of horn

grinding, which contains subtraction and reduction, signifies the track of light that flies by (thus determining the time). It is not only about the possibility of the repetition of carving, grinding, and polishing that wrestle with the artist's physical energies, but about learning to coexist with the dust, noises, and dirty air on the motor-driven shaft machine that is more urgent on a physical level. The artist's response is simply effective: getting fully geared as functional as medical protection to Covid19. Yet, human endurance does have its limits. The artist, therefore, wisely set a working interval of 1.5 hours. After 1.5 hours, they take a "meditative break" for domestic work and then return to another 1.5 hours for continuation, day after day. So now, the finals presented to us are sincere products of deliberation, refinement, and the cost of time. Fortunately, physical consumption poetically achieved a sort of psychological relief: farther and farther from the sense of cold; closer and closer to the state of honesty. In doing so, the know-nothingism of the authenticity of the experience limits the projection of the empathy of the spectators. As a result, habitual cognitive inertia is becoming a decision-making constraint.

The so-called "take for granted," therefore, would be deconstructed in multiple ways to approach the invisible yet priceless authenticity of the experience.

II. The Authenticity of Culture

As an Eastern lady who was brought up and was trained in Asia, *Samples of Moments* naturally fits with the geographical and cultural background of the artist, in either material selection or paradigm of thinking. We might interpret the cause and effect with the Blood Lineage Theory, but the argument of this theory inevitably leads to the suspicion of cultural racism at its most basic level. If we only look at the way an artist creates, she just projects her daily observations into abstract concepts and then deducts them according to the existing logic to further prove the concepts. If the relationship in between is properly handled, it is then consistent with the instinct of the ideas. In particular, if we regard *Valuing the Time (or Seizing the*

Time or Performing the Cost of Time) as a concept lead, her appeal to form is as follows:

- *A material that grows and dies naturally,*
- *A form that comes and goes spontaneously,*
- *A behaviour that begins and ends simply.*

Her specified approaches are:

- *A material that grows and dies naturally - durable horns,*
- *A form that comes and goes spontaneously - drifting petals,*
- *A behaviour that begins and ends simply in jewellery making.*

Generally, a simple interpretation and reproduction of nature has been the core of oriental art (art in the East Asian Cultural Sphere or Sino-sphere) to seek of inner stability, plainness, quietness, and purity. People feel happy and full as they blend into the world of the wilderness, while their autonomous minds are stretched. A deliberative review of Li Yi's artwork shows the similar concern towards nature and ethos that have also been integrated into the shaping of mind. However, unlike placing oneself in the wilderness or choosing self-isolation for loneliness (which is closest to the simple life in Walden Lake in an English literature context), Li Yi prefers to stand with an external perspective and, when combined with philosophical vocabulary, see the insides of nature. A more subtle game of relationship - the tension between growth and extinction - unexpected refers to the Confucian view of life of all things that disappear and reappear timelessly. So, the buffalo horn that grows and dies naturally. The haphazard petal or fruit; behaviour that begins and ends simply (including jewellery making), revealing the ebb and flow in a specific period of life (living body), organic or inorganic, to echo with time, space, and reincarnation.

For the artist, this is a contemporary perspective, where curiosity meets awe of nature. Objectively speaking, no one can really simulate the shape of nature. However, through the sublimation of daily experience, the final appearance in art is the real itself, which requires an attitude that is both offset and dependent on being carried out at the same time. It's a very important relationship orientation, particularly for those who produce knowledge. If we take Li Yi's practise as a referential sample of action, then the enlightenment in it is that only authenticity and self-reflection can help artists to dedicate themselves to a more appropriate state and position themselves in the range of input and output of culture without caring about any practical gains or losses.

III. The Authenticity of Expression

Globally, jewellery involves a vast array of types and quantities. However, it is the works with solid concepts that stand out. If the concept is bone, then the form of flesh and blood that makes skin

alive is space; proportion; texture; colour; function and so forth. Together, they build the true embodiment of art. A closer look at Li Yi's appeal gives us a strong impression: with dark horns, the little zircon and silver nails are subtly placed like starlight sparkling in the gentle twilight; the broken branches and withered petals (or fruits), like stone-engraved statues, silently extended in the sunset. Such a choice of formative expression does not focus on a bright appearance; instead, a slightly determined, even a bit stubborn tone-down, reflecting a profound insight of low-keyness, tenderness, and gentleness (which seems to be quite consistent with her artistic behaviour of calculating time). All forms are so complete as to feel whole, detached but not solitary, old but never lost to new, through a deep balance between inside and outside to seek sincere communication and further interpretation.

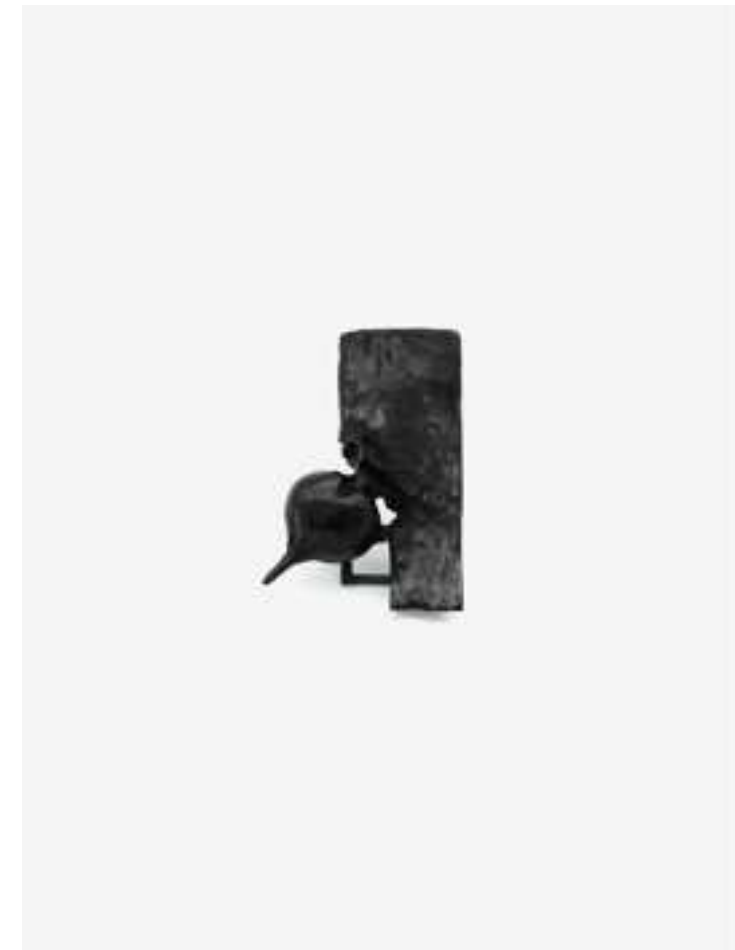


Fig2: Brooch Mixed media

Theme: Samples of Moments; Photo credit: Li Yi

After the conclusion of the work emphasising the uniqueness of art, Li Yi surprisingly turned into alternative experimentation: producing the artwork with CAD support (3D Printing), which implies a certain quantity of multiple reproduction with one-shape work is reasonably possible. According to Walter Benjamin, if AURA[i] in the dimension of caring for time and space, endows artwork with original and unique qualities that cannot be copied, the technology of mechanical reproduction evolutionarily provides a new potentiality with another progress dimension of space-time while dispelling the uniqueness of space-time itself. It is connected to the idea of authenticity as well. In Li Yi's practice, her machine-oriented aesthetics are partially moving out from the authoritative space of an institution to a broader realm of the public.

Compared with other art categories, obviously, jewellery has the most significant characteristics of openness and participation; the most noticeable feature is that it enhances the bodily consciousness of

people. The more recipient is inspired by the work, the more interaction on the recipient's body heads to be produced in ways the artist never expected. The individual thoughts of the recipient consequently generate a new tonality and proposition under the guidance of new consciousness, which in turn triggers a renewed understanding of the subjectivity of both the producer and receiver of art. In addition, different interpretations of the same work by different individuals also indicate the importance of the background of sociological knowledge in being comprehensible. A sense of community belonging through public interactions: wearing, gifting, collecting, and even collaboration is therefore promoted by this specific art form of author jewellery, as the behaviour of reproduction does not reduce the authenticity of artistic expression. Alternatively, it never labels the artist as the only person who produces the aesthetics, which is the banishment of authority. The real power of expression, it turns out, is even more aesthetic in the bodily interpretation of the recipient (as can be seen in the photo collection of the wearing effect of jewellery). Similar examples are not limited to

wearable art. We choose Gill Sans font on the computer for redesign to individually continue and convey Eric Gill's insistence on truth, goodness, and beauty [i]; when we listen to Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 in D minor in concert, we care more about who is performing it at the time; Years after Sol Lewitt's passing away, the art museum could continue to rewrite *a collective solo show* (not a retrospective show) based on the precisely prepared instructions he left behind. All because **the real power expressed now is more critical**. The authorship crisis mentioned in the beginning is then literally experiencing the crisis of copyright. It will also be challenged in a constantly changing context. From another point of view, however, it might be a potential aspect to suggest that the public is the joint author or co-author. In some ways, Li Yi's exploration of new forms is based on the premise of responding to the changes of the times; as for her, and perhaps for all of us, **individuation (authority/the birth of the author [ii]) and de-individuation (anonymity/the death of the author [ii]) are two sides of the same coin**; dual ends to a life driven

by the pursuit of artistic authenticity that brings an incredible sense of the present to us directly and romantically.



Fig.3: Group Photo of Wearing Effect:

Wearers: Artist, Li Yi (left), Collector, Teng Fei (center) and Gallery Founder, Liang Xiao (right)

Prof. Teng Fei wears *the Dark Night*, pendent necklace, mixed media

Li Yi and Liang Xiao wear the 3D-printed artwork, *Doubling Time*, resin

Theme: *Samples of Moments*

Venue: The Closer Gallery, Beijing, China; Photo credit: Li Yi

| Epilogue I

So, what is the exact definition of authenticity? And how to be an authentic self? As the American literary critic Lionel Trilling once pointed out, the word as we now use it refers primarily to a congruence between avowal and actual feeling. In other words, it requires a relative congruence between social self and inner self. The more diverse the social roles, the more the authenticity of individuals will inevitably become an issue that needs to be constantly questioned. Nowadays, we are all engaged in a society that is dominated by news feeds and algorithms. People are therefore hardly unblinded by utilitarian considerations, and so many illusory dummies, make-believes, and even fake masks are as confusing as mud and sand, which flow together to mingle the truth and lies. The authenticity of artistic embodiment, however, provides a certain and critical way for us to feel the fundamental reality of the world and to rebel against the social hypocrisy of it.

To end the writing as a spectator as well as a critic, I sincerely hope that Li Yi will adhere to her original ideal of art-sculpting time and characteristics with simplicity, plainness, and authenticity through more thoughtful studies upon the principle, concept, and significance of author jewellery, to achieve a utopian yet realistic state of self-consistent. If the world and the fact are as she sees them: everything grows and everything dies, then we can probably expect a sense of permanence, a fleeting permanence (or ephemeral permanence), to be raised in her subsequent practices, along with a lighter and freer discourse. Prospectively, her assumptions, thoughts, behaviours, and even sentiments will then, under a broader pattern, spontaneously flow into a vibrant sample of vigour times.

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> More Images of 'Samples of Moments'



Brooch | black buffalo horn, silver | 60 x 40 x 20 mm

Necklace| black buffalo horn, steel | 200 x 300 x 40 mm





Pendent necklace | black buffalo horn, steel, silver, thread | 500 x 40 mm



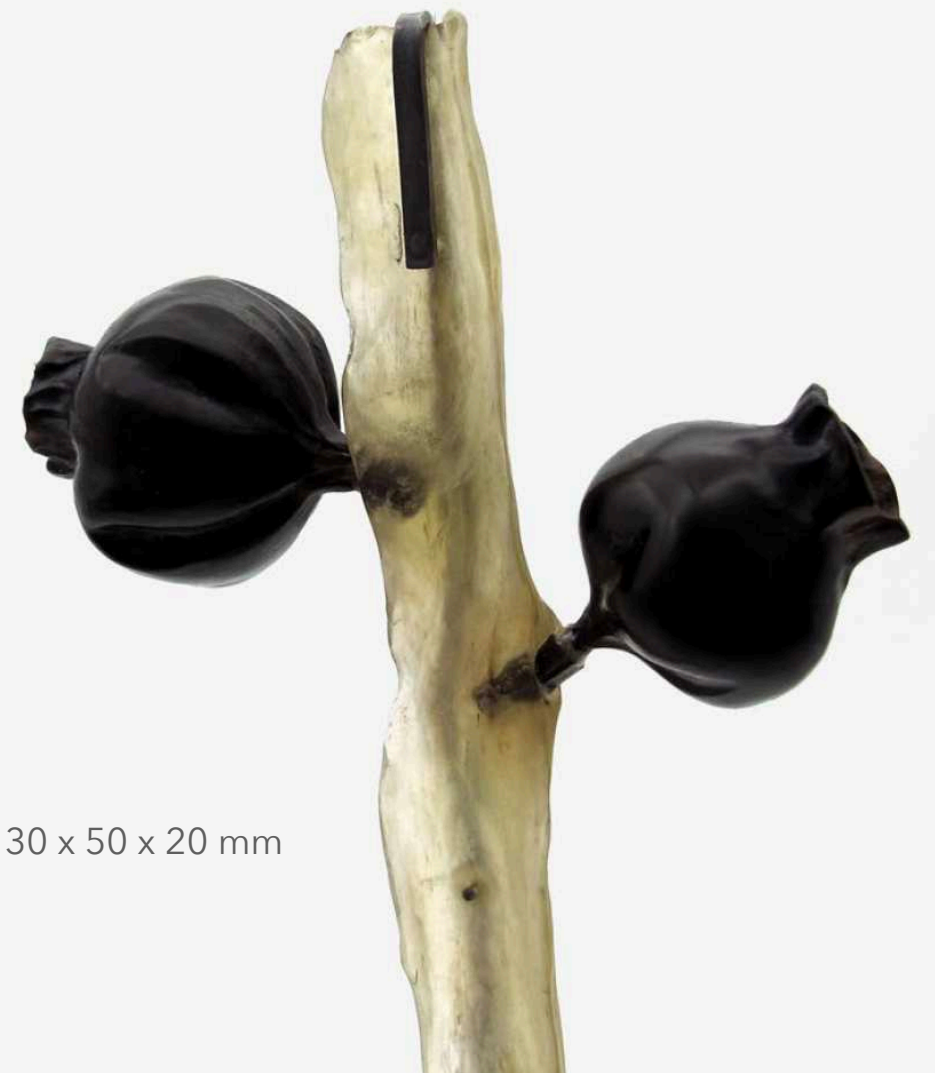
Ring | beech, buxus sinica, eucalyptus fruit | 140 x 120 x 10 mm



Brooch | black buffalo horn, yellow coat horn, steel, silver | 80 x 45 x 10 mm / piece



Object | Black Buffalo Horn, Silver | 140 x 20 mm



Brooch | black buffalo horn, yellow goat horn, silver | 130 x 50 x 20 mm



Pendent necklace | black buffalo horn,
steel, silver, thread | 500 x 40 mm

> Complementary Info.

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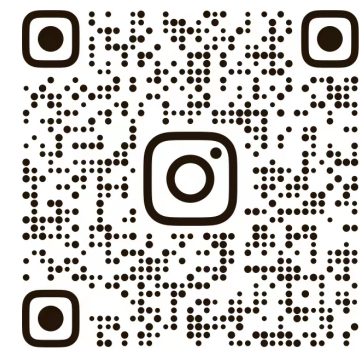
Email: wjj1231@hotmail.com

Time of Produce: May, 2022

Image Credit: Li Yi

Chinese Version: <https://www.cafa.com.cn/cn/research/details/8329927>

IG Page for Collaboration:



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