

AUSTRALIA

Melbourne

Euan Heng at Australian Galleries

Scottish-born Euan Heng spent his early years traveling the world, working as a merchant seaman, before returning to Dundee to study for his Diploma of Art in 1975. Since his arrival in Australia, in the late 1970s, he has strung together an impressive list of exhibitions. Appropriately, Heng's recent series of watercolors and drawings launched the specially constructed Australian Galleries Works on Paper Gallery in Collingwood.

Heng has long been interested in expressing his ideas through figuration and exploring how narrative figurative art might continue to engage a contemporary world, sometimes against the odds. These fastidiously executed his recent works had their genesis in a recent trip Heng undertook to Italy, looking at the symbolic meanings conveyed in the subject matter for many of the Re-

naissance frescoes. Surprisingly, these new works mirrored themes for which Heng has long been well-known. That large, somewhat awkward-looking male figure still inhabited his landscapes—landscapes which have always been a tad remote and which suggest a strong sense of melancholy. And there still seems to be an absence of activity in the narrative aspect of the work, suggesting that the few figures or objects we see are caught in a definitive moment.

In *Navigation* (2000) the stoic, blank-faced man stands watching on the shore as what looks like an ocean liner sinks into the sea. Behind him a white bird seems to balance in his open palm. This stoic figure reappears in varying guises in a number of the works, suggesting that the figure may represent the artist himself. So much of Heng's work is inflected with a symbolic twist, illuminating what the artist feels is fundamental to the human condition. There are suggestions of our emotional suscep-

tibility, the fragility of nature and the predicament of the individual in the hostile contemporary world. As this burly figure reappears throughout the series he appears powerless to affect change. Even as he stands watching the ship sink, he remains unmoved. He is merely a voyeur.

Which is the role of the viewer as well. On the one hand, we gaze and marvel at the sheer simplicity and beauty of Heng's watercolors and drawings, as in the watercolors *Arrival* (2000) and *Departure* (2000). In these works the landscape is cleverly reversed as a ship either simply arrives or departs the land of its origin. Yet, a number of other works in the exhibition are loaded with a perplexing range of symbolic imagery, representing notional opposites through which the viewer must wade. In the gargantuan triptych, *Riddle* (1999-2000), the burly human figure stands center stage holding a caged owl, perhaps representing the capturing of knowledge. Trees on

either side provide a natural environment for a whole range of symbolic creatures, the duck (representing the Earth), the rabbit (genesis), the pheasant (representing light and day), the squirrel (preparedness), and the snail (representing the evolution of the universe.) The real beauty of Heng's work is that nothing is ever stated directly. These are landscapes of the imagination over which the viewer is propelled to linger.

Roger Taylor

CANADA

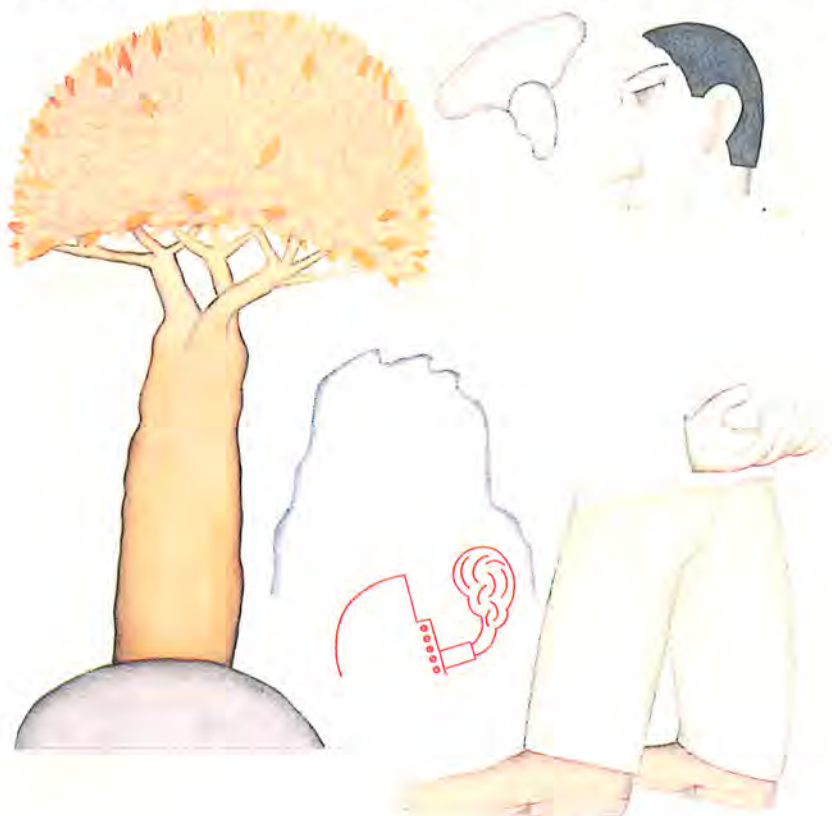
Vancouver

Hong Hao at Art Beatus Gallery

Hong Hao graduated from the printmaking department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, in 1989—at the crest of the wave of young Chinese artists who have skyrocketed to critical attention. In the decade since Tiananmen, the Beijing-born artist has participated in more than 20 exhibitions worldwide, including the acclaimed *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* exhibition currently on the Asian leg of its international tour.

Suspended Disbelief, Hong Hao's first solo exhibition in Canada, presented 18 examples from his *Selected Scriptures* series of prints (including six featured in *Inside Out*), as well as several large-scale, computer-manipulated color photographs portraying the artist as the enigmatic Mr. Gnoh and as a Beijing tourist guide.

Like other artists of his generation, Hong employs the ambiguities of pastiche to frame ideas about cultural fragmentation and the pervasive influences of consumer media; however, it would be unwise to equate his prints and photographs with the parodic imagery of other Political Pop artists. His concerns are the anxieties and instabilities of rapidly changing "truth."



Euan Heng, *Navigation*, 2000, watercolor and pencil on paper, 53.5 x 56 cm.