



Playing the virtual cool guy, perhaps the theme of this "photo" by Taiwan artist Chen Ching-yao.

PHOTO: MOCA

History on its head

Yao Jui-chung's hat trick: a book and two new shows

BY SUSAN KENDZULAK

FEBRUARY IS clearly the month of Yao Jui-Chung: the artist, writer and curator. He has a photo exhibition, a new book out, and a blockbuster show co-curated with Mainland critic Zhu Qi at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), Taipei.

It's hard to impress a jaded New Yorker like myself, but, boy, was I wowed by MOCA's gala re-opening and the new exhibition, *Spellbound Aura: Chinese Contemporary Photograph*, which runs until May 2. Curated by Yao and Beijing-based Zhu Qi, the show offers a new idea for what photographic exhibitions can be. Strictly staying away from the typical small-framed shots on barren white walls in austere rooms, they've created a really provocative exhibition offering some of the best contemporary art from both sides of the Strait. It includes digital photos in lightboxes and on brightly colored walls, video installations, fish tanks with toy terrorists, and even a painting. What I like about the show is that it feels alive and sexy. Remember the word "museum" has its roots in "mausoleum" and, as you may have experienced, so much of the art seen in museums really feels dead.

This exhibition of 25 artists from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China delves into specific social topics like betel nut girls, menstruation (presented like beautiful Victorian-style photographs), prostitution, and big picture issues like eastern aesthetics, memory, and identity. But the core questions it raises are even more interesting: Are there crucial differences between artwork from China and Taiwan? And in contemporary art, is there such a thing as an oriental point-of-view, especially since artists share to so many of the same global referents with their western counterparts?

Good exhibitions create interesting dialogues between artists and viewers, and this one definitely gives food for thought. One highlight of the grand opening was when Mayor Ma Ying-Jeou was asked to pose as a groom for Mickey Chen and Vicky Lu's *Perfect Couple* series, and he answered: "yeah, sure".

Yao's solo exhibition of framed black and white photos at IT Park, entitled *Long March - Shifted the Universe* is ideal for you Chinese history buffs, as the accompanying didactic (and bilingual) wall texts describe



Trading Identities by Mainland artist Chang Xin.

PHOTO: MOCA

significant markers or monuments along the historical route of the Long March. In front of each marker Yao does a handstand and the photos are hung upside-down making it appear that the artist is lifting the world in his hands. The Chinese phrase "shifting the universe" refers to the power of the gong-fu master who can move mountains with his hands. Hypothetically, if the gong-fu master can move mountains through "shifting the universe", then Yao's proposition becomes a rewriting of history, and hence, a reconfiguration of the Taiwanese identity - an issue that's preoccupied him and many other local

artists for years.

Yao's book *Roam the Ruins of Taiwan* highlights the abandonment of Taiwan's factories and warehouses, as the mass exodus of traditional manufacturing continues to go to China, thus leaving empty ruins behind. This book is similar to the premise of Chen Chieh-Ren's film *Factory*, a 30 minute video (mentioned in last month's column) which was installed at IT Park gallery last month.

For you grant-seekers out there:

Open call for visual artists, photographers, writers, performers, musicians, and filmmakers to apply to the Kio-A-Thau

Artist-in-Residence program in Kaohsiung.

Located at a sugar refinery, only applicants who can make work about the site and its history will be considered. A stipend is offered. Deadline is Feb 22, 2004. Contact Nora Yeh kat@kat.org.tw, www.kat.org.tw.

Another open call is sponsored by the Acer Digital Center: Future Imprint - International Animation Competition Award which has a grand prize of NT\$ 200,000. So all you tech/media artists get working on your proposals. Feb 29 is the deadline. Contact Leona Liao for further info: Leona_liao@acer.com.tw.

I recently met up with Won-il Rhee, the Chief Curator from the Seoul Museum of Art. He will be back in town in the spring with his curated exhibition Media City at MOCA. His previous exhibition Media City Seoul 2002 included 100 international artists, many of them top-notch and which sought to put Seoul on the map as a digital city. This Taipei version should be quite exciting, so stay tuned for further details.

Huang Shih-Chieh's front-door installation of pre-recorded voices, animated toys and plastic gadgets at the Taipei Artist Village always makes me chuckle. He is now in a group show called "Emerging young Asian artists in NY" (where he's based) at El Centro De Arte Caja De Burgos, Spain. www.cabdeburgos.com

An interesting conference on Asian Art with a great roster of speakers will take place in Singapore on Feb 19 to 22.

International Conference on Our Modernities: Positioning Asian Art Now will be at the Asian Civilisations Museum, Empress Place, Singapore. <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/conf2004/asianart.htm>

The Taiwan monthly art magazine *Artco* now has some English sections. That's great for us art lovers who can't read Chinese. Before I could only look at the pictures - which is one benefit of working with visual art.

For you couch potatoes, who making the gallery rounds seems like hard-work, check out these instead. Some cool websites featuring new art from Taiwan. From London: www.redmansionfoundation.org, and from Hong Kong: www.aaa.org.hk.

Also check out the Taipei Fine Arts Museum updated website and take a virtual tour: www.tfam.gov.tw

Highly recommended: *Spellbound Aura: Chinese Contemporary Photograph* at MOCA (台北當代藝術館), 39 Chang-an W. Rd, Taipei (台北市103大同區長安西路39號). Open: 10am to 5:30pm, closed Mondays. Through May 2nd.

Kuo Wei-Guo, a well known self-portrait painter is showing at Main Trend (大趨勢藝術空間) 209-1, Sec 3, Chengteh Rd, Taipei (台北市承德路三段209之1號).