

SYDNEY'S OWN CULTURAL REVOLUTION

A NEW ADDITION TO SYDNEY'S CULTURAL LANDSCAPE, THE PRIVATELY OWNED WHITE RABBIT MUSEUM PRESENTS AN UP-TO-THE-MINUTE VIEW ON CONTEMPORARY CHINESE PRACTICE REPORTS **CARRIE MILLER.**



Of all the trends to emerge from the art world over the past decade, perhaps none has attracted more heat than the Western so-called discovery of contemporary Chinese art. And thanks to the opening of a new gallery in Sydney, the Australian public will now be able to witness the spectacle of this fascinating genre first hand.

The creation of **Judith Neilson**, White Rabbit is a collection of over 450 works by more than 130 artists acquired over the past decade. The gallery itself occupies a beautifully renovated former knitting factory, which offers four storeys of exhibition space plus a teahouse, reading room/library and small theatre.

It's the culmination of several years of intensive collecting work on the part of Neilson, whose interest in contemporary Chinese art was originally sparked by a meeting with leading Sydney-based Chinese artist **Wang Zhiyuan**. From this original encounter she made several trips to China,

often in the company of Zhiyuan, to acquire and commission work.

Interestingly, the collection consists only of post-2000 works, reflecting not only the timing of when Neilson's interest in the movement began but more significantly a conceptual turning point in the movement itself. As **Paris Neilson**, the gallery's collection manager, explains: "During the 1990s when contemporary art started to take off in China it was far more focused on Mao and the cultural revolution, whereas now the issues being presented are universal ... issues people can relate to. You don't have to be Chinese."

Asked why take on such an enormous project rather than simply donating the work, Paris points out that in the case of the latter, "the likelihood of it being shown is really small. Only three to five per cent of a museum's collection is shown at any one time. By having our own museum we're able to show a lot more of the collection and that

is one of our goals: to share this work." This is reflected in the fact that the first exhibition contains the work of an impressive 59 artists.

It is of course a subjective collection, representing the interests of a single individual, and on that basis will no doubt have its critics. Ultimately, however, as **Edmund Capon**, director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, put it: "We don't have all the cultural resources that a great city should have" which is what makes White Rabbit such an "extraordinary addition" to Australia's cultural landscape. ■

From left:

Chen Wenling, *Asking God*, 2006. Bronze, vehicle duco, 77 x 33 x 27cm. PHOTO: DAVID ROCHE.

Centre, Lu Zhengyuan, *Mental Patients*, 2006. Fibreglass, dimensions variable; back left, Sun Furong, *Nibbling-up Series - Tomb Figures*, 2008. Cloth, mixed media, 180 x 550 x 250cm; back right, Chen Wei, *Phlegm*, 2008, *A Rat's Post Office*, 2008, and *Tunnel*, 2007. C-prints, each 150 x 150cm.

COURTESY: THE ARTISTS AND WHITE RABBIT, SYDNEY