

contrasts

**CONTRASTS GALLERY presents**

**LI TIANBING: A GAME AS A PRETENSE OF BEING**

**Curated by Italian art critic and curator Demetrio Paparoni**

**Opening Reception: Wednesday, 23rd March, 2011, 6-9pm**

**Exhibition on show from 24th March-11th April, 2011**

**HONG KONG ARTS CENTRE, The Pao Galleries, 4/F, 2 Harbour Road, Wanchai, Hong Kong**

**Hong Kong** - Contrasts Gallery is proud to present *A Game as a Pretense of Being* – Li Tianbing's first solo exhibition in Hong Kong. The Paris-based Chinese artist will exhibit oil paintings and watercolours at the Pao Galleries, Hong Kong Arts Centre. The exhibition is curated by renowned Italian art critic and curator Demetrio Paparoni.

Li Tianbing was born in Guilin in 1974, two years before the end of the Cultural Revolution. Li refers to the socio-cultural context of 1970s China and recalls his childhood to evoke the collective condition of his generation. His work reflects on the relationship between familial structure, identity of the individual, and society as a whole.

Now that he lives and works in Paris, Li's paintings are haunted by his memories and an acute awareness of recent Chinese social history, expressing a constant duality in his struggle to define his identity as an adult and reconcile the values of the East and West.

The exhibition, *A Game as a Pretense of Being*, will feature works from three different series painted in 2009 and 2010. The common theme of these works is the self-portrait of the artist as a child. Using childhood photographs as a starting point, Li reflects on his solitary experience growing up under China's one child policy. Through this approach he expresses the conflicts of today's society, representing himself both alone and together with imaginary brothers and playmates he never had.

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*A Game as a Pretense of Being* continues the artist's exploration of his memories, reality, and fiction. Layering the present and rapidly disappearing past, Li evokes his concern for the struggle for personal identity in a society undergoing drastic evolutionary change.

The attraction that war holds for children and the symbolism of colours is manifested in the *Battle* series (2010). In *Tirer devant les Affiches (Shooting in front of the Bulletins)*, the artist portrays his childhood-self clutching a gun in front of a contemporary bulletin board. The bulletin board's contents have been replaced by messages referring to present-day international and domestic political conflicts. The scene is a realistic black and white rendering that reminds us of old photos, yet the red colouration symbolically evokes blood and revolution. The insertion of written texts deliberately disconnected from the narrative reflects the artist's concern about media control, emphasizing how the means of communication has changed but not the strategies of persuasion.

The *Orphelin (Orphan)* watercolour series (2009) depicts lonely children who, having been lost or abandoned by their parents, show a palpable sense of sadness and isolation. Mimicking their blurred focus, subtle tonalities and surface blemishes, these portraits show suffering in an environment dominated by materialism and lack of humanity.

In his *Overlap* series (2010), which superimposes images derived from contexts different from those of his self-portrait, the artist highlights how the memory can create parallel realities to the one actually lived. This series is dominated by the transparent face of the artist as a young boy, through which we can see different backgrounds (from rural village to battlefield and snow-covered landscapes), where fragments of reality are combined with those from a child's parallel imaginary world.

This last series of works offers an intimate and poetic view beyond the external interpretation, where memory is used as the conduit to perceive reality.

### About Li Tianbing

Excelling in art as a child, Li trained in China, both in traditional technique and Western realism. Li completed his studies at the Institute of International Relations in Beijing before proceeding to study oil painting at the École Supérieure Nationale des Beaux-Arts in Paris, graduating in 2002. Along with other contemporary Chinese painters, Li's work reflects a series of defining dichotomies existing in China today: East and West, communism and capitalism, as well as ancient culture and modern consumerism.

### **About Demetrio Paparoni**

Demetrio Paparoni was born in 1954 in Siracusa, Sicily. He lives and works in Milan. He is an art theoretician and curator. In 1983, he founded the contemporary art magazine *Tema Celeste*, which he edited until 2000. He has taught the history of contemporary art in the Faculty of Architecture at Catania University, and has written many books and monographs about some of the most important artists of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

### **About Contrasts Gallery**

Since its inception in 1992, Contrasts Gallery has showcased leading contemporary Chinese artists, and has brought the work of international artists to China. The gallery's exhibitions have stressed the rich history of China's art and artists who strive to reinvent its legacy in order to express their feelings about change in China today. The gallery has evolved from a philosophy rooted in the tradition of Chinese Literati art, which promotes art for the sake of self-cultivation and embraces creativity without hierarchies. Contrasts Gallery's exhibition program is designed to create new cultural exchanges between artists from the East and West working in divergent traditions and across disciplines. Contrasts Gallery is based in Shanghai.

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