



China Carnival No. 1:
Tiananmen, by Chen Zhuo
and Huang Keyi.

FINE CHINA

CHINESE ART HAS BOOMED ALONG WITH ITS ECONOMY,
AND THE PICK OF THE NEW BREED IS NOW ON DISPLAY

WORDS LOUISE NUNN

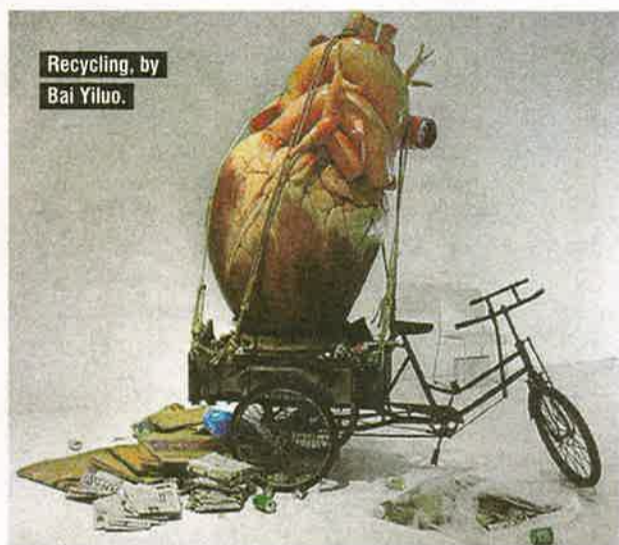
DOES Cang Xin's carved forest of human and animal forms sprouting foliage tell us about China today, or Bai Yiluo's installation with its enormous, fleshy human heart strapped to a man's tricycle cart? Perhaps it's Chen Zhuo and Huang Keyi's vision of Tiananmen Square as a giant amusement park. Or Wang Zhiyuan's comment on capitalism in towering pink panties with a scantily-clad woman and hog-headed man, and the inscription "Diamonds Matter Most".

China entered a new era when it joined the World Trade Organisation in 2001. The country's subsequent economic surge was matched by an explosion of activity by its artists at home and abroad. A new exhibition in Adelaide turns the spotlight on this outpouring of creativity, and the things that have been occupying Chinese artists in the decade since.

The White Rabbit Contemporary Chinese Art Collection, at Samstag Museum from July 15 to September 30,

is big in ideas and scale, Samstag director Erica Green says. "There's a real emphasis on individuality, on the cult of the individual," she says. "It's an idea that has never really existed in 5000 years of Chinese culture, which has always been about the collective and the community. So it has been a huge shift in people's thinking. The opening up of China brought ideas about consumerism and advertising, things which were very, very new. That led to a new blossoming within the art practice." ▶

Sydney funds manager Kerr Neilson and his wife Judith started the White Rabbit collection in 2001, focusing on works created from 2000 onwards. Like the Chinese economy, it grew exponentially to become one of the world's largest and most important collections of contemporary Chinese art. Samstag is the first gallery outside Sydney to gain access to the collection, in the midst of celebrations marking its first 10 years. The selection of work by 12 artists will include sculpture, installation, painting, video and screen prints. Green notes that in the Chinese zodiac, 2011 is the Year of the Rabbit, an auspicious occasion for the intelligent, friendly and artistic people born under its sign. "It really is a coup to have the collection in Adelaide," Green says.



Recycling, by
Bai Yiluo.

"All the artists represented are major artists, which underlines the fact Judith Neilson has been very ambitious in her collecting."

A tour in Mandarin and an education resource for schools are some of the activities Samstag is planning in conjunction with the show, which has been included in the OzAsia Festival, from September 2 to 17.

The White Rabbit story started in 1999 when Judith Neilson enrolled in a Sydney art class run by Wang Zhiyuan. She started collecting his work and they kept in touch when he returned to China in 2002. In 2006 Neilson travelled to Beijing with one of her daughters and met other artists through Wang Zhiyuan. When she got home she telephoned to say she wanted to start a collection and asked him to help. The Neilsens' now substantial collection includes works by artists from a wide range of genres and stages of their careers.

Wang Zhiyuan sums it up in a White Rabbit publication about the collection and its artists. "What it seeks to show the world is a visual-cultural feast from the huge, diverse and rapidly-changing country that is China," he says.

Given how large the collection has become it's no surprise the Neilsens ran short of display room. "I started thinking it would be wonderful to have a space to show what Chinese art really is," Judith Neilson says. The Neilsens opened the not-for-profit, private White Rabbit Gallery in Sydney's inner-city Chippendale in 2009, in a four-storey converted knitting factory. With work by more than 160 artists and new pieces added each year, they can only display a fraction of the collection, so there has been an entirely new exhibition every six months. Run by Judith and the couple's two daughters, the



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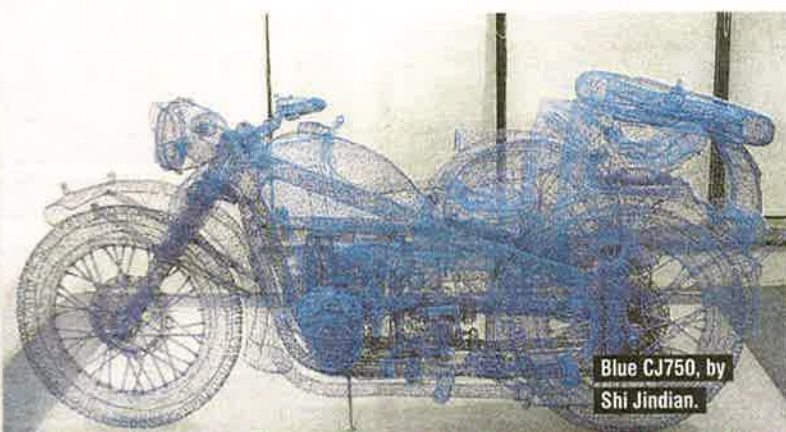
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Exotic Flowers and Rare Herbs series, sculptures by Cang Xin.



Blue CJ750, by Shi Jindian.



Detail from This Is A Book, by Shen Liang.

gallery has education programs, a library specialising in Chinese art and culture, and a Chinese tea room.

The main drawcard, of course, is the art. There are dazzling feats of artistic engineering, Green says, including Shi Jindian's motorcycle crocheted to scale in blue stainless steel wire. The 3D object could be a shadow of the original, or a CAD drawing. "Technically, the craftsmanship in the exhibition is superb and the ideas are also very, very accessible," Green says.

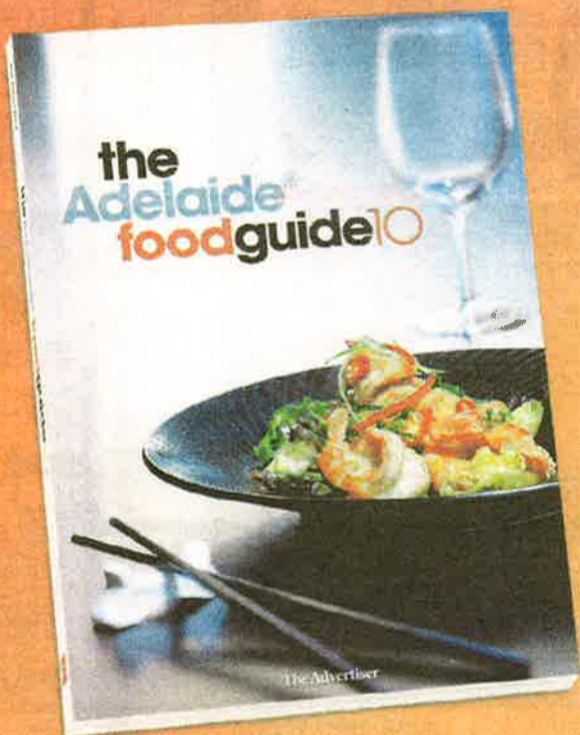
Sun Furong drew on her experience as a seamstress in her *Nibbling-Up Series: Tomb Figures* installation of 100 Mao Zedong suits shredded with scissors and mounted on steel frames. For the artist, the cutting expresses the idea that "in the struggle for survival (you are) stripped and eaten away, by many things you cannot help ... until you are broken".

At the other end of the spectrum, Bu Hua harnesses Flash computer software to animate cute characters and then post them online, where she has amassed a huge audience.

Wang Zhiyuan says White Rabbit is forcing a reappraisal of contemporary Chinese art. "Most Westerners' impression of Chinese contemporary art is largely derived from pre-2000 works, most of which mix political symbols or traditional Chinese iconography, with a touch of what is trendy in the West," he says. "Since about 2000, however, China has experienced drastic social transformations, which are reflected in contemporary art. The White Rabbit Collection forms a basis for a better understanding of the changes taking place."

White Rabbit Contemporary Chinese Art Collection, Samstag Museum, until September 30.

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