

Zhou Song's Art

In the work of Zhou Song (b. 1982), the technique of hyperrealism plays to more unnerving effect in series paintings such as his *Dirty Flower* (2006), or the ensuing *Metamorphosis* (2007-10). Each of these works evokes traditional tropes of Chinese brush painting with flower, tree blossom and butterfly motifs in graphic arrangements of spilled gutted fish entrails, blood any body parts painted with extreme realism. This is a knowing any ironic kind of 'dirty realism' insofar as the Chinese word 'zang' means 'dirty' as well as 'yin (solid) organ' (heart, liver, kidneys, lungs, spleen).

In his *Soldiers · Weeping* series of 2006, the canned outlines of a military pistol or an AK-47 machine rifle are similarly filled to the brim with fish guts and assorted organs - the spilt entrails of armed violence, their reddish intestinal viscosities rendered in astonishing detail, visually fascinating and repulsive by turns.

Zhou's deliberate toying with the painterly business of representation is something new and distinctive in Chinese painting, asking questions beyond the business-as-usual of photorealism and still life, dwelling compulsively on the element of duration of painting. As David Hockney put it, in Bruno Wollheim's extraordinary documentary film¹⁶, "in a photograph it's the same time in the top left-hand corner of the image as it is in the bottom right", whereas painting takes time, and eye of the painter in their encounter with the world as we see it.

His 2011 series, *A Red Heart* portrays the gentler, more delicious and beguiling image of a strawberry greatly enlarged and sometimes bitten and torn or leaky, but always studiously composed - realism as high artifice. What we see here we see into, and through, as Zhou's approach to figuration in the series paintings constantly wrong-foots our notions of subject, playing always with the viewer's visual understanding of realism in painting.

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