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# Ai Jing Returns: art exhibition I Love Ai Jing (2)

By Xu Ming (Global Times)

10:23, November 27, 2012

## Learning a new language

Visiting the exhibition, people would not be able to forget Ai Jing's other identity as a singer. On one piece, Ai painted a girl playing guitar, against the music score of the song "My 1997," which made her famous across China in the 1990s. She was regarded as the "contemporary female ballad poet" and a leading folk singer.

But Ai gradually faded out of the music circle, particularly after 1998 when her song "Made in China" failed to pass censorship. Though she occasionally appeared in some activities and has produced songs since then, her focus turned to contemporary art. As she said, when she could no longer express herself through music, the best solution was to find "another language."

She started to learn painting in 1999 from Zhang Xiaogang, a renowned Chinese contemporary artist. Ai lived in New York for years and traveled widely to enrich her cultural experiences by visiting galleries, art institutions, and auction houses. Since 2007, she began to participate in important art exhibitions as a visual artist and has held three exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai and New York. After her exhibition in New York in 2009 her work started to become widely known and catch the eye of collectors.

In her book Ai on the Way published in 2004, she wrote that she was fond of painting as a child, but she thought music was a better way for her to express herself at that time. She once said, after more than 10 years, painting has opened another gate for her, one with richer colors.

As the first singer to hold several art exhibitions in China, Ai's transition to visual artist hasn't happened without raising some eyebrows. She was once called a "beginner" in art after spending 10 years learning, and some say she is just using her former fame to create a ripple. But such doubts do not seem to affect Ai. To her, visual art is simply an extension of her creation along with music. "Arts are all linked," she told Global Times.

In her creation of visual art, Ai incorporates her talent and emotion in music, which are particularly reflected in works with love as their theme. She said she would not give up music, admitting it continues to whirl in her mind while painting.

Pointing to her works "Gun and Roses" and "I Love Heavy Metal," she explained that they are inspired from the music world that other artists probably would not notice. "If you look carefully, you will see that these works are more or less linked to the music I have done and been familiar with."

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