

The Sydney Morning Herald

Brash strokes

Author: VICTORIA HYNES

Date: 03/05/2002

Words: 398

Publication: Sydney Morning Herald

Section: Metro

Page: 26

GUO JIAN: BUBBLES OF YUM

Where Ray Hughes Gallery, 270 Devonshire Street, Surry Hills

When Tuesday-Saturday 10am-6pm, until May 8

More information 9698 3200

Guo Jian gives propaganda a bawdy twist, writes VICTORIA HYNES.

On his frequent forays into China, art dealer Ray Hughes has uncovered a rambunctious crop of contemporary Chinese painters. The walls of his Surry Hills gallery have shown it all, from the political pop lacquer paintings of the Luo brothers to the unsettling psychological portraits of Liu Wei.

Probably the most outlandish renegade of this coterie is Sydney-based painter Guo Jian, who has made Australia his home since 1992. Subtle is not a word to describe his eye-popping images: crude and lewd would be a better description.

Exploding onto the canvas are sexually voracious, panting People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldiers and semi-naked pin-up girls, coming across like Chinese revolutionary art on acid. Propaganda posters, military photographs, girlie playing cards, tokens of western consumerism (Mariah Carey even pops up) are crammed together in crowded, garish compositions. These are frenetic images of debauchery with glamour girls in military fatigues wielding machine guns, and army officers lounging in a drug-induced stupor or hysterical frenzy, leering with lecherous grins. Like a cross between sexual fantasy and nightmare, the mania and comedy of his images will tickle the fancy of some viewers, while others may find them unpalatable and disturbing.

It's not surprising that Guo Jian has made the Chinese military the subject of his paintings. For four years in the early '80s, he was a soldier and military artist in the PLA. Born in 1962 in the south-west of China, as a teenager the artist was swept up with the fervour of revolutionary ideology, even though his grandfather was executed by the PLA. Heroic propaganda, which insinuated a covert sexuality, with attractive young girls in short skirts, proved irresistibly appealing. He started his artistic career in 1979, producing political art posters celebrating China's war with Vietnam.

Later studying traditional Chinese art at the Central Minorities Institute in Beijing, he broke away to become an independent artist. His disillusionment with mainstream politics and corruption led to his metamorphosis to Tiananmen Square protester in 1989.

With their in-your-face eroticism and barely contained hysteria, these are artworks that will make you laugh and cringe at the same time.
