

A large, ornate yellow archway frames a view of the ocean under a cloudy sky. The archway is set against a red wall. The ocean is a deep blue-green color, and the sky is a bright blue with scattered white clouds. The archway has a scalloped top edge and is decorated with gold-colored details on the sides.

Southern Skies

Chinese Artists in Australia

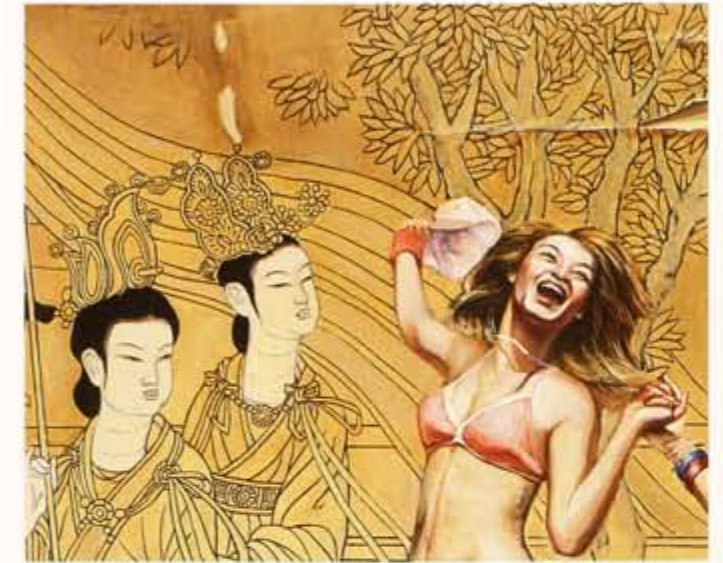


AUSTRALIA AND CHINA: ART AND FRIENDSHIP

The Chinese artists who are celebrated in *Southern Skies* began their engagement with Australia in the dynamic atmosphere of late 1980s Beijing. Eager for knowledge of the world beyond China, they connected with young Australians equally keen to understand the vast society which was opening up before them. This relationship shaped the sensibilities of the artists in this volume, and they in turn made a priceless contribution to the way in which the two societies perceive and reflect each other.

Leaving for Australia in the 1980s and 1990s allowed them to build their careers, develop their ideas and return to China as successful artists. Most now choose to divide their time between Australia and China. They are sensitive to the advantages that each society offers to their work, and move easily within the new global context that is important for Chinese art in the 21st century.

In the 1980s, for many young Chinese, locked for so long outside the walls of the artists' associations and the institutes of China, everything about the modern world



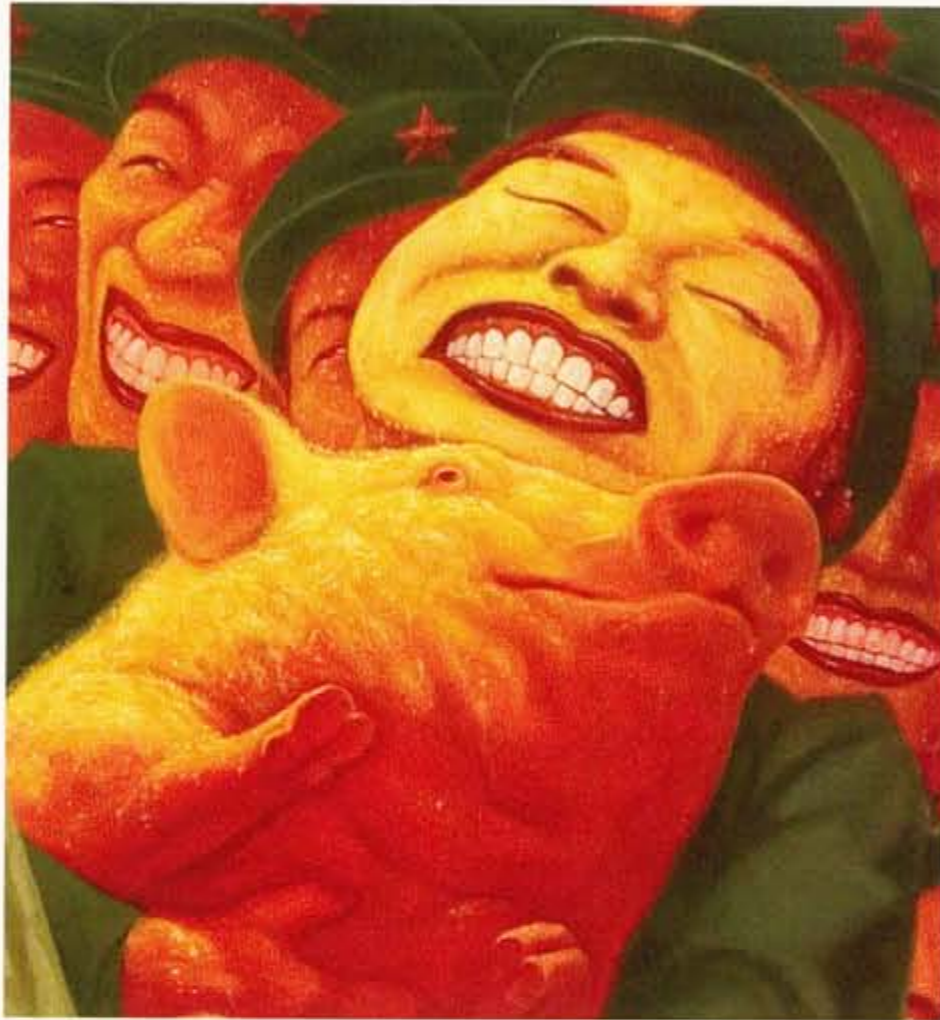
and China's place in it could be expressed through art. The lives they led then would have been defined as poverty, not only according to Australian economic indicators but also measured by the more relentless Chinese yardstick applied at that time by the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. Yet despite their difficult circumstances as students or independent painters, they moved in circles that evoked the camaraderie of 19th and early 20th century Paris. Lin Chunyan, for example, lived with his girlfriend and a cat in a tiny room measuring only three by five metres that doubled as a studio in a back alley in central Beijing. A pot belly stove stood at the centre of the room and the walls were stacked with canvases and books.

The bohemian spirit of the life they made outside the rigid social frameworks of the day attracted a group of young Australian expats who bought their paintings and stayed to talk deep into the night. These are 20-year friendships today, strengthened through countless dinners and conversations in Sydney, Beijing and many points between.

The historical catalyst for all of this was that in the 1980s the young artists were frustrated by the limited opportunities to build their careers as independent artists in China, despite their energy and talent. Australia promised new horizons: their Australian friends were in a position to help, and they did so happily.

In going to Australia, these artists had different motivations, but if they imagined that they were exchanging poverty





Shen Shaomin's work is monumental and international in scope, but in the way that it reflects prehistoric, traditional, contemporary, industrial and post-industrial concerns, it flows directly from his experiences in both Australia and China.

Guan Wei's murals cast a self-consciously 'ancient Chinese' eye of anecdotal fantasy and proto-science across the vistas of antipodean dreamtimes and colonizing, and achieved a synthesis that uniquely recommended itself to the Sydney Olympic Committee as iconic of the millennial vision the organizers wished to express.

Lin Chunyan's human figures tumble untrammelled through space – as often as not against a Chinese landscape – but their signature burst of cockatoo colours is an unmistakable echo of the Bundeena countryside where he lived and worked alone for three years.

Hu Ming was at one time an artist in the Chinese army, yet her military

for something better, they were perhaps dismayed to find that the lives of struggling artists in Australia were only marginally better than those of their Chinese counterparts. The jobs they took ranged from cleaning fridges in a recycling yard, through taxi driving to all the sundry casual jobs that the big city offers up to new arrivals. Nevertheless they lived their lives to the fullest in Australia; some fell in love and others moved on to have families. But they never lost sight of their artistic vision and eventually became involved in art projects in their newly adopted country. Many were outside the mainstream of institutional art before leaving China, but in Australia they succeeded in entering the broader and unregulated flow that defines Australian art and gives it uniqueness.

The work they created, some of which is illustrated in this volume, succeeded in drawing on their experience of the ambiances of two artistic cultures to create something new and unique.

The artist Ah Xian, for example, produces work that is recognizably Chinese, drawing on that country's highbrow and middlebrow art and handicraft traditions, yet it won the Australian National Sculpture Prize in 2001. He now maintains studios in both countries, while raising his family in Australia.

women, statuesque and erotic, bask in sunshine more suggestive of her Australian home than most areas of China north of Guangxi province.



Guo Jian's riotous visions of Chinese life have become technicolour under Australian skies, while Tan Yifeng's voyagers, suspended between confusion and hope, seem to reflect his experience as an immigrant. The sculptures of Liu Xiaoxian create playful and provocative appositions of Eastern and Western sensibilities.

Over the past decade these artists have begun returning to China, often as Australian citizens, and have found that it is no longer the same country that they left, and that their once marginal visions can now be accommodated. Contemporary art has become part of a grand new vision of culture that has evolved as part of China's globalization. The once barely tolerated artists' villages on the outskirts of Beijing have now been transformed into districts of ateliers, many of which rival small Australian factories in size. Beijing by 2007 had more than a thousand galleries, many on a scale worthy of the title of art museums, as well as a vital art publishing industry and artists' villages now extending for kilometres. Songzhuang, for example, where a number of these Australian Chinese artists now have workshops, has a municipal government that gives priority to art developments and has a governing body including critics and artists who would have been considered subversives even a decade ago.



It is thirty-five years since Australia established its embassy in the People's Republic of China. In that era, the two societies were almost as remote from each other as they were when the Qianlong Emperor, who reigned from 1735 to 1796, received a live emu as tribute and composed an essay musing on this avian wonder: he was not to know where this first contact between the two lands would lead.

Today, planes carry people between China and Australia as casually as a Bondi bus, and artistic exchanges are flourishing in ways that could not be imagined twenty years ago. Younger Chinese artists no longer need to move abroad to gain international experience: the artists represented in *Southern Skies* were part of a cultural phenomenon that may never occur again, but their legacy is a profoundly important one.

Art is universal in its appeal. At one and the same time it can be intensely personal and utterly typical. It speaks of the inner life of a single solitary soul but it can also act as a code for an entire culture and indeed for the human race. It is all about belonging, but ultimately it belongs to no-one but the artists who created it. In this gathering of highly talented individuals we have the record of eight lives, but at the same time we have one history of cultural relations between Australia and China, and a unique documentation of a particular stage in history and globalization.

Dr Bruce Gordon Doar
Beijing
5 March 2008

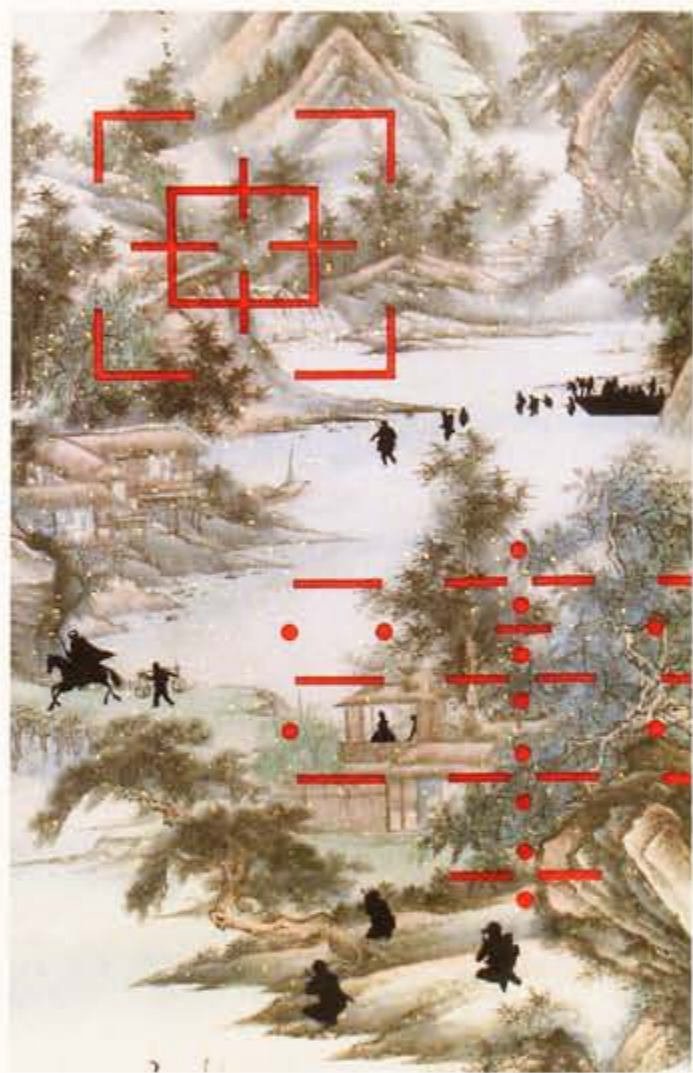
澳中友谊与艺术交流

此次《意纵天高》展览中所展示的几位华人艺术家，是在上世纪八十年代后期北京的蓬勃氛围中开始接触澳洲的。这些艺术家渴望了解中国以外的广阔世界，他们与在中国的澳洲年轻人接触，而这些澳洲青年也期望认识正对他们开放的中国广大社会。这种关系塑造了本图录中几位的艺术敏锐性。反过来而言，这些艺术家对澳中两个社会对彼此的认识反映，也作出了不可估量的贡献。

这些华人艺术家于上世纪八、九十年代远赴澳大利亚，得以开创艺术生涯，实现自身理念，再返中国时已经功成名就。如今其中的多数选择奔走于澳洲与中国之间。他们能敏锐把握这两个社会对其艺术创作的馈赠，在对二十一世纪中国艺术至关重要的全球化新浪潮中得心应手，游刃有余。

上世纪八十年代的中国，有许多青年长期徘徊于主流艺术家组织与机构之外不得而入，对他们而言，任何有关现代世界及中国在其中位置的东西都可通过艺术来表达。不管是以澳洲的经济指数，还是当时中国社会科学院采用的更为无情的标准看，他们那时的生活都可以冠以贫穷二字。然而这些学生或自由艺术家尽管生活窘迫情形堪忧，他们还是从容游历于属于自己的圈子，让人想起十九与二十世纪早期巴黎艺术圈中的同道情谊。例如林春岩，当时与其女友及一只猫蜗居于北京中部胡同里的一间小屋，仅有5米长3米宽，还得兼作画室，一个大腹火炉占据小屋正中央，周围墙壁则堆满了画布与书籍。

这些中国青年在当时的刚性社会结构以外过着吉普赛人式的飘零又自在的生活，吸引了一群移居中国的澳洲年轻人，他们去向这些艺术家购买画作，并经常留下畅谈到深夜。这些友谊延续至今已有二十载，并在悉尼、北京和



其它很多地方数不清的晚餐欢聚中不断深化、加强。

这一切的发生都源于深刻的历史背景。上世纪八十年代时，这些年轻艺术家尽管深具天赋才华横溢，但他们作为自由画家开创艺术生涯的机会却很渺茫，令人沮丧。就在此时，澳大利亚为这些年轻人提供了前景广阔的新天地，因为他们的澳洲朋友有能力援手，而且他们很乐意这样作！

这些中国艺术家是出于不同动机而远赴澳洲的，但如果他们认为自己是在抛弃贫穷换取更好的生活，那他们或许会失望地发现，澳洲本土那些正在奋力拼搏艺术家的生活，比他们的中国同行也就是好一些而已。这些中国艺术家抵澳后从事了各种各样的工作，清洗回收利用的电冰箱，驾驶出租车，还有大城市能为新来乍到者提供的形形色色的临时杂活。尽管不容易，这些艺术家还是在澳洲





与手工艺传统，有着鲜明的中国特色，但同样赢得了2001年度澳大利亚国家雕塑大奖。阿仙如今安家在澳大利亚，但在澳洲及中国都有工作室。

沈少民的作品气象宏大，具有广阔的国际视野，但是就它们所反映关切的史前、传统、当代、工业和后工业各时期问题而言，却是直接源于他在澳洲与中国两地的经历。

关伟在其壁画作品中，采用了类似中国神话《山海经》等的奇异动物形象，有意以其“古代中国”之眼，深远地审视了澳洲原住民神话中的远古开天辟地与之相对的近世欧洲殖民，独特地实现了两者的融合，从而受到了悉尼奥林匹克委员会的欢迎，并被用作张贴宣传画，来表达2000年奥运会组织者在新年之际希望传递的理念。

林春岩作品中的人物形象，在空中随意翻转腾挪，毫无障碍，时而以中国山水为背景，有时又并不如此，但标志性的类似澳洲美冠鸮鹑的热烈色彩，却清晰地反映出他独自生活工作了三年之久悉尼本迪纳（Bundeena）的乡村景致。

呼鸣一度曾是供职中国军队的艺术家，但是她的女兵形象如雕像般优美又让人产生情色联想，沐浴在和煦的阳光中，让人更多想起的是她在澳洲的家，而非中国广西以北的广袤低温区。

郭健将丰富热闹的中国生活刻画于澳洲的明净长天之下，恰似彩色印片，而谈一峰作品中的航海者们悬于疑惑迷惘与期盼希望之间，或许反映了他作为移民的体验。刘晓先在雕塑作品中将他对于东方与西方的艺术感悟熔于一炉，情趣昂然，发人深省。

过去十年来，这些艺术家开始重返中国，并常常是以

生活得有声有色，有的找到了自己的真爱，有的更生儿育女拥有了家庭。无论怎样，这些中国青年从来都没有放弃自己的艺术理想，并最终在新近扎根的澳洲参与了艺术项目。他们中很多在离开中国前是游离于主流学院艺术之外的，但澳洲艺术却有着独一无二的特色，那就是这里的艺术潮流广泛兼容且不受条条框框约束，使得中国艺术家顺利地加入了这浩荡的潮流中。这些艺术家成功地从他们亲身体验的澳洲与中国两种艺术文化氛围中汲取灵感，创作出了新颖独特的作品，本图录展示了其中的一些。

例如阿仙的瓷像作品，由于借鉴了中国的高雅艺术及更大众化的艺术



澳洲公民的身份。他们发现中国已非离开时的那个国度，而且自己当时边缘化的艺术理念现在也能被包容接纳了。当代艺术已经变成中国全球化过程中文化巨变的一部分与见证者。北京城边上一度不被容忍的那些艺术家村落，现在变成了画室汇集的地区，其中许多工作室的规模甚至可与澳洲的小工厂相比。到2007年，北京已有一千多家画廊，其中许多规模堪比艺术博物馆，与之配套的还有蓬勃发展的艺术出版业，而艺术家村落更在以公里计地扩展着。宋庄就是其中一例。多位澳洲的华人艺术家在这里有工作室，市政府对艺术发展给予优先考虑，而且宋庄的管理层还包括评论人与艺术家在内，而仅仅十年前这些人还会被认为是颠覆性的危险分子。

澳大利亚在中华人民共和国建立大使馆迄今已三十五年了。当时澳中两个遥远社会对彼此的陌生感几乎一如清朝的乾隆时期。乾隆皇帝于公元1735至1796年在位，期间曾收到一个活鹑作为礼物，他就这一异域珍禽有感而发地写了一篇文章 - 乾隆当时很难想象，这两块土地的首次接触最终会走向何方？

如今，中国与澳洲之间航班频繁，来往两地几乎可象乘坐悉尼著名的邦迪（Bondi）海滩旅游车般随意，艺术交流以二十年前根本无法想象的活力蓬勃发展着。年轻一代的中国艺术家再也无需去海外寻求国际体验。就此而言，本展览中包括的几位艺术家，是一种独特文化现象的一部分，这一现象或许再也不会发生了，不过他们的艺术人文馈赠，却是影响巨大，意义深远。

艺术的魅力是适用于全人类的。艺术可以在具有个人鲜明特色的同时又有极大的广泛代表性。它述说着一个孤

独灵魂个体的深刻内心世界，但也可作一个文化整体甚或全人类的精神代码。艺术讲述的全是有关归属的问题，但从终极意义上说，艺术又仅仅属于创作了它的艺术家们。本展览荟萃了几位深具天赋才情的艺术家，我们从而得以认识了八位生命个体，但这同时也是澳大利亚与中国共有的一部文化交流史，是对历史长河与全球化进程中一个特殊时期独一无二的记录。

陶步思博士
2008年3月5日于北京
澳大利亚昆士兰大学 李宝平博士译



郭 健

从第一天到澳大利亚起，我就有一种归属感。这是一个宽容的国度，我遇到了很多有意思的人，他们给了我许多灵感。回头来看，我生命中最美好的年华都是在澳洲度过的。我很享受现在的生活和从事的艺术工作。澳洲使我成为一个艺术家，她成就了我的今天。



From the first day I arrived, I felt at home in Australia. It is a tolerant country with many interesting people who have given me inspiration. Looking back, the best years of my life were spent in Australia. I truly enjoyed my life and working on my art. Australia made me who I am today as an artist.

Guo Jian



Untitled
《无题》
oil on canvas 布面油画
140 x 160 cm 2008



Untitled
(无题)
oil on canvas 布面油画
152 x 213 cm 2001