



Gallery doesn't lose head over public opinion

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IN THE entrance hall of the White Rabbit Gallery in Chippendale is an enormous white sculpture of a naked man reeling backwards, his partially severed head hanging by a flap of flesh and sinew.

Unlike state galleries and museums, White Rabbit need not concern itself with public opinion. A privately run gallery, it exists to showcase the idiosyncratic and personal Chinese contemporary collection of Judith Neilson, the wife of the billionaire fund-manager Kerr Neilson.

In its second exhibition, opening on Thursday, works that are funny, reflective and beautiful share floor and wall space with works that are violent and sexually explicit.

The most confronting images are in the photographic series *Red Star Motel*, by the artist known only as Chili.

The staged images depict sordid and illegal happenings in Chinese motel rooms. There are standover men and bloodied victims, naked porn stars and a couple on a drug binge.

The Neilsons did not set out to create a controversial show. Alongside the more difficult images are domestic interior paintings by Dong Yuan, Cong Lingqi's sculpted everyday objects and Zhang Chun Hong's 11-metre drawing of braided hair.

But as a private institution, funded by the Neilsons' \$30 million foundation, it has more freedom than government-funded galleries.

"We don't have to report to a million people to get permission to do something," said the Neilsons' daughter, Paris, the gallery's collection manager.

"You lose a lot of the bureaucracy that is faced by the public institutions."

Galleries that showcase private collections have a long tradition in the US, but in Sydney White Rabbit is

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unique. With free admission and no work for sale, it has more in common with the Art Gallery of NSW and the Museum of Contemporary Art than with commercial galleries.

The Neilsons are developing a schedule of talks, film nights and cultural events that echo the public programs of state institutions. Nevertheless, they say the gallery will not compete for the audiences who traditionally attend public galleries.

"All we are doing is adding something more to Sydney's cultural scene," Paris Neilson said.

This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2010/01/17/1263663018707.html>