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White Rabbit

Follow the White Rabbit and discover a wonderland of Chinese art in Chippendale. By Nick Dent



The notion of Chinese art brings to mind ancient jade, Ming dynasty vases, and propaganda paintings of Red Army patriots. You don't immediately think of a red car with a tongue protruding from its bonnet 10 metres into the air, from which dangles a life-size golden sow and two figures hanging onto the animal for dear life.

Chen Wenling's 'Valiant Struggle No.11' (2006) is the sight that greets you on entering White Rabbit, a state-of-the-art, four-floor temple to 21st century Chinese art hidden on a backstreet in Chippendale. Wenling's monumental and startling artwork is a fair indication of the kind of art being produced in China at the moment, and the kind being collected by Judith Neilson for display in the Neilson family's self-funded, non-profit gallery.



Contemporary Chinese art is a hot commodity right now, and among the most fascinating in the world, says Paris Neilson, Judith's daughter and the collection's manager. "The scale of the work is impressive," she says, over red lychee tea in White Rabbit's ground floor public tearoom. "When you go to China and visit the artists' studios, they're the size of airplane hangers. They have access to materials like bronze and fibreglass and they can get workers to help. They have so much freedom to create whatever comes to mind."

The range and ambition of White Rabbit's current exhibition, *The Tao of Now*, is staggering for a non-institutional gallery. Works include Wang Yuyang's full-size campervan that on close inspection appears to be breathing in and out, Dong Yuan's exact recreation of her entire apartment in 186 canvas paintings, and Zhang Chun Hong's charcoal drawing of an 11-metre long plait of black hair hanging down a wall and stretching across the floor. "That style of drawing is known as gongbi," explains Neilson. "If you make a mistake you have to start all over again, you're not allowed to erase, and each stroke has to be perfect."

White Rabbit opened last August, the culmination of an idea sparked ten years ago. Judith Neilson discovered the work of Wang Zhiyuan at a 1999 exhibition at Ray Hughes Gallery in Surry Hills and began a friendship with the Beijing-based artist. "Mum went and visited him in Beijing and was just amazed by the work she saw," Paris explains. "She bought a couple of works and came back raving."

Judith's husband, Platinum Asset Management founder Kerr Neilson, urged her to buy more, and the issue of where to keep and display a collection arose. The Neilsons found an old knitting factory in Chippendale and set about a three-year, \$10 million refurb. White Rabbit is now one of the largest collections of contemporary Chinese art in the world, numbering more than 400 works.

Like Paris in the 19th century and New York in the 20th, Beijing is shaping up to be the 21st century's art capital, with artists from all over China congregating there and a feeding frenzy of international buying that the GFC doesn't seem to have slowed. Judith Neilson takes frequent acquisitive trips to China and White Rabbit's exhibitions will rotate every six months.

"What we'd like to be is an additional cultural space in Sydney, in addition to the Art Gallery of New South Wales and the MCA," says Paris. "It's another activity that people can do in Sydney, and it's free."

Edmund Capon, director of the AGNSW and an expert in Chinese art, agrees. In an email to *Time Out* he hails White Rabbit as "a totally new, fresh, independent addition to the arts in Sydney. This is an amazing glimpse across the vivid plains of contemporary Chinese art. We all owe a debt of gratitude to [the Neilsons] for the inspiration."

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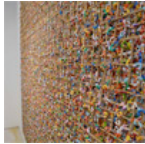
[The Tao of Now](#) White Rabbit Contemporary Chinese Art Collection until 22 Jun

Top 5 White Rabbit exhibits



Xia Xiaowan 'Man and Woman' 2007

This drawing of two figures has been executed on 14 glass sheets stacked in a frame to create an eerie effect that's like a hologram



Qin Fengling 'Scaffold' 2008

Fengling creates little three-dimensional figures from blobs of paint - hundreds of them to each canvas



Cang Xin Exotic Flowers and Rare Herbs series 2007

Astonishing wooden carvings of animals mutating into plants come courtesy of an artist-shaman who believes in the transformative power of the spirit



Wu Junyong Opera series (2007)

Four disturbing flash animations depicting politicians in dunce caps, debasing themselves



Chili 'Red Star Motel' (2008)

Twelve nightmarish photographic scenes acted out in a seedy hotel room set involving drugs, hookers, murder, pornography and partying

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