

GALLERY KASHYA HILDEBRAND NEW YORK

ARTIST PROFILE: TIANBING LI

Tianbing Li was born in 1974 in Guilin, China. There, he discovered painting at the early age of 6, learning traditional Chinese technique (ink on paper). A few years later, he started his training in modern western techniques. His artistic mastery was soon recognized and he received many awards during his adolescence. In 1997, Li left China for Paris to attend the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts. Today, he still resides in Paris but makes frequent trips to China. His dream is to have a studio in Peking and be able to paint all over the world.

The state of contemporary Chinese culture is a constant preoccupation for Tianbing Li. His position between eastern and western culture as well as his broad knowledge of traditional and modern painting provides most of the material for his art. The destruction of Chinese artistic traditions, first by the Cultural Revolution and then by the invasion of western culture, especially American, is a major theme in his paintings. "Hybrid" might be the best word to describe Li's work. In his 1998 series representing different images of the *Buddha*, the artist selected colors reminiscent of traditional Chinese painting - black, ochre and white - but applied them in an oil medium. Moreover, his subject - a traditional symbol of serenity - was painted using an expressionist touch with rich impasto and crumpled canvas. The result is disquieting. In these paintings Buddha's peaceful pose is tinged with angst; even a feeling of violence, and the spectator is reminded of the precarious state of traditional Chinese culture.

Two other contemporary series use the same technique: *Victims*, portraits of Chinese prisoners made just before their execution and *Assembly of Dignitaries with their Head Severed*, where stone sculptures of Chinese emperors from the Tang and Song dynasties (China's golden age) are represented with missing heads, replaced by portraits of Marilyn Munroe, Mao or Buddha, amongst others. These works denounce the violence of Chinese politics, but also the role played by western culture in the destruction of China's cultural past.

When Li uses photographs or sculptures as models, he deconstructs them in order to destroy their status as representations of reality. In working away from Realism, he also rejects the style favored by official Chinese artists in their ideological representations of Chinese communist society. On the other hand, his comments on a society governed by false images of itself and his use of a similar imagery, sometimes remind us of the work of Andy Warhol. Like the late American painter, Tianbing Li is also fascinated by consumer society and the role it plays in the definition of our identity. The artist explores this theme in an ensemble of 24 self-portraits named *Clone*, in which he paints computer-altered images of himself incorporating logos of famous brands, retail barcodes or email addresses. Some portraits express amazement or irony, but others clearly display feelings of fear and horror.

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The frailty of personal identity is one of Tianbing Li's favorite subjects. In the *Victim* series, the artist is trying to illustrate the transient nature of identity by capturing the instant between existence and disappearance. The cultural identity of the artist, explored in self-portraits, is also interrogated. Finally, the reality of identity is questioned in his paintings using images of celebrities. In a series entitled *Icon*, Tianbing Li uses hair on canvas to recreate famous images of personalities: Bob Marley, Leonardo di Caprio, Zidane, Mao, etc. The fragility of the medium and the infinite lightness of hair, contrast starkly with the imposing nature of the portraits.

In 2002, abandoning his somber palette, Li worked with bright blues and pinks. If visually the new paintings are very different from the rest of his work, the artist's preoccupation remains the same. The sea blue used in the series *Chinese Still Life*, is an allegory for capitalism, which came to China through sea-borne trade. Similarly, pink represents consumer culture and "a world submerged in desire and yearning". Each piece of the series uses traditional Chinese floral painting as a model, and appears from afar to depict plants, flowers, birds and insects. But on closer inspection, one discovers among them body parts (often sexual), toys and industrial products. The lovely landscape with bright colors suddenly transforms itself into a scenery of corrupted, polluted and decaying elements. Under the alluring world of capitalism something is rotten.

The subject in Li's painting is often dissolving. Nothing is ever what it seems; nothing is permanent. That in of itself is a good and bad thing. The artist is well aware of the danger of a frozen culture. For him, the artist must move incessantly in order to stay alive. Yet, at the same time, Li is also nostalgic for China's great cultural past that is in danger of being totally forgotten. Between the old and the new, the east and the west Tianbing Li plays with humor and skillfully handles the role of mediator.

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Born September 19, 1974 in GUILIN (China)

EDUCATION

1997-2002 Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris.

2002 Graduated from the ENSBA with the unanimous congratulations of the jury.

EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 Group Exhibition — Galerie Kashya Hildebrand Geneva, Switzerland
Biennale de la jeune création de Houilles
Salon de la jeune création
Solo Exhibition — Galerie Grande Masse des Beaux-Arts, Paris
- 2001 Solo Exhibition — Galerie Les Créations du possible, Paris.
- 2000 Solo Exhibition — Musée Marzelles, Marmande
- 1999 Novembre à Vitry, Paris
Solo Exhibition — Laroque — Timbaut
Group Exhibition — Académie des Beaux-Arts, Institut de France, Paris
Solo Exhibition — Eglise Sainte Foy, Pujols
Group Exhibition — Museum of Modern Art, Dubrovnik
Group Exhibition — Pavillon Mestrovic, Zagreb
- 1998 Salon Grands et Jeunes d'aujourd'hui, Paris
Solo Exhibition — Société Générale, Villeneuve sur Lot
Solo Exhibition — Eglise St. Pierre d'Orival et Donjon
Group Exhibition — Galerie Progres, Belgarde
Solo Exhibition — Ecole Polytechnique, Paris

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PRESS AND OTHER MEDIA

Several articles in the following daily newspapers:

Sud-Ouest, La Dépêche du Midi, La Gazette de la Vallée du Lot, Le Petit Bleu de l'Agan

A television interview TV Belgrade.

A report on ARTE (25/09/1999,7 minutes)

PUBLICATIONS

Liberté et ordre - Maison d'édition des Beaux-Arts du peuple de la Chine, 2001,165 pages

Has been living and working in Paris since 1971.

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