

the  
cameo project

josephine do

china today

17 august – 29 september 2002



## a personal odyssey

'As a child I left home and now have just returned.

The village children know me not, but laughing ask:

Where do you come from, stranger?'

He Zhizhang, Tang Dynasty 618 – 905AD

'You can go home again.

The question is, what or where is home?

To any 'overseas Chinese' emotional ambiguities  
are built into any answer

[but] the pull of the homeland remains powerful.'

Ken Hom, *The Taste of China*

Generously supported and encouraged by a New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women Fellowship and a University of Auckland Graduate Research Grant, Josephine Do recently undertook two separate journeys to China to 'reconnect' with the 'spiritual' homeland. Her response to that odyssey is in part captured in this present Cameo Project exhibition featuring three large [1.2 x 2 metre] multi-layered, brightly blocked, horizontally placed canvasses that initially unroll vertically as traditional Chinese scrolls.

Although having received the greater part of her upbringing and education in New Zealand, Josephine Do, as a migrant who came from Hong Kong at the age of seven, is still, to a certain extent, caught between two cultures. Despite acclaimed academic and personal success as an emerging artist in this country, deeply rooted cultural and family expectations, as well as filial respect and duty, ensure the enticement of the homeland remains powerful despite the difficulties this imparts on the largely westernised young woman who is trying to maintain a balance between 'old' traditions and personal needs and fulfillments. As a consequence, her work, which is part of her doctoral project, is an expression of the difference [and frequently the clash / hence perhaps the almost garish colours in these most recent works] between the old and the new in contemporary China and the perceived contrast between East and West.

What is fascinating for me in these images, is the obvious irony and quiet humour with which Josephine Do attempts to come to terms with her predicament. The question of 'identity' is a recurring pre-occupation not just in her work but also in her life. The 'Kitty' I knew as a child learning

the piano and beginning to take an interest in art, became the more sophisticated 'Josephine' at Elam School of Fine Arts, but was addressed as Du Pui Yee in a letter of acceptance for the Red Gate Artist Residency Programme in Beijing later this year.

An 'outsider' in Mainland China (she speaks Cantonese but not Mandarin) Do is aware of the divide between 'self' and 'other' in that part of the world, but images of the 'links' of a chain, or the seemingly dislocated (because local) LINK logo on a bus, make a subtle and understated 'connection' to the 'there' and 'here' of the artist's sometime fragmented and necessarily disjointed and contrasting worlds experienced with such photographic poignancy on her several journeys into 'new' territory.

Perhaps her most recent travels have made Josephine more accepting of the fact that in China she is, despite appearances, largely a tourist. In one of her Journals she comments: '*I am a foreigner to myself in my own language and I translate myself by quoting all the others.*' In another observation she writes: '*I had to be dislocated from China to become identified as Chinese, just as I had to leave New Zealand to become a New Zealander.*' It is for this more strongly affirmed sense of self perhaps, that these most recent images have become bolder, brighter, more colourful and more clamorous than her previously much more subdued and muted works printed on what seemed like a 'traditional' kind of Chinese 'rice' paper shot through with threads of silk or grass.

The new work is on canvas but the 'process' itself (as with the old calligraphy masters) is as important (or even more so) than the final image. Modern technology is used. Photographs are scanned,

cut, pasted and manipulated into a collage effect and printed on specially treated material that absorbs inks instead of paint. Everything to hand is incorporated to good effect. Brochures, packaging, labels – anything that catches the eye and what is 'ordinary' in everyday China – washing hanging out to dry on deeply stacked high-rise balconies, hundreds of bicycles, dense crowds, over-populated and frequently unsanitary living conditions, nineteenth century workplaces – everything to exemplify what the Western eye (in comparison) might see as 'exotic' and strange.

Colour heightens effect and is used 'to convey information and create a sense of reality' [Journal] yet simultaneously, in its poster-like blocks of energy and emphasis, conjures the China of Mao's reconstruction propaganda and the familiar stereotypes we associate with tourism. In her process these political representations are divested of their previous power and appropriated as the 'picaresque' to underscore the commonly perceived and make us reflect on attitudes and issues relating to difference and displacement and the position of this particular artist, finely balancing her Ying and Yang – honing and shaping her Eastern and Western influences in the connection and process that is art.

**Riemke Ensing**  
Honourary Research Fellow  
(Arts), University of Auckland  
Buddle Findlay Sargeason  
Fellow 2002



# josephine do



## profile

- 1976 Born in Hong Kong
- 1984 Emigrated to New Zealand
- 1998 Graduated from Auckland University of Technology, Painting Dept.
- 2000 University of Auckland, Masters Degree in Printmaking (Hons. First Class)
- 2001 University of Auckland, completing Doctorate of Fine Arts Senior Tutor, Dept. of Printmaking, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland

## solo exhibition

- 2002 'China Today', Cameo Project, **te tuhi – the mark**, Pakuranga, Manukau City

## joint exhibitions

- 2002 'New Works', The Lane Gallery, Auckland City
- 2001 'Recent Work', The Lane Gallery, Auckland City

## selected group exhibitions

- 2002 Grafinnova 2002 – 8th International Exhibition of Prints Ostrobothnian Museum, Finland
- 2001 'Diversion', Gus Fisher Gallery Recent Acquisitions from the University Art Collection, University of Auckland
- 1999 'Works on Paper', Rhode Island Exhibition, USA

## grants and awards

- 2002 New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women Fellow Bougen Family Trust Scholarship First Prize, Birkenhead Licensing Trust Art Award Graduate Research Grant, University of Auckland Residency in Beijing Art Academy, Red Gate Gallery
- 2001 Northcote Creative Communities Scheme Grant
- 2000 New Zealand Academy of Fine Arts Award
- 1999 Birkenhead Licensing Trust Art Award, Second Prize

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