

DECEMBER 12, 2007**JULIA MORTON**

THE NEW ART WORLD ORDER

Though major gallery exhibitions in the city are often called “international,” the artists must often comply with our Western taste for “innovative” art. Quaint ethnic or regional styles can be accepted as antique or folk, but not contemporary. Yet, in the grand scheme of things, having only one progressive point of view is not really that radical. The current exhibitions at Arario Gallery, Absolute Images II: Chinese Contemporary Art, and Winter Moderns at the Aicon Gallery—a group show featuring the work of five Indian artists—question whether there is in fact an “International Contemporary Style.”

At first glance, Arario’s exhibition of large sculptures, paintings, videos and installations—with their pop irony and minimalist imagery—looks American. Perhaps that’s why it’s selling well in the West: We see ourselves in it. The work is by Chinese artists still living in China and, although the familiar objects have been adapted for the sake of an “International” idea, the content remains uniquely Chinese with repressed and burdened masses represented again and again.

Liu Jianhua’s installation, “Daily Fragile,” features white porcelain replicas. Similarly sized and realistic, the gallery floor is carpeted with hammers and skulls, tiny airplanes, boots, baby shoes, guns and piggy banks. Ji Dachun has carefully painted small, neatly dressed, happy workers performing unreal or subversive tasks. Fang Lijun has painted “7 June, 2007,” a large, horizontal blue sky with clouds and, as your eyes scan the surface, anonymous faces appear, filling the air with their presence.

Aicon’s exhibit features five Indian artists currently living in India. Their figurative, landscape still-life and abstract styles are derived from mid-20th century Modernism with subjects covering poverty, love, relationships and cultural upheaval. Though highly regarded in India, they are not well known in international circles because they continued to use traditional icons and stylized forms to focus attention on taboos like sex and equality.



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The look is retro, but the message remains current as India, like China, brings its socially conservative population and its ancient artistic legacies into line with the contemporary expectations. Along the way, as more buyers, artists and dealers become Indian and Chinese, we may see a shift toward the East and a new art world order. In the end, it's not the West, but the market that continues to decide what "good taste" looks like.

Arario Gallery, 521 W. 25 St., 2nd fl. (betw. 10th & 11th Aves.), 212-206-2760; through Jan. 13 2008; Aicon Gallery, 206 5th Ave. (at W. 25th St. and Madison Sq. Park), 212-725-6092, Dec. 14-Jan. 6 2008.