



Detail from Guan Wei's *Day and Night*: explores the slightly absurd side to the human condition.

Unfettered creativity a boon

By SASHA GRISHIN

Beyond China, Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery, Sydney. 10am-4pm, Tuesday-Saturday, 12-4pm Sunday, till May 3.

BYOND *China* is a timely and historically significant exhibition which surveys the work of 13 Chinese artists who arrived in Australia over the past two decades and who now work and reside in Sydney.

As the curator of the exhibition, Gabrielle Dalton, notes in her catalogue essay, "Emigration to Australia on one hand allowed the artists to develop their work without the constant political surveillance and intervention experienced in China, but on the other, a new language, learning to deal with a very different art establishment and audience, and financial survival in a capitalist system posed another kind of restraint on their artistic development".

To date, it has been only Guan Wei who has securely established his place in the Australian art establishment. Promoted by the Sherman Galleries, his work is featured frequently in national surveys of contemporary Australian art.

At this exhibition, his huge narra-

Art



Xiao Xian Liu's *Illusion*, 1994: startling surrealist photographs.

tive mural-like painting *Day and Night* explores the slightly absurd side to the human condition.

The group of academically trained "socialist realist painters", including Li Bao Hua, Jiawei Shen and Huihai Xie, have in recent years been making a noticeable impact on Australian portrait exhibitions, including the Archibald and the Doug Moran

portrait prizes. Trained in the Soviet academic manner, designed to flatter the sitter and to capture a striking likeness, their work is very competent, if a spot uninspiring.

The new and strong work at the exhibition, which is not so widely known, includes the startling surrealist photographs by Xia Xian Liu, where Hans Bellmer-like dolls are cast into a hostile industrial setting.

Also there are the multi-layered paper works by Li Liang, which explore an uncomfortable meeting between Chinese and Australian images on a postmodernist battle ground, while Guo Jian produces powerful confrontational images, rich in their sense of implied violence.

Nan Zhou is perhaps the only artist at the exhibition who is working in a thoroughly traditional Chinese manner, producing superb vibrant calligraphic marks on a monumental scale.

Beyond China is the sort of exhibition that we have needed, one which in a serious and professional manner documents the considerable contribution which Chinese-Australian artists are presently making to our visual culture.