

“Free and Easy Wandering”: Individual Freedom in Yiqiang Wu’s Art via the Bamboo Motif

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This study explores the artistic practice of contemporary Chinese artist Yiqiang Wu, centering on the bamboo motif from the early 2000s to the present. It traces his integration of bamboo into oil paintings such as He Is a Man series and Moments series (2008–2009), his expression of ethereal and dreamlike beauty in Bamboo Forest series (2017), and his most recent mixed-media artworks including Object·Essence: Bamboo or Sight Reading: Bamboo series (2026). These works, especially his most recent creations, resonate with and transcend the classical Chinese literati tradition of bamboo painting. In these works, Yiqiang Wu explores his ideal of individual freedom traced back to the Daoist concept of “free and easy wandering,” by prioritizing spiritual and aesthetic transcendence over stylistic repetition. Beneath his celebration of freedom through innovation, he resists complete social detachment. True freedom, he suggests, entails neither absolute isolation nor emotional numbness, but rather an authentic sensitivity to virtues such as self-reliance, love, and strength. By interpreting his original bamboo-related and bamboo-themed works, this study illuminates how Yiqiang Wu conveys the complexity of individual freedom through his ongoing and evolving artistic practice.

Keywords: Yiqiang Wu; Contemporary Chinese Art; Bamboo Motif; Literati Painting; Individual Freedom