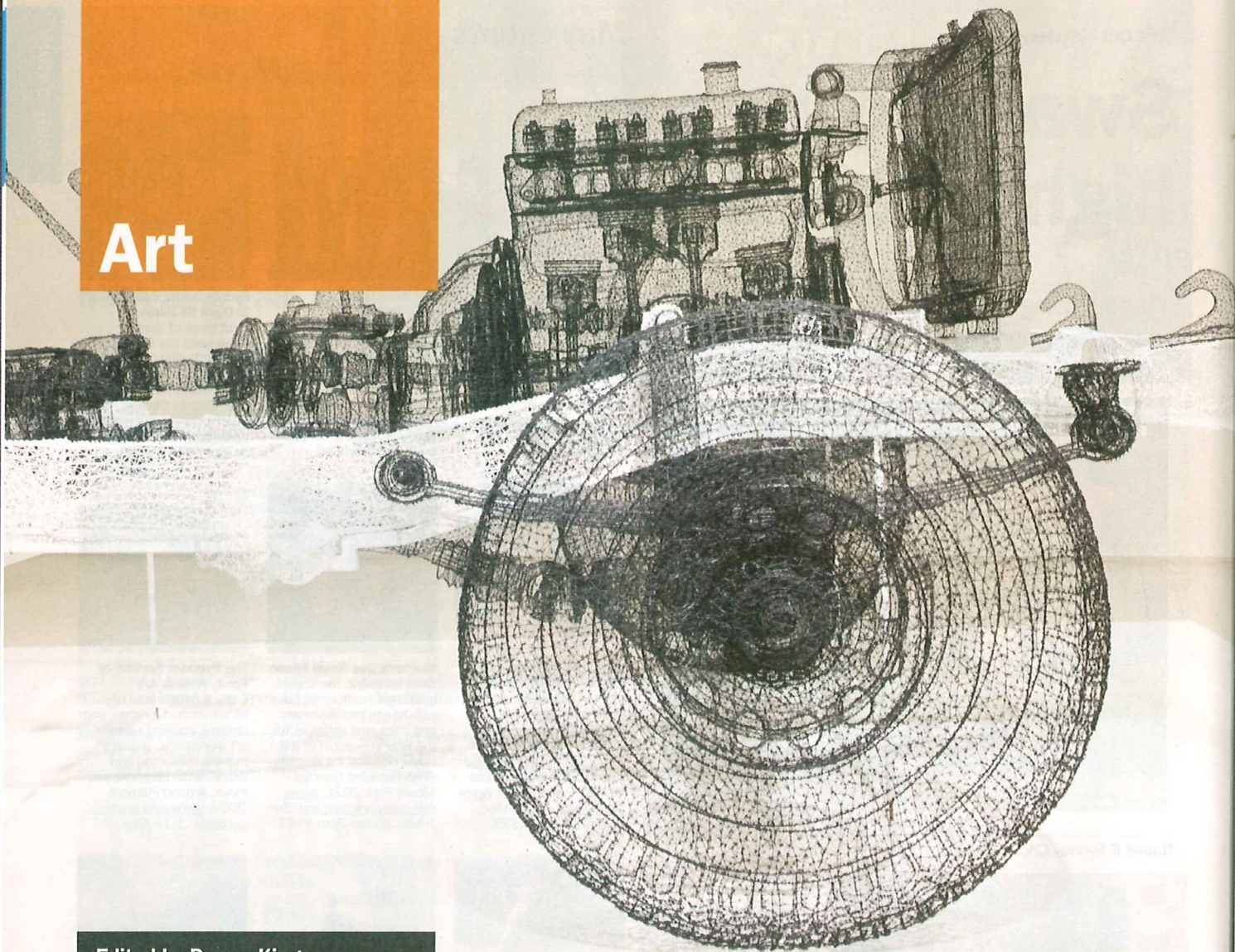


Art



Edited by Darryn King
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'Beijing Jeep's Shadow' by Shi Jindian

Decade of the Rabbit

The White Rabbit Gallery never ceases to amaze, delight and surprise. By Darryn King

She manages her family's collection in one of the city's most impressive contemporary art galleries, but 26-year-old Paris Neilson freely admits that the world of art is daunting sometimes. "Contemporary art can be scary," she laughs. "I'm even scared sometimes!"

Having the charming and beautiful Neilson as one's personal guide to the White Rabbit is probably as far from frightening as you can get. The gallery's latest exhibition, *Decade of the Rabbit*, celebrates the tenth year of the Neilsons' collection of 21st century Chinese art. It reflects the diversity, accessibility and knack for surprise for which the gallery is known and loved – by everyone from school groups to mothers' groups, students to retirees.

In fact, there are probably more wonders on level one than in several contemporary galleries put together. There's a mechanical beetle that senses your movement and scuttles away in the opposite direction; a life-size recreation of a grimy Beijing doorway made from embroidery;

a 'breathing' minivan; and the return of a White Rabbit favourite: two sets of gleaming, sinister figures marching round on a circular treadmill.

There's also a long wall of glowing neon Chinese letters. Neilson explains that they spell out the names of the artist's late father and his favourite Japanese porn star – and the artist, He An, employed highly questionable means of sourcing the materials. "He hired people to go and steal the various characters from the buildings," she says with the trace of a smile. "I don't think anyone noticed."

Up the stairs on level two, a theme begins to emerge: a pair of dragon robes knitted out of the pages of a dictionary; an abstract painting actually comprised of little bits of rice paper soaked in tea and ink; an immaculate stainless steel-wire Jeep; and an incredibly tricky log carving that's not what it seems. According to Neilson, absolute meticulousness is typical of much contemporary Chinese art. "For some artists, it kills all creativity," she says. "But when it works, it works beautifully. I love the fact that there are these tricks to these works: you walk past, then you take a second look and think, 'Oh my goodness!' There's an incredible attention to detail and patience in these things."

Taking the lift to level three – it's the only way to get up there – you're immediately struck by

another beautiful and painstakingly assembled work: a porcelain scale model of the Beijing CBD between its 3rd and 4th Ring Roads, the buildings sprouting tentacles and coral polyps and sitting on a bed of rice. The piece, by 25-year-old artist Zhou Jie, captures Beijing perfectly for Neilson. "It astonishes me how the city changes every time we go there. There are brand new skyscrapers that have come out of nowhere. It's this constantly growing, sprawling creature."

The White Rabbit collection itself continues to grow, evolve and reflect the developing tastes of the Neilson family. "But our idea behind White Rabbit hasn't changed," Neilson says. "We still want to provide a platform for artists who otherwise wouldn't be seen in the West. We want to create a welcoming and unimposing space for all. And we want to document an exciting period for art. We have ten years' worth of work now. It will be interesting to see which way it heads next."

Well, we certainly know where we are headed next: they now serve dumplings in the White Rabbit Teahouse.

Decade of the Rabbit White Rabbit Contemporary Chinese Art Collection, 30 Balfour St, Chipendale 2008. (02 8399 2867 www.whiterabbitcollection.org). Thu–Sun 10am–6pm. **FREE**