

MIMI KIM, *SILKS* 2011, oil on canvas 48"x 60"

Cai Jin
Cui Xiuwen
Feng Jiali
Hu Bing
Gao Yuan
Mimi Kim
Nina Kuo
Zhu Hui

***Chinese-Chinese American
Contemporary Female Artists
Living in the Material World***

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Living in the Material World

A number of female contemporary Chinese artists are engaged with themes that relate to their role in society. As transglobal artists, their work addresses both broad issues of cultural definition as well as more personal ones. They work in a number of media- including paper, glass, photography, painting, sculpture, and videos.

Nina Kuo makes monumental landscapes in the traditional style which are inhabited by tiny court ladies from the eighth-century Tang dynasty. Dressed in long gowns, they engage in incongruous activities – eating from McDonald's boxes and shopping for Chanel – asserting the conflicts of traditional cultural values and today's consumer society. Here Tang ladies, in *Material Shoppers* from 2010, delight in designer bags, perfume and other luxury products. But these ideal beauties are wind-up toys whose activities are the product of mindless consumption. Nina says we are often ambivalent about such glamorous articles. *Clay Tang Ladies*, which she created with her husband Lorin Roser, is a stop action video (3 min DVD). In a landscape filled with calm, dreamy clouds, clay- sculpted terra cotta Tang figurines are distracted by cell phones and laptops, one hears Lorin's score of the sounds of voices, bells and guitar.



NINA KUO, MATERIAL SHOPPERS, 2010,
acrylic pigments and gold on rag paper 22" x 30"

Gao Yuan, who lives in Beijing, has appropriated Manet's infamous painting of *Olympia* of 1863 for her series *Untitled* of 2010. Here an indolent naked Chinese model calmly reading a book lays on a sofa against a backdrop of a fetid and polluted wasteland. Like the subjects of her earlier photographic series, these women are itinerant workers who journeyed to Beijing in search of a better life, only to find the hardships of a society dedicated to the privileged. In contrast to the days of the Cultural Revolution, when the basic needs for survival were provided for all, today, left to fend for themselves, many end up as sex workers. This is suggested by the allusion to the courtesan of the French painting, asserting the universality of the theme. In the series the different naked female beauties are placed in a variety of scenarios -- building sites under construction, areas of industrial pollution and smog-filled skies, or before a Chinese antique screen, all of which suggest the long history of China as well as its contemporary problems.



GAO YUAN, UNTITLED, C PRINT
print, pigment on paper 13 1/4 " x 23 1/2"

Mimi Kim paints huge canvases and fills them with dramas where superhuman strength is necessary for survival. These works resemble the graphics of video games that dominate the internet with their colorful characters in dramatically active postures. Mimi uses extreme scale juxtapositions, brilliant colors and a simplified composition to suggest a dream like setting. In *Silks*, one remembers the simple comforts of youth represented by a giant cuddly monkey, so old and used its stitches are strained. (cover illustration) It looks out impassively, unaware of the needy naked girl/child/doll clinging to it. The harsh light that exposes the girl intensifies the nightmarish quality. In her

painting of the *Pearl of Holfernes*, she portrays Judith, a beautiful Hebrew widow who seduced and beheaded a fierce conqueror who threatened Israel. Here at center, escaping on a large dragon, a heroically proportioned naked female warrior, her mouth smeared with blood, holds in her hand the stolen pearl of light and faith that she retrieved.



MIMI KIM, PEARL OF HOLOPHERNES,

2009 oil on canvas, 48" x 60"

Cui Xiuwen of Beijing interjects into her photographs with traditional settings—the Forbidden Place, Tiananmen Square—the image of young school girls to highlight the discordant lives of women in China. At first these figures, who act as her alter ego, were young school girls, but gradually, as the series developed, they aged, until they are teenaged. They wear makeup that suggests the hurt and violence suffered by the unprotected. Here they are pregnant, a severe problem in China, as the old values are still in play. Thus, the fate of these girls is uncertain. Here dozens of pregnant girls in various sizes and postures are inside the Forbidden Palace. Climbing a large pile of sand, they struggle in vain to breach the wall and escape the confines of the old patriarchal values. Metaphorically they symbolize the natural resources laid waste by capitalism and greed.

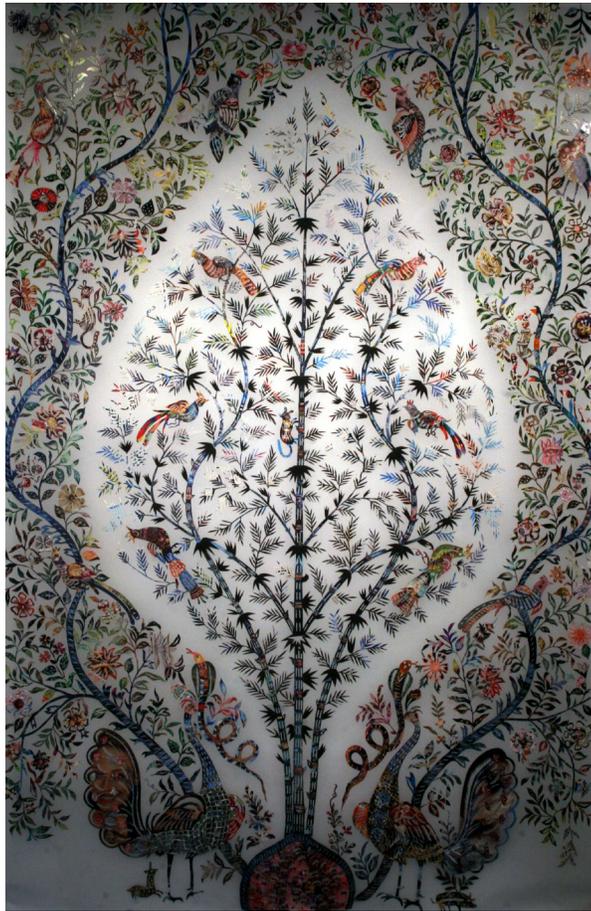


CUI XIUWEN, ANGEL No 7, 2006 Cprint 118" x 68"

Hu Bing works in various media, including glass. Her works, which reinterpret everyday objects, are not only unusual and visually compelling, but makes one reassess the aesthetics of things we use daily. But these are often large constructions with ingenious imperfections in the surface that create patterns of light and shadow, facets of reflections that illuminate the interior and exterior of the piece. The glass sculptural shapes of glass often take on the appearance of the human body and the illusion to the body as a vessel is apt. This makes the fragility of the works all the more anthropomorphic. Her recent large-scale installation at the Flat Iron building in Manhattan incorporates numerous glass pieces of varying hues, many of them shattered and reconfigured. In this way Hu uses glass to suggest the environment of violence and frailty of modern life.



HU BING, CONTAINERS, 2008, mixed media 12" x 12' x 12



*XIN SONG,
TREE OF LIFE, 2011
paper cut , 56" x 66*

Xin Song has mastered the traditional medium of paper cuts. Using glossy magazines she fashions enormous works, such as the *Tree of Life*, which has intricate lacy designs of leaves, flowers and birds. Xin Song has studied the popular rural artform in the remote countryside where it began centuries ago as a women's practice. Later she studied the art with professors at a renowned university of art in Beijing. When she first arrived in New York, she was astonished by the slick adult magazines and their commodization of women, so she used these as fodder for her scissors and created enormous compositions which defy the frailty of the medium. Here in vivid colors the *Tree of Life* is treated as a symmetrical Persian motif of a tree, flanked by birds, often seen on carpets and brocades. The tree's leafy branches support long-tailed songbirds, brilliantly colored flowers and a small squirrel, all created by her unique cut paper technique. Flanking the tree are the mystical phoenix birds that never die.



CAI JIN, BANANA, 2012, oil on canvas, 10"x 14"

Cai Jin who lives and works in Beijing found her inspiration early in her career in the painting of banana leaves. On large canvases she recreates the serene, broad-leaf withered plants so prized by Chinese gardeners when green. She paints the leaves from a microscopic point of view, alive with the process of deterioration as forms decay and transform into other microbiological types of life. To emphasize their post mortem vitality, she paints these leaves in shades of red. The whole is an invigorating denial of death. Sometimes more delicate forms emerge on a bright red background, other examples explore a bluish green or violet

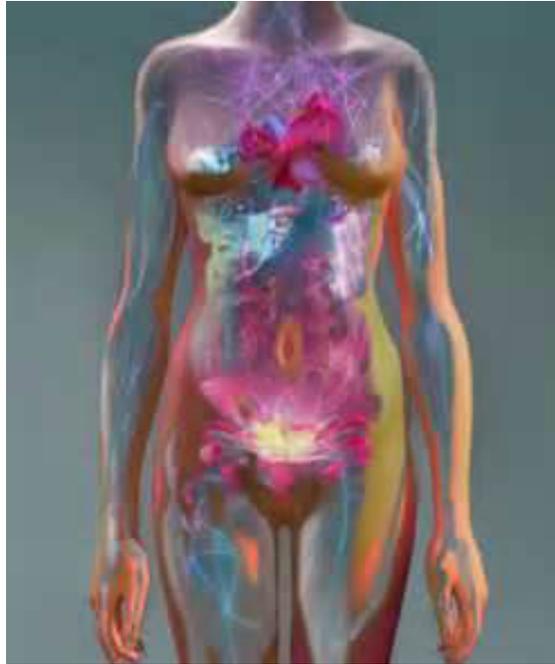
bent and decayed desiccated forms which, on close view, are alive with movement caused by variations of pigment and stroke. In some on works she has painted the red leaves on an old fashioned bathtub or a mattress adding layers of innuendo of violence and mayhem.

Feng Jyali is a portrait artist. She was one of a group of four women painters, the Sirens, who gathered together to show their art, which was unwelcome at the art institutions. She has always focused on the image of women with subjects that range from early works portraying scantily clad young girls in claustrophobic hot house compositions, to dour portraits of women of the Cultural Revolution, and more recent compositions, such as this one which features her own daughter as she encounters the difficulties of growing up in Beijing. These works, skilled and insightful portraits, succeed not only in achieving representational likeness of the subjects, but also in rendering their states of mind. Feng's work presents the evolution of women from the restrictive environment of the past to the era of Mao's egalitarian effort of "Women Holding up the Half of the Sky" to the real restrictions of life in China and the challenges that lay ahead.



FENG JIALI, DAUGHTER 2012,
oil on canvas 47" X 31"

Hui Zhu who lives in Beijing and teaches at Tsinghua University is a 3-d animator whose short films recreate the evolutionary process of birth. In gorgeous colors we see the first zygote separate into two and then after innumerable divisions and transformations, it achieves the complexity of a fully grown woman. The balletic movement of images that seem at times vegetal, floral, or parts of the human anatomy continuously morph into new forms, as if in some primordial dance. One image transforms into another as if in infinite space until the whole complexity of the human respiratory system emerges and continues until the full female form is achieved. The narrative of the video also anticipates the cycle of death, but it is the kind of death in which energy is neither created nor destroyed but rechanneled into new life forms. These poetic videos affirm the ancient mystery of creation in modern terms and the primary role of woman as the source of creation.



HUI ZHU BREATHE TOGETHER 2009 video

Thus these nine female Chinese artists working in a number of media and disciplines interpret the world they live in through their art.



XIN SONG , *FLOWER*, 2011 papercut