

HK\$50/US\$6/
CAN\$7.95/€6/UK£4

ASIAN ART NEWS

VOLUME 17 NUMBER 5 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2007

FARHAD HUSSAIN

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Hong Hao, *Elegant Gathering*, 2007, hand-painted digital photograph, 52 x 300 cm. Photograph: Courtesy of Chambers Fine Art.

cotton plants, which are full of farmers in straw hats, wooden shacks, temple spires, farming implements, buffalo, as well as indigenous food stuffs.

Kasornsuwan's art, which teems with energy, depicts a humble, yet fulfilling way of life where man and nature live together harmoniously. His playful compositions celebrate a culture and lifestyle in decline. Each of his stylistic interchanges has its own merits with the 2005 Keith Haring-like acrylic paintings, the most whimsical in their delivery as they offer a bird's eye view of village life. One of his most captivating works is *Pink Orchard* (2004) with its dripping backdrop and dark black outlines.

Steven Pettifor



THE UNITED STATES

New York

Hong Hao at Chambers Fine Art

Hong Hao's work satirizing art openings is so delightfully witty that it is sure to bring a smile to most faces, even in the visages of those who are not inclined to be easily amused. The Beijing-based artist, who has enjoyed mocking the art world for years and, in 1997, sent out fake invitations to Chinese artists to submit works for possible inclusion in a special section of *Documenta X*, cleverly captures the hollow and pretentious aspect of art openings in his latest multimedia scrolls. Openings, the ritual gatherings that mark the beginning of a show, have become extremely popular in countries like China and India as the art market dramatically grows in

Asia, and like everywhere else, are viewed as symbols of status, sophistication, and glamour. Attending these parties, and, more important, being seen at them, is perceived as an indicator of belonging to the elite art circles of society. Thus, openings—intended to introduce new art to people—have taken on another role as people often use these events to socialize, expand their professional or personal networks or simply get a free drink. Frequently, there are several openings in a day during the same time that last for a meager two hours (typically 6–8 p.m. in New York) and people will rush to an opening, talk to the people they know or want to know, wave or exchange hasty pleasantries with others, quickly glance at the art if they have the time, and rush out of

there to do the same thing at other openings.

Weaving candid images from photographs of openings, both in China and other parts of the world, into paintings based on civilized Chinese gatherings from the past, Hong insightfully and humorously comments on openings today, and possibly on all so-called civilized gatherings, contemporary or ancient. For this show, titled *Elegant Gathering: Hong Hao's Opening*, he scanned images of paintings from different periods in Chinese history that portrayed the elite of the time engaging in cultural pursuits or cultured conversation. Then, he digitally inserted snippets from opening photographs such as slabs of cheese, bottles of beer, a professional-looking reporter interviewing a man in a

striped jacket, into these classical settings in a very deliberate and strategic manner. Finally, he printed just the digital images onto large scrolls and gave it to those trained in classical Chinese art to paint the ancient gatherings around the photographs. The result is outstanding works that seamlessly blend the past with the present, photography with painting.

Hong establishes visual relationships between the contemporary and the ancient in such a skillful and ingenious way that you see well-dressed people carrying modern bags with logos looking perfectly comfortable as they strut around the grounds of an ancient landscape, T-shirt clad men looking completely at home sitting on the same table with scholarly-looking men in traditional robes from a different time, and slick cellphones looking very much at ease next to elaborate Chinese tableware from some long-gone era.

The artist's assemblage of images is such that you feel the spirit of a contemporary opening despite the setting of a classical Chinese gathering. For example, the detachment from the art people are invited to view at openings is wittily portrayed as attendees, typically dressed in urbane Western attire, appear like they are enjoying the social aspect of the party, but equally frequently, come across as bored, sullen, distracted, or vacant. There are several memorable moments in Hong's works, but one of the most wonderfully anachronistic ones is an image of an erudite-looking ancient man in a beard and traditional robe accepting a shining green bottle of beer from a server in *Album of Literary Men*.

Priya Malhotra



Hong Hao, *Album of Literary Men*, 2007, hand-painted digital photograph, 132 x 105 cm. Photograph: Courtesy of Chambers Fine Art.