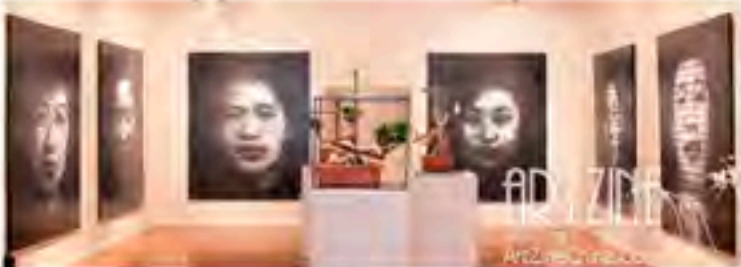


## Zhang Dali and Shen Shaomin – Eli Klein Fine Arts

By Bingxia Yu



Chinese contemporary art may have been buzzing more than anything else in the art market over recent years, yet in the city of New York, where 500+ galleries root their bases, only 3 or 4 represent contemporary Chinese art. Among them is Eli Klein Fine Arts, a SoHo gallery just ten-month old, run by two young Americans who sensed the under-representation of Chinese art in the city just a little earlier than others.

Zhang Dali and Shen Shaomin's new show in Eli Klein Fine Arts is the first ever exhibition of the two artists working together, the first ever U.S. appearance of Shen Shaomin, and the first ever U.S. showing of Zhang Dali's new series of paintings, "Slogan."

Though not obvious at the first glimpse of their works, the two artists share a lot in common. They were both born in Heilongjiang province, and have both reluctantly, but consequentially lived oversea for years – Zhang in Bologna, Italy and Shen in Sydney, Australia. The two of them, who are close friends, have now both come back to work in Beijing.

Zhang Dali's new "Slogan" paintings continue his political symbolism known best in "Chinese Offspring". Cliché slogans as current as the Beijing Olympics slogan, "One World One Dream", as stereotypical as "Support the lead of the Party", or as subversive as an intense repeating of "AK47", were spelled out with black and white Chinese characters into big portraits of Chinese migrant workers. "Slogan" delivers a multi-layered but almost effortless political metaphor. Seen from a distance, the faces seem as banal, clichéd as the slogans, and the slogans as trivial and negligible as the common faces.



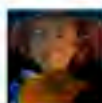
Zhang Dali, Welcome to The Olympic Games 2008

Zhang Dali's works seem to be staying in line with his own expressive methods dating back to his early graffiti works. His massive but passive aggressive uses of clichéd cultural symbols keep portraying the same kind of massive passive aggressiveness in contemporary Chinese society. Migrant workers' faces in "slogan" looked harsh and lifeless, neither resentful nor joyful. The repeating of slogans used in each painting enhances the feeling of a deadly massiveness made by the masses. Zhang Dali once said that he thought there was something heroic about migrant workers. Yet the heroism shown in his works can only be seen as tragic heroism, after being repressed, assimilated and objectified. What we see most in Zhang Dali's works are the passive status of human beings,

while political symbols often take the lead as the subjective.

In the same hall, Shen Shaomin's works, some ten sculptures made of dead animal bones and live plants depict the same sort of symbolic passiveness. Shen has worked with animal

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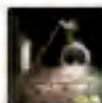
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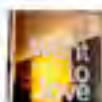
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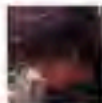
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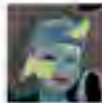
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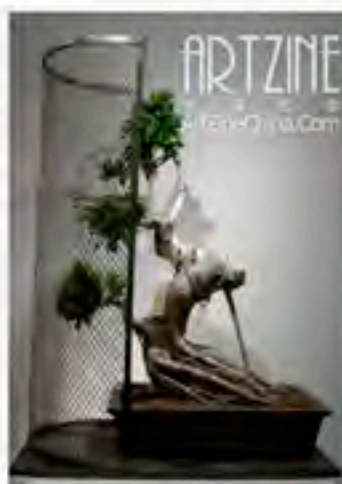
bones 3 years. His last critically acclaimed sculpture series, "Unknown Creature" were absurdly shaped skeletons built from various types of animal bones. The concept continued to become the new series, "Experimental Fields", in which animal bones construct several highly artificial plants. Claws make petals, rabbit skulls make bulbs, and skeleton fragments from various animals make flowers. The artificial plants then take on the color of animal bones, resulting in some absurd plants looking almost as sharp and scary as his former creatures.

Shen's another new series of "Bonsai" put live plants into cage-like iron structures. The live plants, still fresh and green, were glued to or distorted by the structures imposed on them and made into awkward shapes. The plants are like prisoners in this work, according to Shen. He was tempted to critique the notion of relentlessly constructing artificial beauty regardless of price in Chinese society, a critique that can go way beyond making Bonsai plants, to, let's say, the political slogans from Zhang Dali's paintings, or, to a certain Chinese ideology that both artists have lived through.

Zhang Dali and Shen Shaomin both picked up Chinese cultural symbols in their own convenient ways. In them you see the unique symbolic and expressive quality among the generation of Chinese artists born in the 50s and 60s. In fact those symbols, together with their political implications, are the things that attract foreign dealers like Eli Klein the most.

"Beijing artists are strongly political and very daring, which is rare on the market now," said Klein, the owner of Eli Klein Fine Arts.

The exhibition will run through Aug 21. Eli Klein Fine Art located at 462 West Broadway in New York.



Shen Shaomin, Bonsai-46



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Zhang Dali, Slogan No.11





Shen Shaomin, Bonsai - 44



Shen Shaomin, Bonsai - 39

[TOP](#)