

FIELD GUIDE

NEW YORK
JAMES COHAN

INTERVIEW ARTIST YUN-FEI JI USES GHOSTS AS METAPHORS AND WRITES WITH HIS BRUSH.

At first glance, the artist Yun-Fei Ji's works seem familiar. With their black ink lines and faded watercolor on Xian paper, they look like classical Chinese paintings. But examine them more closely, and out of the trees and shrubs step an eerie cast of characters. *Mistaking Each Other for Ghosts*, 2007, for example, contains a wolf licking a human face, a bird-headed creature with a human body, a woman with a forlorn countenance. This painting appears in a show of the same name. Ji's second solo outing, at James Cohan through March 27. All the works displayed refer to the 17th-century author Pu Songling's ghost stories, with their invocation of classical Chinese painting to critique China's social disparities and government corruption. CARNELIA GARCIA spoke with Ji, who recently moved to Brooklyn, about ghosts, satire, and working with the famous Rongbaozhai print studio.

For: YUN-FEI JI R.M. Studio
in Parooollit, London, 2007.
in Columbus Park, New York,
2008. ————. A. P.S.K.
no. 10/10/10 13-14 35/10/10 Ji
Three Ghosts Gloom/taoqi
2009. ————. JI-FEI JI
WOODEN COFFIN/DE-FI/TAOQI
size: 16N • 10N.



FROM TOP: MIKA KAMBE, THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART; JAMES COHAN GALLERY, NEW YORK



MODERN PAINTERS



THROUGH MAR. 27
JAMESCOHAN.COM

JOSHONG is part of the 03 piece. The 19th-century Chinese Art, a traveling group how that came at the Smart Museum, Chicago and recently at the Nasher Museum of Art at Duke University North Carolina.

NASHER, DUKE He has an upcoming show at James Cohan Gallery, Shanghai, June-July 2010.

Your grandmother told you ghost stories as you were growing up. Which was your favorite?

I was told of this lake where children swam but got stuck. Their spirits have to find substitutes to get out of the lake. So I would pass by this lake when I was a child and was terribly frightened of it. One time I saw a hat floating on it, and it started to slowly move toward me. I ran away because I really thought it was a ghost! But, of course, it was just the wind blowing it.

How did you start using ghost stories in your art?

I use ghosts as metaphors because it's an easy way to satirize human problems and issues. One story that drew from was about this student who went to Beijing to meet the emperor to become an official, but because he was ugly, he was rejected. And because of that he killed himself. He went to the underworld and was told that he seemed to be a capable candidate to be an official so he returned to the living world to spread his story among the ghosts who live among humans. That kind of story made me think about real issues in society.

Since you've returned to China to work, what issues have you observed?

I went to Guangzhou province and visited blue-jean factories. There's a city near Shenzhen where 70 percent of blue jeans are made. I saw the workers and met with the owners to see how the government served different people on different levels. For me this was a very fruitful period in terms of ideas.

In your show you include some drawings you made after visiting Louisa following Hurricane Katrina.

I saw this natural disaster as an example of government failure. And after the financial collapse, I saw similarities—how the government failed to do its job as a watchdog. We very disproportionate in both cases how the people who put in all the work paid the price, and the people who benefited from all the work paid no price.

Your new artist's book "Migrants from the Three Gorges Dam" beautifully presented in the form of a scroll "was pointed at the famous Rongbaozhai studio. How was that experience? And how long did the scroll take to make?

It was really an honor to work with this prestigious studio, which makes woodblock prints that developed more than a thousand years ago. MOMI commissioned me to make an artist's book and put me in contact with the studio. It took more than a year of collaborating to finish the book.

What is your process like?

I start my work with many small drawings in pencil. I have them all on the studio wall, hundreds of them. I live with them. I start to work on my painting when I really want to see something on paper. My medium is ink and watercolor. What draws me to it is that painting and writing are very much the same thing. Rather than paint a tree, I will write a tree or a figure. And writing with the brush is a very interesting and difficult thing.





WORLDWIDE FUTURE GENERATION PRIZE

The art world is filled with awards from dependably controversial ones like the Turner Prize and Hugo Boss Prize to ambitious ones that start at the \$150,000 Wolpin Prize, inaugurated last year. So it's easy to become cynical about UK artman art collector Victor Pmchuk's plans to substitute another annual trophy. Fortunately, his Future Generation Art Prize has some unusual twists. For one, it's egalitarian: anyone 35 years or younger can apply by submitting art through the prize's WebSite. The reward is also remarkably generous at a \$100,000 check, an exhibition at the billionaire's Kiev museum, the Pmchuk Art Centre (PAC), and professional mentoring by 10 of his favorite artists: Damien Hirst, Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami, and Andreas Gursky. Some of art's biggest guns, including curators Okwui Enwezor and Robert Storr, and 2011 Venice Biennale director Dan Edelbaum, will select winners from a shortlist of 20 applicants, who will be featured in a December 2010 group show at PAC. Given the remarkable names involved, the advisory board includes Elton John, Guggenheim director Richard Armstrong, and Muccia Prada—that lucky artist will also receive unprecedented attention. Let's hope he or she is ready. —AA

- PIII -
FUTUREGENERATIONARTPRIZE.ORG

UNITED KINGDOM THREADNEEDLE PRIZE

In 2009 the public was given the task of selecting which or more than 2,400 entries would snag the £25,000 Threadneedle Prize for painting and sculpture, set on Sheila Walsh's small canvas *Self-Pouring*. This year for the British contest's third edition, that duty has fallen to three judges—Savile Bray, a SS1 curator at the Naouan Gallery, David Rayson, professor of painting at the Royal College of Art, and Michael Sandie, fellow of the Royal British Society of Sculptors—who will curate a show of the submissions, to run from September 2 through 18 at London's Mall Gallery. The public will still have a role, however, voting for the winner of the new 10,000 Visitor Choice award, as well as the 10 runners-up, who will each receive a 1,000. Contestants, who must live or work in the UK, may register online, must submit original work by May 17, and the case of sculpture, and June 1, or paintings. —CG

MAVP JUNE 1
THREADNEEDLEPRIZE.COM