

Artist Statement – Transforming Traditions

Sculptural Painting

All of my works in this exhibition aim to transform traditions of the East and West by using a technique called Sculptural Painting.

Chinese jade or lacquer carving is one of the most important art forms in the history of Chinese civilisation. Carvings of landscape images were especially popular but difficult, employing semi-abstract design and elegant decorative elements. The narrow dimensions of the jade or lacquer used by Chinese artists to carve landscapes strongly affected the composition and restricted the figure's volume and depths. Decorative lines and patterns are essential in this process. Artists also used larger shadows, by cutting deeper, to enhance the image. In the end the original Chinese landscape painting turned into a beautiful and distinctive low relief carving of a landscape difficult to find elsewhere in the world.

My painting is a process of applying this traditional technique to reverse the low relief carving back into painting. I use brushes to 'carve (paint) out' the painting's surface, to produce decorative lines, patterns and shadows as if carving jade in low relief. Thus, I bring out a restricted sense of 3D volume protruding from the 2D canvas surface, a visual illusion expressed brilliantly in traditional Chinese decorative carvings. Here Western postmodernist art theory was instrumental in the painting's process of seamlessly transforming the traditional in combination with Western linear perspective to achieve a sense of space beyond the surface of the canvas.

Meanwhile, my paintings' flat brushwork and bright colours are influenced by Western hard edge abstract, optical illusionism and pop art. In these ways, my paintings combine and transform the principles of contemporary Western and traditional Chinese Art. Works by Roy Lichtenstein, Kandinsky, David Hockney and Hokusai as well as Chinese landscape painting masters have influenced my creative approach.

Chinese and Western symbols

In this exhibition the larger sculptural paintings depict images that are significant in Chinese culture: Dragon symbolising potent and auspicious powers, and *Kylin*, a mythical creature that can drive away evil spirits.

The striking feature of *Arhat*, a Buddhist who has achieved spiritual enlightenment,

was imported from Persia along the Silk Road in ancient times.

Lady & Lion – After Botticelli’s Pallas and the Centaur: the main message in Botticelli’s painting is perhaps associated with uncontrolled passion, lust and sensuality, and submission of passion to reason. Here my painting Lady and Lion has transformed it into the conflict of race and gender differences playing out between the East and West (lady and lion).



Arhat
181 x 124cm
2023



*Lady&Lion-
AfterBotticelli Pallas
and the Centaur*
184 x 174cm
2023

The Body

Our bodily relationship with the environment, technology and religion is critical for human existence. Overwhelmed by the hostile environment of natural disasters, worldwide pandemics, and political and economic crises, our once sublime and confident bodies have become fragile and threatened.

My painting depicts such a bodily world in that the ideal renaissance body has fallen off its pedestal, broken into pieces to become the aching, longing, distorted, suspended, confused, isolated body parts, floating and submerging in a blue or red water surface, gasping for air. The fragmented bodies are mixed with different religious and cultural symbols among the robotic objects interacting with the floral background. This is an imaginative vision of the new bodily world, a wake-up call for us to rethink the balance between human and nature.



Body#1 (Quagmire), 90 x 90cm, 2021



Body#2 (Split), 90 x 90cm, 2021



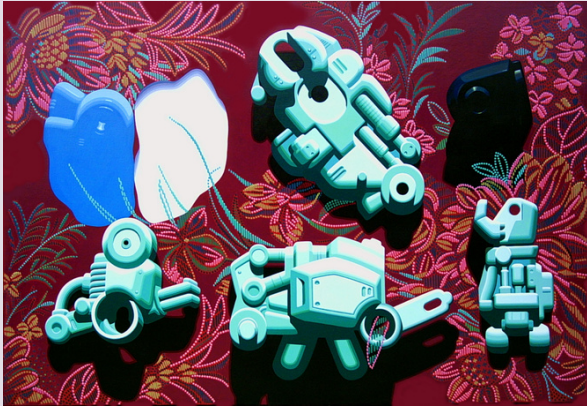
Body#3 (Pond), 90 x 90cm, 2021



Body#4 (Bend), 90 x 90cm, 2021

Descendant

The robotic objects in *The Pandemic Body* and *Descendant* have been given marks of “heads, eyes, mouths, arms, legs and tails” to project an animate quality to the unidentifiable biomorphic bodies. Recent AI developments have made technology more pervasive in human life. The background floral patterns are from handmade Chinese brocade. The flowers come alive over the top of the objects or body parts. Thus, the background becomes object, object becomes background, and a second background is created underneath, suggesting a diverse and integrated cultural environment.



Descendan
(BlackShadow)
124 x 181cm
2018



The Pandemic Body
(Transfigure)
121 x 94cm
2021

Landscape

In producing the Australian landscape icon *Gum Tree*, I present an angle of looking upwards to focus on the tree trunks. In the twilight, the majestic trunks like human bodies dance in the wind and soar towards the blue sky in ecstatic salutation, their branches becoming narrow roads winding towards a heavenly and spiritual destination. Gum trees are painterly subjects with the Chinese calligraphic strokes of the branches breaking free and the Western optical colours both subtle and vivid.

My series of Chinese landscape paintings invites people to immerse themselves in the natural world. Inspired by classical Chinese poetry, these paintings depict sceneries of bittersweet memories of the past and uncertain outlooks of the future. Mountains and rocks, and water including lake, river, sea, clouds and waterfall, are integral parts of Chinese landscape painting that embody the concept of Daoism. By gazing at the vast landscape and distant horizon, one can connect with the universe. They also symbolise the dialectic concepts of Chinese culture: yin and yang, hard and soft, solid and void.

The pine tree symbolises steadfastness, self-discipline, and endurance. It's often depicted with other symbols of longevity such as cranes that are associated with immortals in Chinese art.



Landscape Series



Gum tree diptych
180 x 124cm
2014

