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It's Asian Work, but Abandon the Stereotypes Before Entering the Booths

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By KEN JOHNSON
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Two young, bald Asian women in Western-style clothes are horsing around. One points her finger at the head of the other, who scrunches up her face as if bracing for a bullet.

Titled "Bang!," this tableau of life-size figures in painted fiberglass, by the Chinese sculptor Xiang Jing, calls to mind a famous Vietnam War photograph by Eddie Adams: the 1968 image of South Vietnam's national police chief executing a Viet Cong prisoner. So the playful surface of "Bang!" masks a half-repressed

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called "SimulAsian: Refiguring 'Asia' for the 21st Century."

Xiang Jing's "Bang!" (2002), in painted

fiberglass.

If you've been paying attention recently to the breathless publicity about the growing Asian art world, you could come to this fair expecting grandiosity. Thankfully, that's not the case. It is not dominated by big names like Zhang Huan, Cai Guo-Qiang and Xu Bing, but by around 350 less familiar, younger artists from China, India, Japan, South Korea and Vietnam.

There's a certain amount of what might be called hotel art, but the general impression is one of sophisticatedly playful and wide-ranging ingenuity. Labor-intensive technique prevails, and most artists work somewhere along an Asian-inflected line connecting Surrealism and Pop Art.

But this is not another cult-of-youth art fair, like some of the satellite expos that will surround [Art Basel](#)-Miami next month. Because it is an all-Asian fair, it has its own distinctive flavor. However much Asian artists may borrow from the West — which is a lot — their art collectively evokes geographically specific tensions and anxieties.

One way to put this is to observe that contemporary Asian art is ruled by three gods: Buddha, Mao and Warhol. Mao is the most visible. Six life-size statues of him made of shiny stainless steel by Guangci greet visitors at the exhibition's entrance, and he reappears in works by numerous other artists inside.

Mao is the comical pop culture icon whom Warhol painted, but he's also the bad father whose image invokes real 20th-century political and social pain. The vaguely mocking way he is so frequently

trauma.

In many ways Ms. Xiang's sculpture embodies the mood of the first Asian Contemporary Art Fair in New York, on view through Monday at Pier 92 on the Hudson River. Fizzy and entertaining on the surface, it has a disquieting underside.

The fair offers visitors an easily manageable 76 booths, occupied by dealers from Asia, the United States and Europe. It also

exhibition organized by the

ner and Lilly Wei that addresses the definition of "Asian-ness." It's

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represented in contemporary Chinese art hints at a deeper post-traumatic anxiety and, perhaps, an urge to exorcise him.

The image of Buddha is explicitly represented less often. One instructive instance is the work of Long-Bin Chen (at the Frederieke Taylor booth), who carves laminated stacks of New York telephone books into Buddha heads that look uncannily like stone sculptures.

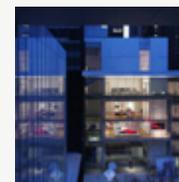
What you see more often are works that conflate historical traditions and aesthetics with contemporary motifs, as in Li Lihong's pedestal-size ceramic representations of the McDonald's golden arches covered by antique-style patterned glazes (at Beatrice Chang). A more impressive version of antiquity-modernity interplay is a wall-size Cubist construction of mirrors designed by Jeong-Soon Oum to represent in a semi-abstract way an ancient scholar's bookshelf (at Seomi & Tuus). In works like these you sense a concern about modern progress eroding traditional spiritual values.

Warhol's image and works mimicking his paintings appear almost as frequently as depictions of Mao. Among the paintings by Dong-Yoo Kim at Leehwaik Gallery, for example, is a portrait of [Marilyn Monroe](#) composed of gridded pixels — each a tiny image of [John F. Kennedy](#).

The Warholian perception that nature has been blotted out or replaced by consumer culture is embodied in works throughout the exhibition. In large set-up photographs by Zhan Wang at Interart Channel, hundreds of pieces of shiny stainless steel cookware are arranged to resemble vast cityscapes. Another complex cityscape, this time made of scraps from old denim pants by So-Young Choi, is at CAIS Gallery's booth.

Given the fair's hectic ambience, the quiet abstract paintings by Chen Ruo Bing at Taguchi provide a contemplative respite. Working on medium-size canvases, he creates simple compositions: grids of gray boxes centered on monolithic forms and, in one case, a square delineated by four purple brush strokes on a yellow field. The main interest lies in the rich colors stained into the canvas, which glow with Rothko-esque incandescence. The work is a fine blend of formalism, hedonism and transcendentalism.

The Asian Contemporary Art Fair continues through Monday at Pier 92, 12th Avenue and 52nd Street, Clinton; (212) 563-3360 or [acafny.com](#).



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