

EXHIBITION: TAO OF NOW

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It sounds a little like a bumper sticker, doesn't it? Slapped onto this staggering collection of works from contemporary China showing at the White Rabbit Gallery, if *Tao of Now* is such a sticker its vehicle has most certainly got its destination all worked out – and the art world of Australia should jump on board. What unifies these works is the single-mindedness of each artist's vision, and the precision they use in achieving it. Taoism loosely means, 'the path' or 'the way' and is less of a religious code than way of life. Its teachings stress effortless effort, naturalness, refinement – actions used to unearth the natural force and flow of the universe. In a modern China that is past its Opening-Up antagonism and is now grappling with ever more voracious forms of consumerism, modernism, internationalism and individualism, artists are seeking to represent these enormous social changes. It's an anarchic time that artist Wang Zhiyuan likens to the American era of post-historical art, "All artists now face an uneasy dilemma: you can do whatever you like, but whatever you do, there is no benchmark to evaluate it." Therefore, *Tao of Now* is an incredibly diverse array of works, yet feels unified by each artist's struggle to find their 'way'.

Zhang Chun Hong's *Life Strands* (2004) is an 11m length of meticulously rendered hair, each stroke of charcoal laid down in the style *gongbi*. This precise technique can capture animal's fur to butterfly wings in the kind of high-definition most computer whiz-kids would kill for. Nothing can be erased, so any errant stroke means the artist must start again. Similarly, Du Jie's tiny colour-coded paintings from which her paintbrush tip never leaves the canvas, demand a steady hand and meditative concentration; her titles, such as *Brown, 2007.06.06-2007.06.29* record the lives of her lines from first inception to final inky breath. Qin Fengling's paintings also dominate visually with their intricacy, presenting a web of life and complexity communicated through simple squeezes of acrylic paint nudged into human form, a process she likens to cooking. "Sometimes what comes out is a bun, sometimes it's a picture." In Cang Xin's *Exotic Flowers and Rare Herb Series* (2007), the Mongolian channels his father's shamanistic traditions to call to the earth the spirits of frill-necked lizards, scorpions and corpulent babies, all spliced with other organisms in a beautiful, wood-hewn mutated wonderland. With no training, Xin either engages skilled carvers to do his work or uses his own body through performance art.

This is not only the *Tao of Now*, it's a vibrant cross-section of the artists of the future.