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## An Intriguing "Difference of Opinion"



Courtesy Chambers Fine Art  
A detail of Zhang Dun's "Street Scene No. 1," (2011).

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Courtesy Chambers Fine Art  
Mi Mai's "876b1561," (2011)

"A Difference of Opinion"  
Chambers Fine Art, 522 West 19th Street, New York  
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It is said that opposites attract. Though Zhang Dun and Mi Mai may have a "Difference of Opinion," as their duo show at Chambers Fine Art was titled, these artists aren't so dissimilar. Both are recent graduates of the Central Academy of Fine Arts — Zhang Dun in 2010 and Mi Mai in 2008 — both are in their 30s and are at roughly the same states in their emerging careers.

Zhang Dun's hand-drawn graphite landscapes are a far cry from Mi Mai's ink-jet prints from the "Random" series: pulsating clusters of vivid colors composed using computer algorithms, which are an attempt by the artist to take human choice and the human hand out of the equation. That craftsmanship is gone but the works that emerge betray a keen sensitivity to color. In "799b796" (2011), acid-green bounces off lemon-yellow alongside forest and pea-colored dapples. They exhibit a refined departure from 2009's more haphazardly colored "Random" series entries, shown in "Make it New" at Chambers Fine Art in February of this year, in which Mi Mai and Zhang Dun's work hung together for the first time along with five other young Chinese artists.

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The choice to pare back to just these two in their summer show was a gamble for Chambers Fine Art; one could imagine Mi Mai's large, lively prints utterly overwhelming Zhang Dun's monochrome landscapes. But Zhang Dun's haunting industrial views, figments of the artist's imagination and childhood remembrance with nary a human soul in sight, hold their own. Here the artist's hand is everywhere present in pencil lines, ranging from minute cross-hatching to dark, confident strokes. Zhang Dun's work, in fact, dominates in the first room over one of Mi Mai's only black and gray prints. The looming buildings in "Street Scene no.1" (2011) absorb the viewers' attention, drawing them into its black-and-white detail — despite the busy presence of Mi Mai's framed pixel-splotches hung nearby.

While there's an instant appeal to the precise pencil strokes of Zhang Dun's work — indications of the countless hours and discipline that went their making — Mi Mai's computer-generated pieces reward a closer look. Though appearing organic at first, they are actually comprised of millions of minute square pixels. In form and color it's hard to believe they aren't man-made, reminiscent as they are of the landscapes of the Song Dynasty and "Monet at his most daring," as the press materials note. Yet knowing about their automated creation forces the viewer to question those perceptions. Do we think of the Song Dynasty because of Mi Mai's nationality or see Monet purely because of our universal cultural knowledge?

As volatile a relationship as it can be when opposites attract, Mi Mai's vibrant printed splotches and Zhang Dun's quiet tonal drawings don't fight for the spotlight; rather, the "difference in opinion" lies in the particular way each of these two artists launches on a contemporary art practice after studying the academic techniques and traditional sensibilities that are required in Chinese art institutions. Though both have taken different paths, one revering the hand-made mark, the other rebelling against it, each process reveals itself as deeply affected by the traditional background from which it was derived.