

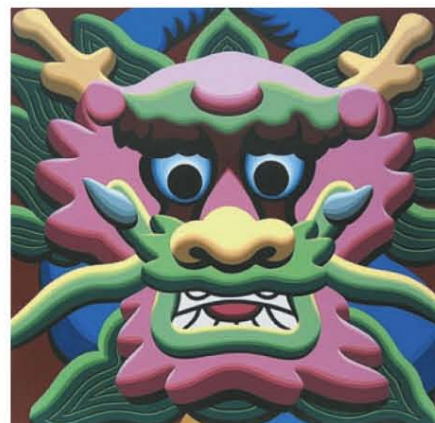
# Vantage Point



## The Art of Fan Dongwang



Dragon Head 10 (Yellow), 2001, acrylic on canvas.



Dragon Head (Centre), 2001, acrylic on canvas.



Dragon Head (Red), 2001, acrylic on canvas.

## Artist Statement

The traditional and contemporary images in my work are not only beautiful, but are also powerful symbols of eastern and western cultures and nationhood. It is through these signs that the past continues to have a bearing on the present as well as the future. The imagery often evokes various meanings among viewers of different backgrounds, opening to multiple interpretations, they therefore contribute to our ongoing dialogues and understanding.

I employ a new method of 'painting as relief sculpture' to produce this painting the same way as ivory carving - to use the brush to 'carve (paint) out' the painting's surface, as if carving an ivory relief or low relief sculpture. This brings out a sense of 3D volume on a 2D surface, a visual illusionism that is expressed in traditional Chinese art.

The amalgamation of these images reflects our emerging and diversified cultural identity. My continuing movement between China and Australia enables me to acquire a constantly shifting perspective, and to develop a unique visual language that represents my ambivalent identity.

Dr Fan Dongwang



Photographs taken by Tom Dion, 2001.



Descendants - Turbulence, 2002, acrylic on canvas.

## Vantage Point

The Art of  
Fan Dongwang

Curated by Rod Pattenden

### Macquarie University Art Gallery

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### Gallery Opening Hours:

10am to 5pm Monday to Thursday  
and Saturdays 12th March,  
2nd & 9th April 10am to 4pm

### Artist floor talk:

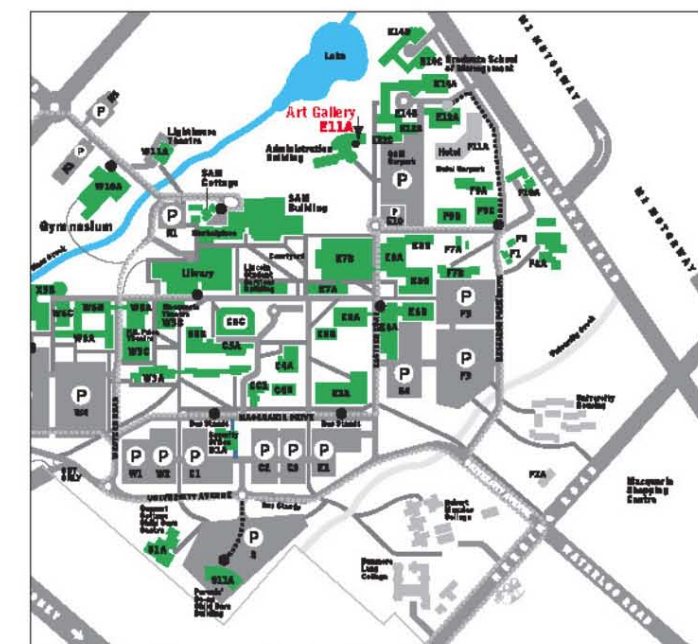
Thursday 17 March at 1pm & Friday 18 March Chinese  
Ink Brush Workshop 9.30-12midday.



THE VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFT STRATEGY

This project has been assisted by the  
Australian Government through the Australia  
Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Cover:  
Dragon Head 8,  
2002, acrylic on canvas.



RTA Parking Restrictions apply. (Opening night excluded)

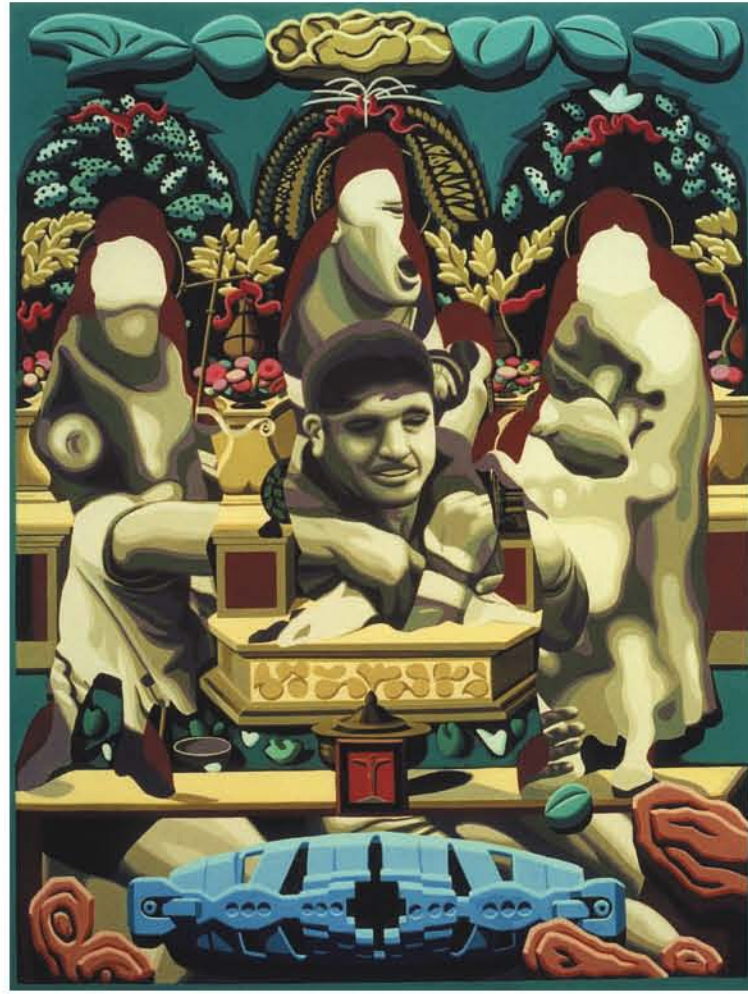
DJC/MQ0103



These images crackle and flash. The artist – Fan Dongwang – is conjuring a game of illumination and illusion. With electric urgency they pop out into the world of the viewer breaking apart the apparent flatness of two-dimensional space. These works seem to mimic the vibrancy of the computer screen and rehearse the graphic confidence of the advertising billboard.

# Culture is Difference: I only see Shadows

This incessant pushing of colour and surfaces does create however an ironic condition. Underneath the pop polish there is a ground cracking with shadows, fragments and uncertain edges. These aspects of shadow and perspective are the real focus of interest for the artist. They are also the means by which a painting is able to draw in the viewer and establish a world of common culture.



Shifting Perspectives and the Body 1 - 5, 1999 - 2001, acrylic on canvas.

These works contain a multitude of references that have been collected from Renaissance art, computer images, children's toys, popular media, Chinese traditional painting and carving. In many ways they reflect the long and diverse education of the artist from the Shanghai School of Arts and Crafts where he trained in traditional Chinese media including ivory carving to a more contemporary education leading to a Doctor of Creative Arts at Wollongong University. The artist has absorbed the many influences of pop art, colour field painting, graphic design as well as traditional forms of Chinese landscape painting.



Descendant Bodies #2 (Green), 1996, acrylic on canvas.

Rather than having developed some new hybrid personality the artist has instead decided to make this complex history of cultural difference the very content of his work. The works are developed through a confident use of large-scale coloured compositions that play with the glossy objects of the cultures that he inhabits. But he does not supply us with a unified view to take all this in. There is no grand landscape where everything finds its place. Instead there are fragments and partial views, gaps where other references clamour for acknowledgment. In many ways the initial simplicity of the artist's approach gives way to a more shadowed and complex exploration of the terrain of the cross cultural traveller who lives in the darkness, in between the bright lights of urban clarity.

Beside the considerable visual impact of these works lies another world of partial views and stuttering speech. These are the shadows where real moments of illumination may occur. These are the spaces where the viewer is drawn into the picture to imagine and reconstruct themselves as part of the collision of cultures and allegiances that now characterises the increasing globalisation of the world we now inhabit. This is

beyond nationalism and simple ascriptions such as Chinese or Australian, or even the improbably conceived Chinese-Australian. These descriptions assume that identity can be fixed through categories of race, gender or age for example. These works reflect back to us the complex nature of cultures undergoing change and the re-assigning of individual allegiance to the values and aspirations of competing cultural forms.

Under the floodlight of these signs there are subtler plays that find their way into consciousness through shadows, gaps and separations in the folded and complex anatomy of these works. Perspectives are shifting as the eye seeks to puzzle out the many cultural references until the familiar terrain of the western single perspective is dissolved. There is no single vantage point possible in putting these works together, no position of power prestige, or visual purchase. Part of our western visual education is to assume one vantage point from which a painting will order the visual world before us. Landscapes educate us about the significance of nature and civilization. In most traditions there is a hierarchy of power and allegiance. In playing with multiple perspectives and conflating both Chinese and western views the artist draws our attention to the many in which we order our visual world.

These works contain the complex experience of the outsider who is empowered to see more clearly the fractured and conflicted nature of any culture. When things seem clear, when power seems self proclaimed and natural then perhaps we are most blind. It is the outsider and the artist who will always be most dangerous to the accepted order of things. Our culture is not one – it is not seamless and self-evident. In reality it is conflicted and torn with competing debates and tensions. The gifted view of this artist is to lay out the complex nature of the visual environment of meaning and to remind us of its power to order our ability to see.

This is demonstrated in the central series of works in the exhibition Shifting Perspective and the Body 1-5, 1999 - 2001, where five large canvases challenge the viewer to establish their ground of perception. This work demonstrates the highly developed way the artist uses colour and form particularly as he uses colour in a manner similar to low relief carving in which individual segments move in and out of the viewers understanding of relative distance. Other perceptions of the body are explored in works that play with perfect athletic forms reminiscent of classical statues that begin to devolve into robotic fragments (Descendant Bodies). In more recent works the cultural symbol of Imperial China, the dragon, emerges as an illuminated pop icon. The past continues to hover in the shadows of the present.

Fan Dongwang is a highly refined practitioner who presents a unique and complex vision that demonstrates the porous nature of culture. In his works the shadows remains the most stable form. These spaces provide the only ground upon which to appreciate the flash and brilliance of these works as a way of considering our own cultural identities in a period of rapid change.

Rod Pattenden



Descendant Bodies #1 (Blue), 1996, acrylic on canvas.