

to power on their political connections, enjoyed a lush life until they were grounded for their actions: Chen is now under house arrest.

Looking through the SGA's windows, we experience a visceral contrast between superficial material progress and spiritual, societal stagnation. While headlines may boast exponential economic growth, Gu seems to suggest that beneath it all there lies a torrent of corruption, as broad and powerful as the polluted river slithering along outside. ■ **REBECCA CATCHING**

**Gu Dexin** ■ Installation view of "2007.4.14" at Shanghai Gallery of Art ■ Courtesy Shanghai Gallery of Art

## BEIJING

### Yuan Shun: *SOFT LANDING*

BEIJING TOKYO ART PROJECTS

Entering Beijing Tokyo Art Projects for Yuan Shun's "Soft Landing"—the artist's first solo show in China in 20 years—must have been a disorienting experience for visitors. With steam rising periodically out of metal grates in the concrete floor, the artist walking through the gallery in an astronaut suit, gallery employees in space shuttle support staff uniforms and a large-scale model of untamed extraterrestrial scenery in the background, the setting could have easily been mistaken for a science fiction movie set or Disney World's Tomorrowland.

The installation, *Soft Landing*, held one corner of the main gallery. It is a six-meter square low-elevation rendering—almost sandcastle-like—of an outer space topography complete with mountains, valleys, craters and an

ample sprinkling of "planetary" dust. Yuan achieves great detail despite using simple materials such as sand and wood. At first glance the setting looks rugged and untouched, the artist giving the mountains rough, sharp edges and peaks and sprinkling little rocks around their bases. Upon closer inspection, however, signs of human intervention appear in the form of small plastic cube- and dome-shaped structures erected on the surface, and paths and roads carved through the sand. The two types of structures form their own distinct settlements, but they cluster in a valley between the two primary "mountain ranges." Offering no explanation, Yuan leaves viewers to determine the status of this landscape and who or what could have left these marks.

The installation is accompanied by a five-minute color video piece projected onto the wall of a small second floor loft in the gallery. Prompting further questions about who could have been the first power to reach this unnamed planet, Yuan splices voyeuristic camerawork zooming in on the structures and paths in the installation with close-up footage of the artist writing a diary in which he references a space race between China, Russia and the US.

These works serve as a primer for a series of large-scale acrylic and pencil paintings on paper entitled "Landing in China" (2006), that continues the space theme. Here, futuristic "ball-and-stick" molecular models chaotically drafted in saturated, bright colors dominate the paintings' foregrounds, floating above mountain landscapes done in muted grays and

greens in the background. Within the nodes of the atoms the artist depicts icons of China's urban development, such as the Hong Kong skyline viewed from Victoria Harbour or Shanghai's Pudong district skyline, as well as scenic vignettes of temples and lakeside mountains. The disembodiment of the atoms from the landscapes in the backgrounds underscores the palpable incongruity of a rapidly transforming country in which old and new coexist, but often without any meaningful or productive connection. While Yuan shies away from conclusive statements about the complexities of this situation, his emphasis on space imagery suggests that answers will not come from a narrow inward-looking focus but instead require a broadening of perspective—perhaps even a view from beyond Earth's atmosphere. ■ **HENRI BENAÏM**

**Yuan Shun** ■ *Soft Landing* ■ 2007 ■ Mixed media ■ 600 x 600 x 50 cm ■ Photo by AAP

## HONG KONG

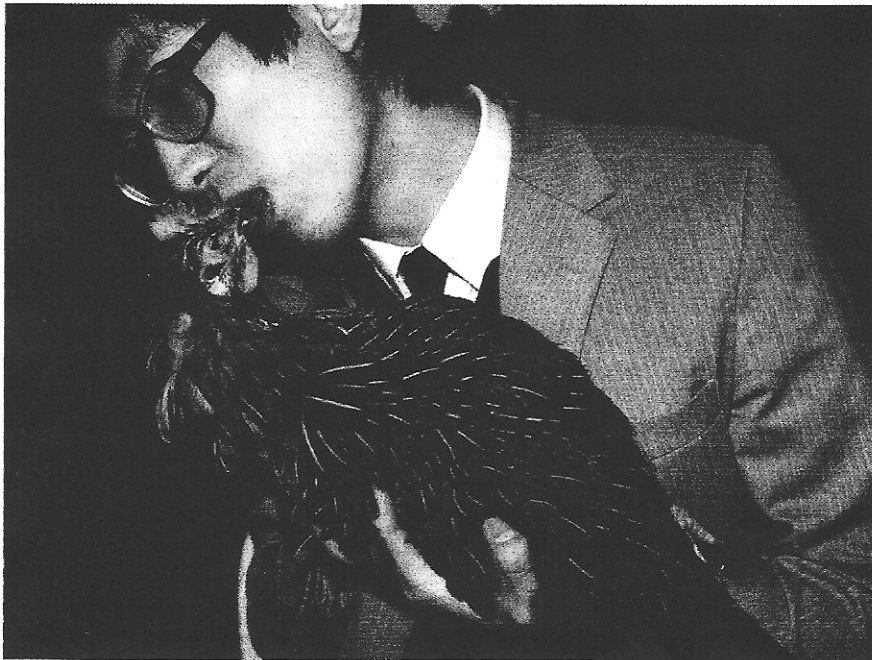
### Adrian Wong: *A FEAR IS THIS*

1A SPACE

With its curious blend of dark humor and social commentary, Hong Kong-based artist Adrian Wong's first solo exhibition on the island city provides audiences with an offbeat take on the phobias and anxieties haunting the inhabitants of this stressful, work-driven metropolis. Confidently shifting amidst sculpture, painting, photography and video, Wong's self-proclaimed "landscape of fear" charts the arcane superstitions and urban myths interweaving the city's social fabric over recent decades. As a Chinese-American artist living in Hong Kong, he is able to incorporate highly localized associations within an "outsider's" perspective.

Indeed, many works in the show use phonetically translated Cantonese titles—as with the video *Guhng Hei Fat Choi/Happy New Year* (2007), in which Wong proceeds to systematically break every traditional rule for good luck on the first day of the Lunar New Year, filming himself eating meat, pointing at the moon, taking out the garbage and even clipping his nails in the evening. Similar obscure customs are compiled in the altar-like sculptural installation *Tuhng Gwai Wan/Play With Ghosts* (2007). This consists of a mirror with printed instructions on how to conjure up spirits as well as the various paraphernalia needed to do





so scattered around like offerings to the dead. While many may take this assortment of ritualistic props as a tongue-in-cheek poke at the peculiarities of a bygone era, it is hard not to feel a faint shudder of terror at the thought of reaching toward the unknown.

Wong also draws heavily on the traumatic reverberations caused by the recent SARS and bird flu epidemics in Asia. Sprinkled around the exhibition space are unsettling reminders of infectious diseases—from oversize latex bird droppings splattered on the wall to a blown up mural of the H5N1 virus as it appears under the microscope. Here, the visible accentuates what is fundamentally invisible, be it bacteria or fear itself. This is also grimly evident in the photograph *Sak Gai/Chicken Kiss* (2007), which depicts Wong committing the potentially fatal *faux pas* of kissing a live chicken.

Final mention must go to the video *Haak Sei Wuih Tuhng Mau Jai/Triads and Kitten* (2007) which, with the same irreverent bravado, breaks down the aura of terror that surrounds Hong Kong gangsters or Triad members. Here, Wong addresses the clichés propagated by popular gangster movies with a campy depiction of four tattooed men performing a choreographed balletic struggle over a kitten.

However cryptic the connotations of his in-jokes, Wong always maintains an engaging dialogue with his subject matter without becoming overly indulgent. By tempting the viewer to look again at the things we would much rather avoid, Wong shows that in Hong Kong, as in any city in the

world, the horrific is never far from the humorous. ■ NADIM ABBAS

Adrian Wong ■ *Sak Gai (Chicken Kiss)* ■ 2007  
 ■ C-print ■ 24 x 36 in. ■ Courtesy the artist

#### BANGKOK

#### Kamin Lertchaiprasert:

SITTING (MONEY) 2004-2006  
 TADU CONTEMPORARY ART



Contemporary art exhibitions in Thailand often feature works in neo-traditional styles that evolved in the 1970s, which tend toward the devotional, the decorative and the sweet. But Kamin Lertchaiprasert, who recently installed an exhibition of 365 sculptures—each illustrating one of his own spiritual aphorisms—at Tadu Contemporary Art, draws directly on Southeast Asian cultural roots without adding a saccharine taint. Inspired by vernacular Buddha

images popular in Laos depicting a seated, meditating figure, Kamin's statues were each about one foot high and formed of papier mache made of shredded banknotes, signaling his rebuke of the worship of money. They sat in a single row on a narrow, chest-high shelf built along the gallery's four interior walls, creating a space reminiscent of the cloisters of a Thai monastery.

The figures were, like Kamin's other recent work, unbeautiful. The artist's expressively dour style can be traced not only to folk carvings, but also to the Bosch-like imagery in Thai temple mural depictions of Buddhist hell. Like Kamin's preceding work in carved wood, woodblock print and charcoal on paper, "Sitting (Money)" took an ascetic approach to color, in this case allowing only the faintest pink and green from the banknotes, which he obtained after they were removed from circulation by the national Bank of Thailand. The sculptures were based on drawings done one each day in 2004.

The papier mache was reinforced by wires which ornamented some figures as secondary elements, or diagrammatic lines illustrating the aphorisms Kamin had written on the sculptures with a charcoal pencil. In 16-04-04 for example, wire tongues of flames rise from a seated figure inscribed, "High temperature makes the body feel hot. Emotion makes the mind feel hot." Some pithy, some platitudinous, Kamin's aphorisms invoke a literary tradition of meditation on Buddhist thought going back to the ancient Dhammapada verses transcribing the sayings of the historical Buddha.

The difficulty of conveying didactic abstractions in the medium of sculpture was itself an apt symbol for the rigors of spiritual discipline, further suggested by Kamin's diaristic format, which transformed the awkwardness of many of the figures into a reflection of the imperfect, improvised nature of the spiritual quest. Kamin practices meditation, studies Buddhist thought and sees art, life and spirituality as closely intertwined. Quietly magisterial in ambition, execution and impact, his "Sitting (Money)" stands as one of the most persuasive exhibitions in Thailand in recent years. ■ BRIAN MERTENS

Kamin Lertchaiprasert ■ Installation detail of *Sitting (Money)* 2004-2006 "01-06-04 Depend on yourself before asking for help." ■ 2006 ■ Mixed media ■ Courtesy Tadu Contemporary Art