

The Need for Biodiversity in Art

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In 1864, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) published his socio-economic theory of “Survival of the Fittest”, applying Charles Darwin’s (1809-1882) theory of evolution to human societies; likewise, Darwin later published the book *The Variation of Animals and Plants under Domestication* in 1868, with the concept of “Survival of the Fittest” being referenced. Given that Spencer’s theory amplified the mechanism of natural selection and eugenics, the resulting “Social Darwinism” was a gross misapplication of the Darwinian evolution by the Nazi Government to justify its population and medical policies. However, in the aftermath of World War II and the Holocaust, “Social Darwinism” was no longer regarded as an academic discipline, but rather as a theoretical downfall that encouraged the crimes against humanity. In Spencer’s day, “Social Darwinism”, rooted in the principles for continuing biological propagation, marked a major academic breakthrough and was invoked to better cultivate empowered citizens, who not only continued to increase human population through the selective breeding of the same species but also contributed to economic growth. Despite the ostensibly impeccable national policy, the society, judging from the statistics, would still spiral into extreme competition and species elimination when being solely subject to the criteria of birth-giving and production value, thereby causing the rapid extinction of a certain community.

Consequently, the variation phenomenon is accentuated and has become crucial at the intersection of biology sociology. This resonates well with the exhibition title “Survival of the Exceptional”, which indicates the unexpected nature of species and the feature that ensures living space for survival solely through biodiversity, thus bearing a striking resemblance to the essence of art.

Meanwhile, with an allusion to the discipline of biology, observing society within the framework of natalism through the agency of artworld can be an effective way to examine the various regulations that treat human beings as just another species and how social systems utilize the un-transferability of gender and biological nature to degrade the human world into the product of monotonous functionalism. Generally speaking, such societies tend to impose natalism by means of patriarchal reproduction, that is to say, the rigid classification system known as gender binary, which aims to make one gender seem inferior to the other gender. Based on the submission and dependency derived from the natalist social structure, “Survival of the Exceptional” delves into the resulting biological competition in courtship and challenges the cultural frameworks in such societies that are deemed tame and pretentious.

The subthemes of “Survival of the Exceptional” employ several biological concepts in a slightly sarcastic way, of which “Symbiosis” reminds people of the interdependency among different life forms; “Antibody” stands for the hidden, invisible defensiveness, whereas “Mimicry” embodies the visible and proper expression in response to nature. By interweaving these key words to interpret the logic of patriarchal societies, the exhibition sheds light on the “canon” in the standard social structure as well as various examples of disguise and morphing considered “not decent”. Some of the exhibited artworks come from the collections of the three major domestic art museums, all of which represent artistic canons, but at the same time unveiling the mechanism behind art collecting: only when certain features are neglected can these artworks be classified as the canons in art history.

For instance, the official description of *Under the Mango Trees* by SHIY De-Jinn, as belonging to the collection of the National Taiwan Museum of Fines Arts, reads, “with its rich and dynamic ink brushwork, the painting depicts the trunk