

4A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART PRESENTS

ZHANG RUI 张瑞

ONE YEAR 一年

28 JUNE - 17 AUGUST 2013

One Year presents a new collection of paintings by Chinese-born artist Zhang Rui. Having moved to Sydney one year ago, the body of work in *One Year* portrays Rui's development of a visual language working across the context of her experiences of China and Australia.

Zhang's work draws on a vast array of images - usually sourced from the internet - as a means of reading or engaging with her new surroundings.

The results are visually cryptic paintings that subtly combine the autobiographical with highly political threads, interweaving her personal and social worlds. Her whimsical works are layered with coded meaning that refers to her experiences living in Sydney and simultaneously connecting to her hometown of Tianjin via social media.

Zhang's works, while seemingly simple on the surface, feature implicit references to incidents of internet censorship, women's rights violations and government corruption that have gone viral on Chinese twitter, *weibo*, and explore their juxtaposition with her life in Australia.

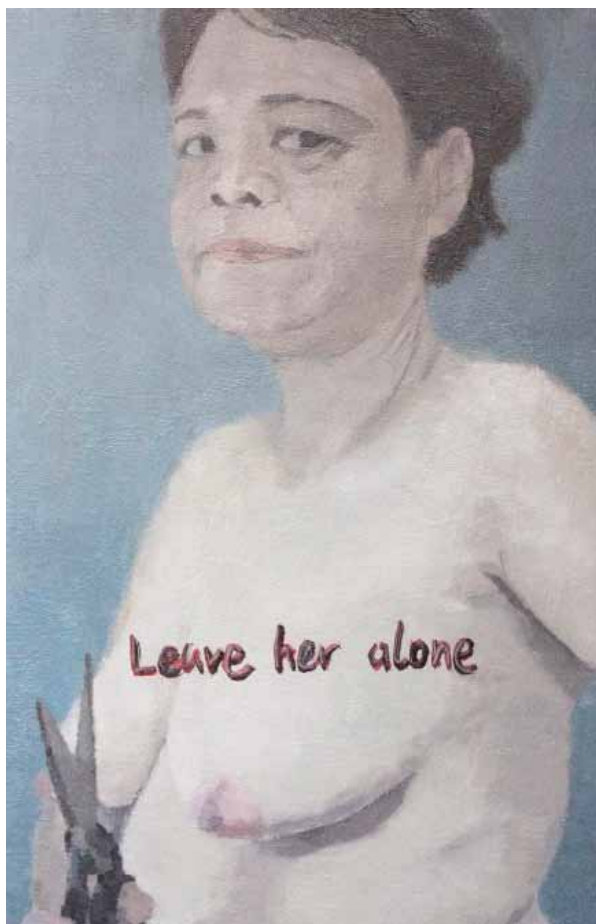
As Toby Chapman, Assistant Curator at 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, commented;

"Zhang's practice reveals the complexity of translating meaning across cultural and geographical distances despite the expanding reach of technology."

The conceptual development of Zhang's works indicate a broad cultural practice that encompasses an education in Western oil painting, an ongoing interest in the Women School (吳門學校) of painters of China and a broader interest in how to express a sense of humanism through painting.

Zhang Rui was born in 1983 in Tianjin, China and graduated from the Department of Painting, Tianjin Academy of Fine Arts. She moved to Australia one year ago with her husband, Ji Ruan, founder of the website www.freeweimei.com, in support of Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei.

The pair met when Zhang was a participant in Ai Weiwei's acclaimed project, *Fairytale*, presented as part of *dOCUMENTA (12)*, Kassel, Germany (2007).



Zhang Rui, *Leave Her Alone* (2013) oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist. This portrait refers to a recent incident where Chinese civil rights activist Ye Haiyan held a placard with "Principles, Have sex with me, Leave the pupils alone", in front of a Chinese primary school, to protest against the alleged abuse of school girls by teachers and officials. Shortly after, Ye was detained by the police. *Leave Her Alone* has a double meaning: First, leave the little girls alone, their bodies must not be abused; Second, release Ye Haiyan immediately.

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE

Zhang has presented work internationally, both in China and Europe, including the solo exhibition *Freedom We Need*, Laden No.5 Gallery, Bad Ems (2011). Rui has also participated in a number of group exhibitions including *Fang – then there was no more living room*, 978 Art District, Beijing (2007); Xu Ni, Cao Chang Di Art Space, Beijing (2008) and *Mud*, curated by Ai Weiwei, China Art Archives & Warehouse, Beijing.

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For all media inquiries please contact Joanna Bayndrian on joanna@creativeasia.com.au or 0405 933 896



Zhang Rui, *Kevin Rudd* (2013) oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

"The past is past. What can prevent us from facing the wrongdoings of our ancestors? In 2008, Kevin Rudd, the then prime minister of Australia, formally apologised to Indigenous Australians for the stolen generations and pledged the government to bridging the gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australian health, education and living conditions. But even talking about some mistakes in Chinese history, is a taboo in China."

- Artist statement. (From Zhang's website ruizhang.net)



Zhang Rui, *Grass Mud Horses* (2013) oil on canvas. Courtesy of the artist.

*While not often seen alive in China, images of alpacas been wildly circulated on the Chinese internet to refer to "Grass-mud horse" (or cǎo ní mǎ 草泥马), (which sounds similar phonetically in Mandarin as "f**k your mother" (cǎo nǐ mā 你妈). The pun was originally coined by netizens as a means of circumventing and mocking government censorship of 'vulgar content'.) It is one of the so-called 10 mythical creatures created in a hoax article on Chinese site Baidu Baike in early 2009 whose names form obscene puns. It has since become a form of symbolic defiance of the widespread Internet censorship in China.*

- Artist statement. (From Zhang's website ruizhang.net)

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