

ASIAN ART NEWS

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ASEAN Art Awards



An Uncommon Spirit: Montien Boonma * Korea's
Jung Jong-Mee * The Simple And The Spiritual:
Dominic Lam * Figures Speak For Kathy Alpar-
Altman * Jennifer Matheson * Seiko Tachibana

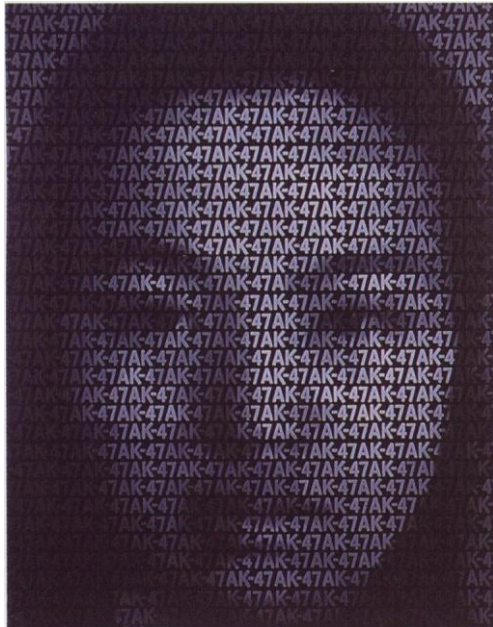
Zhang Dali at CourtYard Gallery

Zhang Dali first caught the attention of Beijing's art world with his graffiti artwork *Demolition and Dialogue* (1988). It became an indigenous part of Beijing's urban landscape when his black-ink, spray-painted images of a bald-headed man began to appear all over the city on buildings, including traditional one-story courtyard homes (se be yuan) and alley (hutong) walls scheduled for demolition. The graffiti, often accompanied by the spray-painted signature "AK-18" (aka "AK-47"), was an expression of Zhang's disillusionment over the destruction being carried out unabatedly in the city with no thoughts for the wishes or needs of its citizens. Zhang subsequently photographed what he considers public art, transferred the computer images to canvas, and painted them.

In using the pseudonym "AK-18," Zhang sought to protect himself from the ever-watchful ideologists, later signing his work as "AK-47," which he has described as a symbol for the Third World, the violence in cities, and the violence of which every human being is capable. Although graffiti is not unknown in Asia, Zhang got his first taste of its communicative power when he was studying in Bologna, Italy, in the late 1980s. He sees his graffiti as a way of opening a dialog with people in Beijing, making them more aware of what is happening to their surroundings, over which they have no control, describing his work as an "exchange of ideas with the people in Beijing, who traditionally keep their thoughts and ideas to themselves."

In *AK-47*, Zhang displayed 16 portraits in acrylic on vinyl both in the Gallery and in the restaurant adjoining the Gallery. The portraits, all of which are of the many migrant workers to be found in Beijing, are composed of computer images transferred to acrylic after careful study of the original color photographs. Zhang then painstakingly matched the skin tones using gray and black paint. The faces of young men and women with "AK-47" written all over them stare forlornly at the viewer. By using "AK-47" Zhang is making a strong statement reminding people of the formidable capabilities of the automatic weapon, which is being used not only to destroy human life but also inanimate objects. *AK-47* represents not only violence but the victims and the predators. *AK-47* also included several of Zhang's plaster-casts made directly from the heads of several migrant workers.

Maggie Pai



Zhang Dali, *AK-47 #11*, 2000,
acrylic on vinyl, 250 x 120 cm.
Photograph: Courtesy of
CourtYard Gallery.