

November 17-23, 2005

Reviews

Wang Jianwei, "Relativism: A Flying Bird Is Motionless"
Chambers Fine Art, through Jan 7
(see Chelsea).

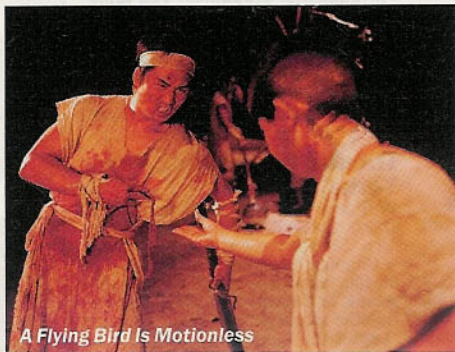
The latest work by Wang Jianwei, one of China's first video artists of note, takes the system of knowledge behind Chinese martial arts as its point of departure. But don't expect *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*. Far from offering magical special effects, Wang's work disrupts the genre's seamless veneer so that human chaos, rather than universal order, rules.

Eight large photographs of battling and bloody martial artists hang like flags from the ceiling in the main gallery. At first, they look like ordinary

action-film stills—one guy who's already dying of an arrow wound is about to be burned at the stake—but subtle manipulations are apparent. There are X-ray views into brains and spinal cords, and passages where a director is seen choreographing the fighters' steps. The video in the back room contains interventions of a differ-

ent kind. It starts with actors standing on a dusty stage toasting each other with water from plastic bottles. Then a windstorm of swirling detritus rises up and they begin to fight with swords, continuing until most fall "dead." As the tape ends, they rise and walk around as if ready to begin again.

Wang writes in the show's catalog that he borrowed the show's title from the Greek philosopher Xenon's theories about movement. But xenon is an inert gas, not a philosopher. Wang's title most likely refers to the famous arrow paradox attributed to Zeno of Elea, which posits that motion is an illusion of perception. Either the meaning has been lost in translation (the confusion could be the translator's), or the show is another example of how overintellectualization can undermine art.
—Bridget L. Goodbody



A Flying Bird Is Motionless