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ARTnews

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Why Artists Are Finding Meaning in Garbage

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Xiaoze Xie

Chambers Fine Art

For the paintings in the exhibition “Layers,” Xiaoze Xie recorded stacks of printed matter much in the way a



Xiaoze Xie, *June-August 2008 G.Z.R.B.*, 2010, oil on canvas, 80" x 93".

Chambers Fine Art.

wildlife photographer would document an endangered species—he captured their physical appearance in advance of their becoming extinct. Indeed, the newspapers and manuscripts in his paintings are endangered: local dailies are going out of business and the Chinese manuscripts Xiaoze Xie depicts have already succumbed to the middle stages of decomposition.

Working from photographs that he took in library archives, Xiaoze Xie painted faithful facsimiles of piles of folded newspapers and hand-bound manuscripts. The thick broadsheets depicted—the *Xinxi Times* and *Guangzhou Daily*—feature bright photos on their front pages that the artist distorted along the creases so that faces and buildings appear slightly elongated and cropped. The issues are from 2008, a big year in China, with scenes of destruction (the Sichuan earthquake) juxtaposing moments of triumph (a Chinese astronaut smiling in his space suit). In one stack of the *Guangzhou Daily*, portrayed in Xiaoze Xie’s *June-August 2008 G.Z.R.B.* (2010), sports fever consumed the covers for days on end: we see weight lifters, runners, stadium lights, and fireworks. The color red dominates. It was the Beijing Summer Olympics, a coming-out cer-

emony for China as a modern superpower. Xiaoze Xie blew up these ephemeral publications to monumental scale, making the faces and scenes on the front pages seem far more present in the paintings than in actual newspapers. Warm undertones of red, orange, and yellow further bring out the fleshiness of the figures.

The works featuring stacks of manuscripts convey a more somber mood. The edges of the books are weathered and warped, their bindings are unraveling, and worms have chewed holes through their thin, rice-paper pages. Unlike the newspapers, these documents have no visible

text or images to provide context. They are mangled heaps of muted gray-and-ocher pages, with the occasional hint of a bent red cover—beautiful decay, sharply portrayed. —**Trent Morse**

Koie Ryoji

Ippodo

The ceramics of Koie Ryoji look as if they might have pushed up through the crust of Middle-earth or emerged from the depths of Grendel’s lair. The artist makes platters of flat slabs streaked with sooty gray, squat water jars dripping in mossy green, and tall, lopsided vases more suggestive of elephant trunks than vessels designed to hold flowers. The

shapes of his pieces are often irregular, the surfaces dented and gouged. Japanese craftsmen have long cultivated the beauty of the subtle imperfection, but Koie takes that discourse to another level, introducing humor, satire, even farce.

This show was called “The Clay Is Laughing” in homage to the artist’s notorious irreverence. Known as the wild man of Japanese ceramics, Koie is an experimenter and conceptualist in a tradition-bound craft. He has stirred controversy by creating kilns designed to fire pots unevenly, bringing piles of dirt into galleries for happenings, and pulverizing toilet bowls and then sculpting the remains. Outspoken about politics, he’s done several series of anti-nuclear pieces intended to comment on Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Chernobyl.

“The Clay Is Laughing” was tame in comparison to these earlier projects, although the work poked gentle fun at traditional esthetics. The focus was on objects that could—if you stretched it—be used in the home. There were cucumberlike serving dishes, slightly askew tea bowls, and a ribbed plate that evokes a giant stalk of celery. Given recent events in Japan, his next show might simply be a straightforward shout of anguish.

—**Mona Molarsky**



Koie Ryoji, *Jar*, 2008, ceramic and porcelain, 6" x 5½". Ippodo.