

INTERVIEW WITH LIU WEI

What does Chinese New Year mean to you?

The hardship of winter has passed, families gather to look forward to spring — this is when all Chinese, wherever they are, reconnect with family. The Chinese people are hard workers – they always give the impression of working nonstop. This is the only time when everything comes to a halt; everyone stops what they are doing to

enjoy a true break. It's a moment of freedom, and I think that there's something about the holiday season that's emblematic for humanity. The interruption is what's important.

How do you see the Year of the Ox, 2021?

I'm not superstitious personally, but the Chinese consider the Ox an auspicious year.

Because of the pandemic, we are coming out of a very unusual year, and it changed a lot of things for me, like how I think, work and the way I look at art and the world around me. I believe one must remain hopeful when looking to the future: each year brings change and new possibilities, even in times of crisis, as we have recently experienced. Focusing on new creativity gives me lots of hope for the future.

What inspires you most as an artist? What about Hennessy inspired you for this work?

All of my inspiration comes from real life. I'm always looking at the world with new eyes and asking what art is exactly at a given point in space and time. Everything depends on one's approach to reality and how you read things.



Rather than just giving my own art a meaning – which I find too frontal – I prefer emotions. In that sense, there are parallels with the Hennessy art of blending: everything mixes together, everything is filled with possibility and there is space for infinite imagination. To me, art is limitless, it's the unknown, nothing is certain. In being an artist, I'm constantly questioning and expressing a desire for a certain kind of beauty.

What were your impressions following your visit to Hennessy in Cognac?

I was really touched by their long history and the technique of assemblage, or mixing. Hennessy is sort of a culture unto itself. When you see all the old barrels, you realize how much time and patience it requires to perfect a craft, from making a barrel to blending cognac. It's fascinating. It has nothing to do with the modern world, where we all work like machines. At

Hennessy there is an old-fashioned way of doing things, and everyone has their unique role, skills and rhythm of life. That really impressed me. The way they make cognac is like art.

How did you choose the colors for 'SPRING'? What is their meaning?

I chose vivid colors and an organic character to express hope for this new spring, for positive change and a beautiful future. There's almost a taste of spring, an abstract feeling about it. But to me the most important thing was the choice of medium! Up until now, I always used a computer to create, whether it was for my paintings or photography, where nothing is left to chance. In real life, choices are the most important things; they entail reflection and resistance. The same holds true for art: the part that really touches me most is the one when you make a choice.



Can you please describe the emotion of creating?

Each work has a raison d'être and a specific starting point, but the creative process means that you incorporate different points of association as you go along, which introduces various meanings and disrupts the normal order of reality. Very often, those significations mean that you circle back and get rid of your original starting point. It's like the process of abstract thought, which is the keystone for humanity. It's the same with respect to Hennessy: I just followed the perceptions I have of great cognac, the emotion of Chinese New Year, and they blended together into a contemporary expression.

What was your biggest challenge in creating this work?

The greatest challenge for me was how to make art that was greater than the juxtaposition of symbols, something that would speak to me, to the House, and to the audience on many different levels.

We live in a time of massive social change and upheaval. What is your role as an artist in that context?

In terms of looking toward the future, art always precedes theory and facts. Art is that thing that's impossible to express in words. The impact of art on reality is always hidden within: it's only once you become conscious of its existence that it takes on meaning. To me, art is a unique way of describing our world.

How do you see today's dialogue between East and West? Do boundaries even exist anymore?

In the beginning, East and West were two completely different worlds. Today, with the blend of cultures, and with technological revolutions and AI, we're moving into a period of massive change. It's almost not about classical boundaries

anymore — maybe we're moving into a new kind of civilization. But I never think about East and West specifically. For me, everything relative to beauty is the same, even if the form is different.

What space between tradition and modernity does this work occupy?

Everything begins in the space of emotions and feelings, through various means of perception. I try to bring together information about the traditional New Year, Hennessy, China, tomorrow's world, and reveal them all through this work.

What message do you hope people will understand as they look at your artwork?

I hope it will speak to them emotionally, that it will resonate. I hope that they will not spend time thinking about what it means, because the meaning lies precisely in the fact that it is supposed to mean something different to each individual and prompt them to ask themselves questions. It's supposed to create new perceptions and self-understanding. Thanks to this collaboration with Hennessy, art becomes accessible to a great number of people and I hope that we can offer audiences new perceptions and knowledge.

Of Hennessy's values, which speak to you most strongly?

Conscientious work at every step of the process, the selection of different qualities of eaux-de-vie, and the choice of taste: it's precisely those differentiations and subtleties that define Hennessy cognac and make it beautiful.

What words or feelings do you always bear in mind?

"What does not change is the will to change," from *The Kingfishers* by Charles Olson. Today is not the only way to the future.

What can art bring to a house such as Hennessy? What can Hennessy do for art?

Art has accompanied society's advances and development since the dawn of time: they are mutually influenced. Hennessy is the crystallization of civilization, it's an aesthetic in itself, a form of art.

How do you see your relationship with Hennessy?

We each describe how we see the world through our art. Each in our own way, we bring to life the pleasure of beauty. We are vectors for one another.



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