

## Political statements made in raw language

**Yao Jui-chung's 'The Cynic' at Taipei MOMA Gallery makes bold statements about cross-strait relations and Taiwanese identity**

By Diana Freundl

In the 10 years since his graduation from the National Institute of Art in Taipei, Yao Jui-chung (姚瑞中) has been active in art, music, theater and film.

He has exhibited internationally, representing Taiwan in the Venice Biennale in 1997, and has held numerous solo exhibitions in Asia, Europe and North America. His recent projects employ both photography and installation to create satirical works with strong political overtones.



Yao Jui-chung's *Chinese*.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF  
TAIPEI MOMA  
GALLERY

Yao's tongue-in-cheek approach continues in his latest exhibition, *The Cynic*, at Taipei MOMA Gallery. Here, Yao utilizes minimal materials to make bold statements about cross-strait relations and Taiwanese identity.

As in previous exhibits, the core of his inquiry are the themes of nationalism and identity. Putting his ongoing photo documentary project of Taiwan's historical sites on temporary hold, he turns to ink as his medium in his latest works.

There are a total of eight pieces on display, each developed from a style of comic books aimed at adults. Near the entrance of the gallery is a doll covered in gold with small horns, which represents both a child's innocence and the devil's deviancy. The two polar characteristics are the basis for the figures appearing in each work -- a devil, and a human figure with a dog head.



*People to people*

The canvases are made from large sheets of recycled paper, which Yao first covered in gold leaf before etching figures and speech balloons. Using colors and word play, in English and Chinese, each work contains explicit and in-your-face political statements.

For instance, *Taiwanese* shows a red devil engaged in intercourse with a green-blue female figure. Above the picture is written "Taiwanese 她玩你死," or "He Plays You to Death."



Without committing himself to any one interpretation, Yao said the red is China, the green is Taiwan, leaving the suggestion that Taiwan is being abused by China.

Several people, he added, choose to associate green-colored figures with the Democratic Progressive Party (DDP) and the blue with the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT). This association favors DDP supporters, considering the greens' superior position through out the exhibition.

More sinister connotations are made in *People to people, Government to Government* (屁股對屁股, 肛門對肛門). The meaning is clearer in the Chinese, which translates, "ass to ass, asshole to asshole." The figures are twisted to form a swastika symbol alluding to totalitarianism.

The association is in part a reference to Yao's view that "everything has become so political." He said, "You go to China you are not Taiwanese. You are against reunification you are not Chinese. You're not Chinese and you're not Taiwanese, so what are you?"

Preferring not to affiliate himself with any single political party, Yao said the pieces are intended as general satirical commentary on the current political situation in Taiwan, specifically the ambiguity associated with Taiwanese, identity.

It is a theme he has explored in the past. One of his previous shows, *Territory Manoeuvre* (1994) was a series of six photographs in which Yao is seen urinating (or making his territory) on six heritage sites constructed during Japanese and Dutch occupations.

His deviant innuendos and graphic content may offend some, but behind all the sex and profanity is a smirking artist with an intelligent argument to make.