

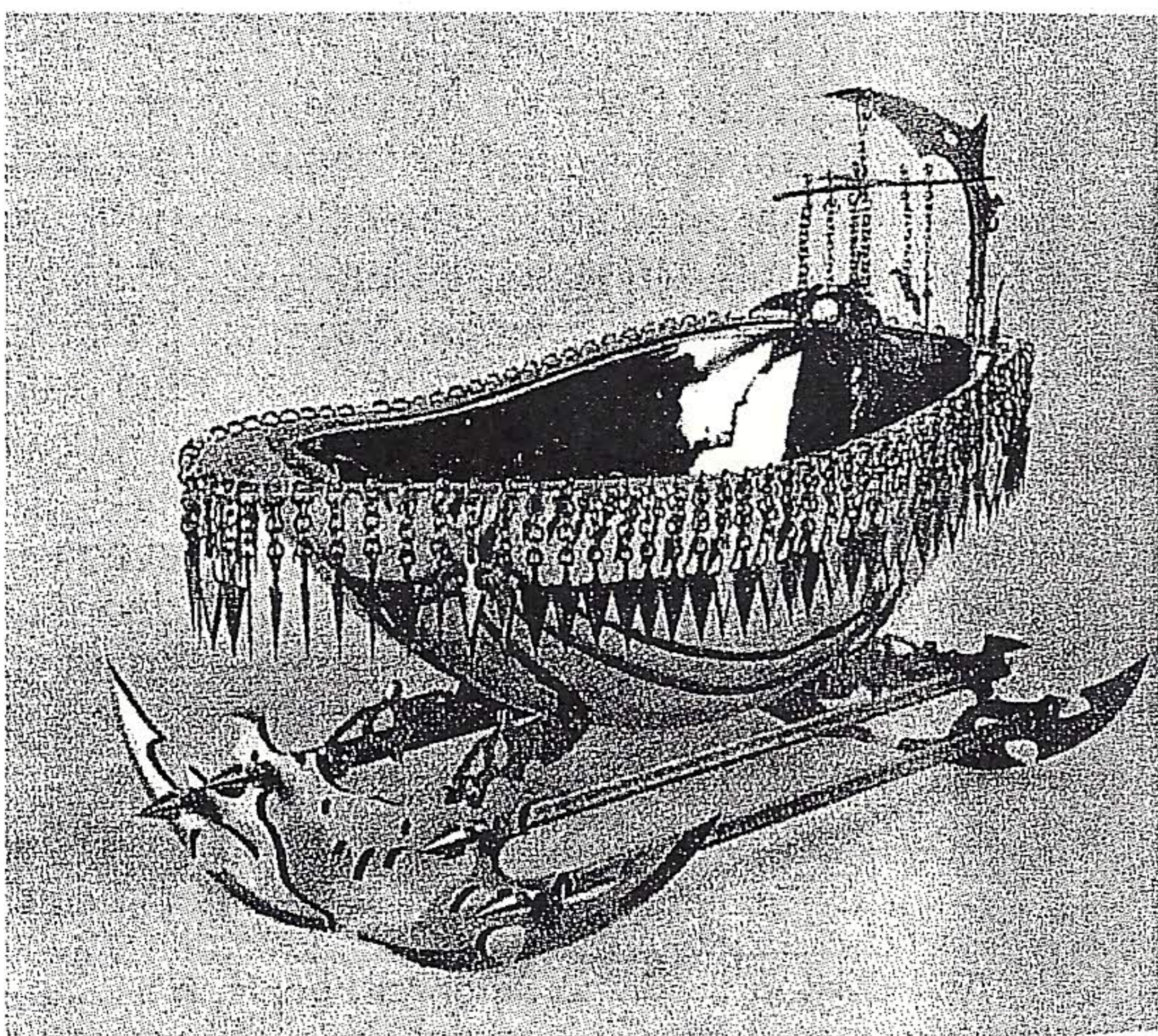
Art in America

November 2006

Shi Jinsong at Chambers

The objects offered for sale in Chinese artist Shi Jinsong's "Na Zha Baby Boutique" were

delightfully over the top. The "merchandise" consisted of an immaculately produced cradle, stroller and walker, plus abacus, bottles, nipples and rattles, all of stainless steel and all featuring razor-sharp blades and points. These pieces suggesting sadistic urges and indebted to Surrealist precedent—think of Man Ray's *Gift*, a clothes iron with a row of spikes running down its main axis—were shown on top of rectangular pedestals dressed in sparkling white synthetic fur, thereby playing on the Surrealist contrast of hard against soft (as in Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined teacup). Blueprints for the objects hung on the walls, completing a display that failed to evoke the allure of a cutting edge (so to speak) baby boutique. The sculptures, on the other hand, were terrific.



Shi Jinsong: *Na Zha Cradle*, 2005, stainless steel, 24 by 31 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches; at Chambers.

Shi Jinsong's shiny, futuristic baby implements bring Wim Delvoye's sculptures to mind, such as the monumental Cor-ten steel *Caterpillar #4* (2002), in which the tractor's surface is eaten away by cutout Gothic ornament. Delvoye's cold, calculating esthetic, inspired by Duchamp, recurs in Shi Jinsong's hard and perfect sculptures seemingly made by machines, and his dark humor as well. Significantly, as they look forward, Shi Jinsong's sculptures also hark back to scintillating Victorian silver, with the many blades and spikes suggesting overwrought ornament. The blades evoke the so-called "death by a thousand cuts" (*Leng Tch'e*) practiced in China in a bygone age, and reference to Na Zha—the "impish trickster with supernatural powers and a flamboyant fashion sense" (according

to the press release)—steeps the work in Chinese folklore and mythology. China is currently going through a series of revolutions, and these seemingly functionalist sculptures may hint at the super baby for the dawning age.

Na Zha Cradle (24 inches high, 2005; with a set of three illustrations) is an elegant work consisting of a mirroring, open oval shell. Sharp arrowheads hang like tassels from short chains around the edges of the spotless container, and blades dangle above it like a mobile for the child's amusement. Shi Jinsong's work makes a valuable contribution to the subject of violence in contemporary art. This artist asserts in his multilayered sculptures the extent to which pleasure may accompany horror and pain.

—Michaël Amy

Sincerely,
Michaël Amy