

NEW YORK

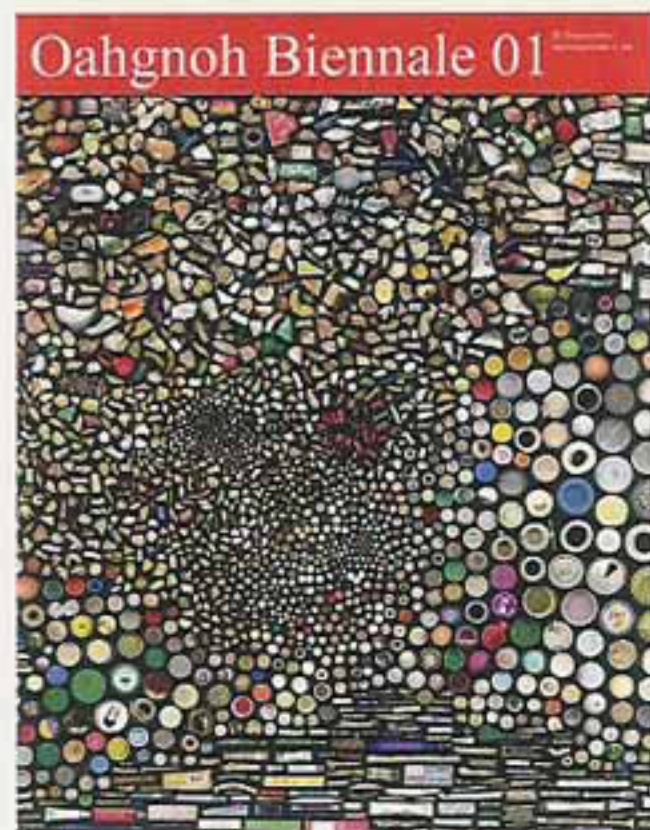
Hong Hao

Chambers Fine Art

In many respects, the display of maps, books, magazines and accompanying wall texts in Hong Hao's "Reading Room," his first one-person exhibition in the United States, suggests a generic if aesthetically pleasing survey of an artist's books and works on paper. Visitors to the gallery could flip through the illustrations to *A History of Contemporary Art* (2004) and *A History of Contemporary Photography* (2004), or admire the meticulous handling of a variety of materials. The pyramid-shaped *House of Gold and Beauty as Jade* (2004), an artist's book alluding to the Chinese love of learning and wisdom, is particularly appealing, with its precise gradations of sheaf after sheaf of appropriated images from Chinese and English-language magazines. *Reading in the Reading Room* (2004), however, is obstructed and baffled by contradictions, pranks, and absurdities in the works on display.

The texts, similar in heft and look to *Janson's History of Art*, also make an appropriately unsubtle point about the paucity of Asian art in supposedly encyclopedic art histories. Other works at Chambers address social concerns. The wisdom in the arbitrarily selected images of *House of Gold and Beauty as Jade* can be reduced to the pointlessly laborious process of measurement and accumulation: a commentary, perhaps, on the alienation of labor, even artistic labor, in a global consumerist economy. Hong Hao, like other Chinese artists—Xu Bing comes readily to mind—is clearly interested in the proliferating glossolalia of East-West miscommunication. He is an especially resourceful facilitator of enlightening nonsense; his *Oahgnoh Biennale* (2003-2004), an elaborate documentation of a self-promoted and self-obfuscated biennale that never happened, renders the seduction and opacity of present-day Chinese art in the West in an inexhaustible index of images taken from sources (erotic magazines, propaganda publications), that, one would assume, have nothing to do with art or the hype of international art exhibitions.

Hao's *The Strategic Defense Order* (1995), one of a series of silk-screened maps produced in the '90s, comments ironically on the grandiose strategic claims of international rivals. *My Things #6*, also called *The Hangover of Revolution in My Home* (2002), a color print of scanned images of hundreds of everyday objects alluding to life under the Communist state, reverses the modernist interest in the publicity of the private by exposing the relentless accretion of depersonalizing images, slogans, trinkets, and the like that intruded upon, if not entirely effaced, the discourse of the self. The resulting mosaic, one of a series of similar studies of everyday objects, imposes a desultory rigor of surface design over any suggestion of depth, space or personality. ■ CHRIS MOYLAN



Hong Hao ■ *Oahgnoh Biennale 01: III Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte* ■ 2003-04 ■ Bound hard-cover book with jacket designed by the artist ■ 2 1/2" x 8 1/2" x 11" ■ Courtesy of Chambers Fine Art