

## White Rabbit

### GALLERY PROFILE

Nick Garner



- | • *Twelve Month Flowers – The Seventh Month Orchid* by Chen Lingyang



- | • *Happy Ballon Men* by He Jia
- | • *Asking God and Red Memory – Smile* by Chen Wenling

Contemporary Chinese art has found a seriously seductive modern new Australian embassy. From the outset seeing only a glimpse of the growing Neilson Foundation's collection at its new home in Chippendale is an impressive curatorial achievement, if in scale alone. White Rabbit, an accommodating 2,000sqm four-story warehouse conversion behind the old Carlton United Brewery, is the public face of the collections 400 plus works of around 160 artists. For one of the biggest collections of its kind and having the gravity of changing how we view China and the art of its people everything seems appropriately scaled.

Paris Neilson leads me through the gallery – Ai Wei Wei's work *Oil Spill* I've seen reproduced before, fired in huge kilns, she tells me of the work forces that some of these artists have working with them. I think it's a little bizarre, there's an image brought to mind of thousands of people in revolutionary jackets glazing ceramic oil slicks, some a metre in diameter. The collection's works have all been made since 2000 and as we go through we're seeing the results of a transition that she explains to me has happened since the prolific expansion of modern Chinese art about 20 years ago. Where in the 80s and 90s the focus was more on Mao and the Cultural Revolution the concerns of these artists and their younger contemporaries post 2000 speak to similar but broader themes – of humanity, commercialism, public policy and the power of the media.

While the themes of the gallery's works show the breadth of the issues personally, politically and culturally driving these artists, the collection also covers a broad spectrum of materiality. From large foyer installations by Wang Zhiyuan (who has assisted the Neilsons with the collecting) to sculptures of all kinds, paintings, drawings, photographs, videos and dioramas with smoke machines the list goes on. Standing behind the life-size fibreglass and silicone mannequins of *Zhou Xiaohu's Renown* (2007) "verisimilitude" comes to mind but there's more to the collection than that – everything seems coated in a layer of shine, from the works steeped in past traditions to those spinning at a convulsing rate, presumably into the future, there's a gloss and finish uncommon to the Australian eye.

The distress of this surface shine might be due to the fact that Chinese art schools, in which most are trained, demand a mastery of practical skills unseen and relatively unheard of in Australia. This can kill the creativity of some of the students Paris explains but to combine that practical efficiency with 'the spark' has made the works on show unusually enticing, for a lack of a better word.

The gallery is looking to do a rehang of its collection in January/February and just to keep you extra cosy they have opened a tearoom in the foyer (selling beer if tea isn't your thing – not coffee though) and is looking towards intimate events such as book clubs and screenings of Chinese films in the not too distant future.

30 Balfour Street, Chippendale NSW  
Thursday – Sunday, 10am – 6pm, Free Entry

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