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Nurit David * **Koon Wai Bong** * **Vietnam's**
New Gang Of Five * **Tsang Kin-Wah** *
Kumwqot * **Tawan Wattuya** * **Lin Hong**
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soldiers and lurid dancers in pop pinks and green PLA uniforms have been bleached of all color. Their black-and-white palette evokes two immediate responses: the jar of polemic positions and a filmic tradition. Titled *The Cast and Crew*, Guo has used silver-screen mythology as a motif to question reality in today's China. It is an exhibition riddled with ambiguities despite its clean-cut palette.

These are big paintings and they command the gallery space and the viewer's attention. The artist has played with formulaic heroics, casting over life-sized portraits against the movie set. This is perhaps best captured in an imposing self-portrait where Guo casts himself in the role of the 'PLA pin-up boy' depicted in a brushy pastoral setting. In *On Set-Self Portrait, 1979* (2010)—and two decades on from his witness of Tiananmen's trauma—Guo's highly constructed image points to the broader conditions of 21st century China as it deals with its own urban migration, Western desires, and projected 'global image.'

While our first impression places these portraits somewhere between nostalgia and the 'shopping-mall photo studio,' it is their subtle embedded clues that offer the greater truth. Take this same self-portrait, for example, with its proliferation of residential tower blocks that hover in its background, diffused in what could only allude to the polluted haze of China's cities. Is it a new agrarian reform, its propaganda equally veiled as Hollywood's?

Guo has long used the device of theatrics. His earlier works were framed around carnival-like chaos oscillating between eroticism and violence. This same awkward grouping of figures and expressions continues in these new paintings, however Guo substitutes his former set of players for another: actors becomes soldiers and everyday players blur with the stars. The endless reenactment of war 'on-screen' has been reduced to the banality of between-takes 'happy-snaps.'

Essentially, this exhibition reads as a collection of painted

photographic portraits taken at the edges of reality. This is best captured in a huge diptych stretching some five meters, *The Cast and Crew* (2009). The structure of this painting is extremely interesting, where the cast is stacked and framed within brick walls that open to a proscenium arch. In the distance one can make out a cameraman ready for the next shoot. As an image it is the ultimate metaphor for containment where the only escape is fantasy.

Guo Jian has an uncanny knack at scrambling the referents in his paintings. Like the 'happy snap' itself—reiterated in the posed peace sign by its sitters—these images capture a candid moment, a kind of *false* reality. It is as fleeting, fragile, and fabricated as a constantly changing China, and it offers a subplot as bleak as these painting's somber palette. Lights, camera, action—yes, the world is looking but does it really see?—this is the greater scene Guo Jian directs in his paintings.

Gina Fairley

The Tao of Now at White Rabbit Collection

The White Rabbit Collection opened August 2009, four floors dedicated to Chinese art post-2000. While it is Australia's only museum dedicated to Chinese art, it has been heralded globally for its



Chen Zhou + Huang Keyi, *China Carnival No.1: Tiananmen*, 2007, c-print, 120 x 180 cm. Image: Courtesy the Artists and White Rabbit Collection.

focus and quality in leading this investigation. It is a big tag to live up to and its second exhibition, which is a fresh take on its 450-strong collection, attempts to affirm that position.

The Tao of Now continues to awe visitors with its breadth and astute investigation. It moves perceptions beyond the pop antagonisms of the recent past, rather turning to an evaluation of the present—China navigating its new world image. The points of reference have changed. This is illustrated on entering the museum. Visitors are faced with the juxtaposition of Yi Ling's huge abstracted triptych, *New Women* (2007), which brokers new modes of painting, with Chen Wenling's sculpture, *Valiant Struggle No.11* (2006), soaring up the museum's four levels and calling on a more familiar assault of Chinese society with its gold-leaf pig dripping

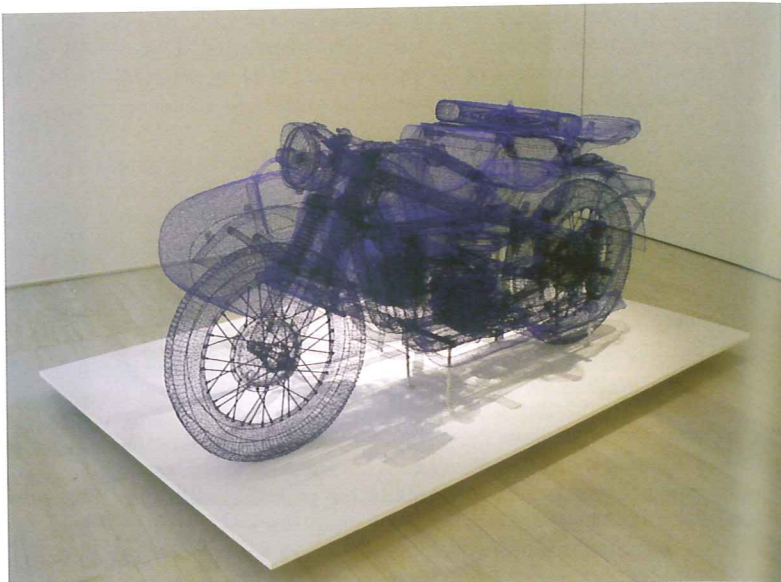
off the outstretched tongue of an anthropomorphized red car. It is dramatic and it screams 'contemporary Chinese art.'

However, as one moves through the galleries, our perceptions are swayed by the diversity and freshness of the work on exhibit. Essentially, *The Tao of Now* is more a title than a theme corraling 40 artists. While the works loosely adhere to the hallmarks of Taoism: the seasons, the passage of time, balance, and nature's superiority over man, it is the *spirit* of these beliefs that is persevered and updated through new technologies and media in this exhibition.

We have to remember that most of these artists have lived abroad; have only known the single-child generation, and have no experience of a pre-Open China. As a result their work has more to do with



Cong Lingqi (b.1982), *Dust*, 2008. mixed media, dimensions variable (occupies space of about 2 x 12 m).



Above left: Zhang Chun Hong, *Life Strands*, 2004, charcoal and graphite on paper, 1,160 x 150 cm. **Above right:** Shi Jindian, *Blue 750*, 2008, colored stainless steel wire. Photograph by Gina Fairley. Images: Courtesy of the Artists and White Rabbit Collection.

access to technology, media communications, and less to do with communist politics and retribution. It is a contemporary reality fleshed out across the floors of the Collection, a show as disparate as the many opinions on Chinese art and its systems of 'value.'

Take, for example, Lin Jiunting's multi-channel interactive video installation of the four seasons, *Beyond the Frame* (2006), which uses the genre of traditional scroll painting across paired digital kiosks and flat-screen monitors; or Zhang Chun Hong's 11-meter charcoal plait, *Life Strands* (2004). It extends beyond the *gongbi* technique and traditional scroll (not to mention its cultural symbolism for a woman's identity) to engage the gallery space using the conventions of installation. Both works fuse two belief systems and, if you like, leapfrog the preoccupations of artists that emerged from the last millennium.

However, it is a dialogue not always so subtle that viewers first encounter arriving at the upper levels. Consider this line-up on the first floor: Chilli's perversions of contemporary Chinese life in his photographic series *Red Star Motel* (2009); Chen Zhou + Huang Keyi's huge C-prints of shopping mall brides and a carnival-like digital rendition of Tiananmen Square, and Bu Huo's alter-ego animations. It is a landscape remapped and

in the thrust of chaos.

On upper levels that same critique of time and re-interpretation of the everyday is fleshed out in Shi Jindian's wire sculpture, *Blue 750* (2008), the Chinese-copied, Russian-copied, pre-WWII BMW motorcycle that has entered contemporary collectable culture; Wang Yuyang's silicon van titled *Breathe: Manager Zhao's Black Car* (2008), which mechanically breathes to let us know that the black-market industry of opportunity is alive and well; and Wu Junyong's two stunning animations *Opera 2* and *3* (2007), the naked postulations of politicians screened in White Rabbit's theater. This evolution of reinterpretation is best manifested in Yan Jun's *Dialogue* (2006), an ancient setting of Ming dynasty table

and chairs constructed from discarded radiator parts and pipes in a *yin/yang* balance between hot and cold, new and old.

One of the youngest artists in the collection is Cong Lingqi (b.1982) whose work is placed adjacent to one of the most senior Cang Xin (b.1957), her standout installation *Dust* (2009) holding its ground. Comprising 210 hand-made minuscule objects from a fly squatter to a drill, they are suspended in a blackened space, their shadows caught in the beam of a theater light. It has a galactic quality and yet, as silhouettes, the objects are cast as memories soon to be outdated by a newer model.

Dong Yuan captures a similar flutter between memory and nostalgia as well as our compulsion for the new in her

recreated student apartments, their contents flattened as still lifes on canvas, overlapped and stacked. A spoof on *trompe l'oeil* perspective play is expanded to a contemporary lament caught between reality and memory. It is sentiment that recurs across this exhibition, from Jin Shi's *Retail Business: Karaoke* (2009), a mobile karaoke cart, to the meticulously rendered scrap of found fabric by Liang Yuanwei's and Li Bo's photorealist painting of everyday objects, *The Importance of Ancient Western Relics* (2007).

The Tao of Now asks: What role *now* to play? It is a question on which one ponders as one walks away from this exhibition. And it is a question that is rigorously applied to White Rabbit's own considered examinations of our times through its collecting.

Gina Fairley

HONG KONG

Futures at I/O

The exhibition *Futures* serves as a platform for recently graduated new media artists in Hong Kong. It features the work of five emerging artists from several educational institutions and each has a distinct approach to artmaking and new media.

One of the strongest



Guo Hongwei, *Paradise*, 2008, polypropylene and acrylic, dimensions variable. Installation view White Rabbit Collection. Image: Courtesy the artist and White Rabbit Collection