

# Qiu Jie



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# Introduction

Qiu Jie is perhaps one of the most intriguing contemporary Chinese artists alive today. Creating pieces with the simplest of tools - pencil on paper - he travels through his cross-cultural background to provide a singular iconography of idols and stylistic references, which he arranges in a unique narrative voice. In his intricately detailed drawings, he confronts the history of Chinese society with contemporary Western popular culture in a black and white aesthetic. His drawings create links, sew a common thread between different situations and establish another logic in the story of time.

Born in Shanghai in 1961, he moved to Switzerland in 1989 and has spent almost half his life there. This shift to the West is responsible not just for his particular set of cultural references, but was also the influence for his chosen artist pseudonym 'Qiu Jie', which poetically translates as 'man from other mountains'. His interpretation of otherness resides in his experience as an outsider, whether as a Chinese man living in Geneva, or as a globalized citizen returning to the traditions of his parents' hometown.

This acknowledgement of the self as other is key to understanding the artist's identity in his own narratives. The act of including his own character in pieces such as 'Oriental Pearl' and 'The New Long March' leaves him subtly integrated and yet at the same time slightly removed. Rather than playing the role of an icon alongside recognisable faces of Western popular culture and Chinese politics, Qiu Jie portrays himself as a passive observer, a quiet traveller through his own canvases. Amongst so many contrasting visual symbols, his presence emphasizes the strength of his eye for bringing stories together that arise from different places and times, past or present. Although at face value his work can appear quite surreal, each visual clue needs to be decoded through this combined lens of both Chinese and Western aesthetics. His knowledge of these contrasting stylistic histories allows him to play with the question of identity through cultural juxtapositions.

Another dichotomy in his work is the use of Chinese traditions set against contemporary pop culture. Qiu Jie weaves together his visual storylines according to classical Chinese painting techniques; his collages of icons are often framed by a backdrop of mountains reminiscent of Song Dynasty *shan shui* paintings. The overall sense of flatness is emphasized by the lack of vanishing perspective, while the size of the figures occupying the space is dictated by their importance rather than their situation. Plum blossoms, bamboo and pine can also be found gracing many of his works - an adoption of commonly recognised Chinese symbols known as the 'three friends of winter', they represent endurance, courage and strength, and are admired for their perseverance under harsh conditions; perhaps a metaphor for the hardships of the artist's childhood.

**Caca Boudin** 2003  
Oil on wood  
240 x 360 cm  
Pages 8-9



## Introduction

Recent works

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Acknowledgements

The combined experience of modern and traditional allows Qiu Jie to manipulate images from a broad spectrum of Chinese history, and integrate them into stories interspersed with elements of Western popular culture. Each symbol is obtained from a variety of sources such as newspapers, adverts, photos, films and paintings – a ready-made imagery to be incorporated and choreographed into a new allegory. The artist, in the role of a novelist, uses these existing characters in his individual small panels; eventually piecing them all together into a single frame and narrative.

The artist works meticulously and extremely patiently; to weave together a comprehensive story out of so many different elements demands months of research. Each detail is carefully planned, and any initial blank space becomes filled with visual bridges and connections. To include something as simple as a pack of cigarettes in his composition, Qiu Jie begins by researching which cigarettes are smoked by Chinese artists today, the design of the packet, and where they can be bought. The viewer is led through a precisely planned journey of streets, old factories, restaurants, shops and other locations familiar to the artist, giving him the affinity to the background necessary to bring his story to life.

In order to understand these imageries, one must question why the artist has chosen each individual element in his work, and move beyond each icon's superficial value. A prominent example of this is the recurring image of a cat's head transposed on a human body, representing Mao Zedong. While the initial significance is found in the play on words, as *mao* is the Chinese term for cat, a deeper reading of the context elucidates more ambiguous connotations. Traditional Chinese painting often pairs the image of a cat with that of a butterfly to depict blessings of long life. Furthermore, by placing the hybrid figure in eroticized environments, such as in 'Massage' or 'The Night of Shanghai', Qiu Jie addresses issues of power and politics in a subtle yet compelling way.

The juxtaposition of contrasting cult figures from East and West is another particularity of the artist. In 'BB and Mao' he painstakingly paints Brigitte Bardot and Mao standing alongside each other, both gazing at the viewer in an almost confrontational manner. By entering the two figures into a direct arena of comparison, the artist not only engages in a playful derision, but raises some formidable questions about the disparity in ideas of fame and recognition. While the image of Mao is one of the most notorious in contemporary Chinese popular culture, comparatively universal celebrities in the West are not politicians but film stars, models and musicians. Qiu Jie introduces some challenging questions about societal values and the weight given to visual icons.

Stylistically, Qiu Jie's work is a further nod to his varied artistic education. Fascinated by the act of drawing since his early childhood, and financially limited to pencil as a medium, he began copying propaganda images from the newspaper at the age of ten. Despite a Multimedia degree at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Geneva, he has remained mostly loyal to working with pencil: 'Drawing with the simplest material possible is part of my philosophy. I don't like big art installations. My artworks are extremely light; this is part of the bare simplicity of the process. I am aiming to reach the essence of things with modest tools.'

The act of drawing also plays an important part in the way Qiu Jie allows his stories to unfold. The flexibility of pencil means that he can erase elements he is unhappy with, while leaving behind small marks and hints of previous ideas. His process of creation and construction is fluid; a fact also reflected in his use of small sheets of paper that become pieced together to form a larger whole. By breaking up a work into smaller units, he is able to keep each one in tight focus so that each individual part of the composition is equally strong, and can replace or add units as his thought process develops.

Qiu Jie's first degree, a decorative arts course at the Shanghai High School of Applied Arts, solidified socialist realism as a strong visual influence. Images of cheerful working class peasants and soldiers are abundant in his work, smiling out at the viewer and seemingly oblivious to the company of pin-up girls or the contemporary sky-scrapers of Shanghai, such as in 'Shanghai Bund'. However, while the social realist artworks of Qiu Jie's youth featured a deliberately restricted colour palette only in order to be printed quickly and cheaply for prompt dissemination, his pieces often choose to retain the same limited black and white colour scheme, punctuated by small flashes of red. His work becomes a conscious reference to the palette of the communist government's propaganda, in particular his use of red: not only was it the colour adopted by the Chinese Communist party, but traditional Chinese aesthetics bestow it with strong associations to the emotions of happiness, luck and success. Without any direct political point, Qiu Jie again plays with the connotations of aesthetic choice.

The patience of the artist in the detail of his execution is a testament to the strength of his nostalgia for the beauty of China, and epitomizes many of the challenges faced by contemporary Chinese artists as they strive to reclaim and rediscover their cultural history. This, combined with his fondness for the aesthetics of the Cultural Revolution, is Qiu Jie's way of uniting cultures, traditions and histories through his talent as a storyteller.

Caroline Ward



Qiu Jie's workshop, Geneva

Introduction

Recent works

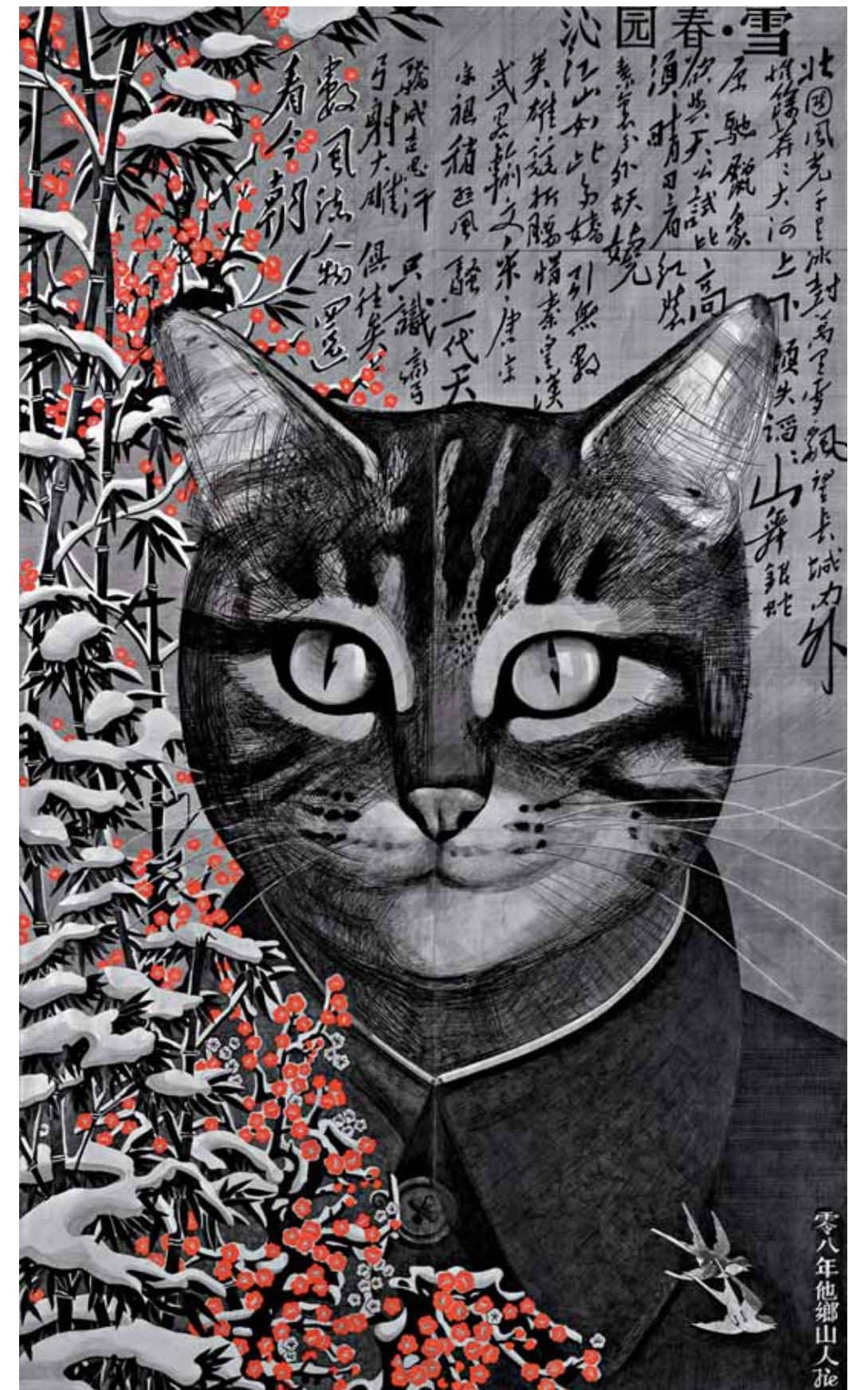
Curriculum Vitae

Acknowledgements

Portrait of Mao 2008

Pencil on paper  
200 x 120 cm

Private Collection, Singapore





Recent works



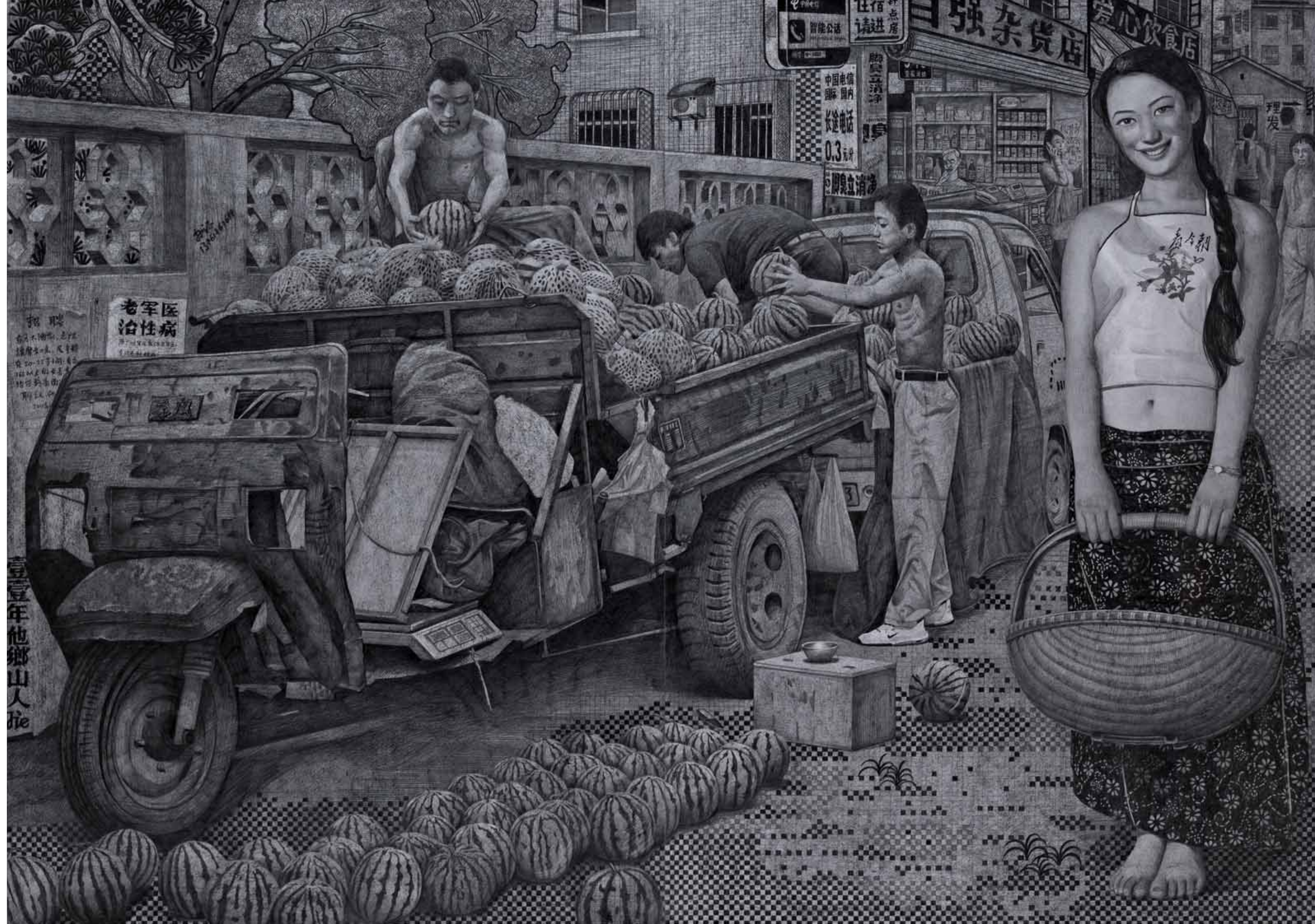
**Oriental Pearl** 2011  
Pencil on paper  
140 x 150 cm



**Enfance** 2010  
Pencil on paper  
100 x 63 cm (each)

**Young Girl Selling Watermelon** 2011  
Pencil on paper  
100 x 140 cm  
Pages 20-21

**A Sitting Woman** 2012  
Pencil on paper  
100 x 140 cm  
Pages 22-23





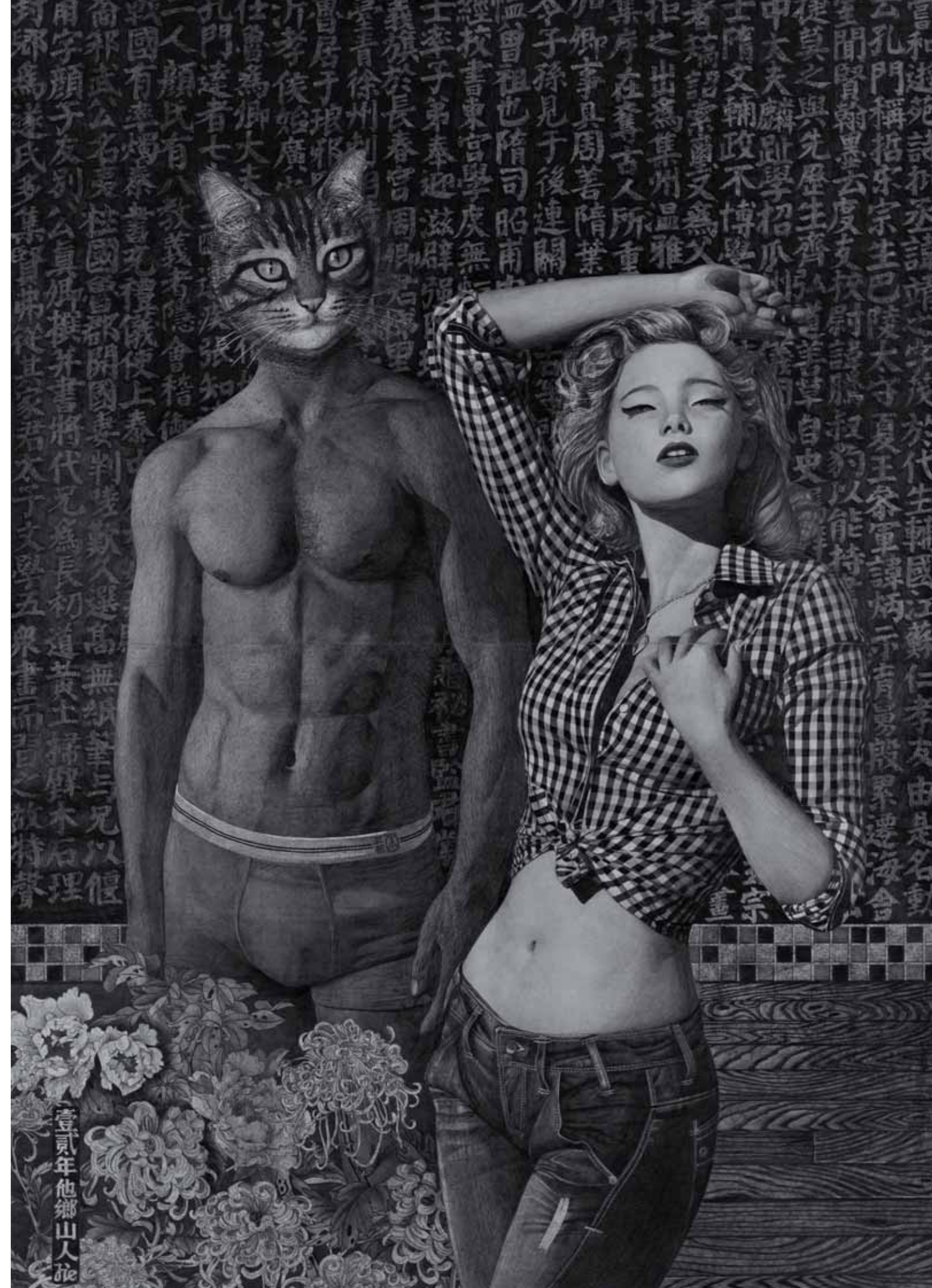
壹貳年他鄉山人記

**Three Guns Underwear** 2012

Pencil on paper  
140 x 100 cm

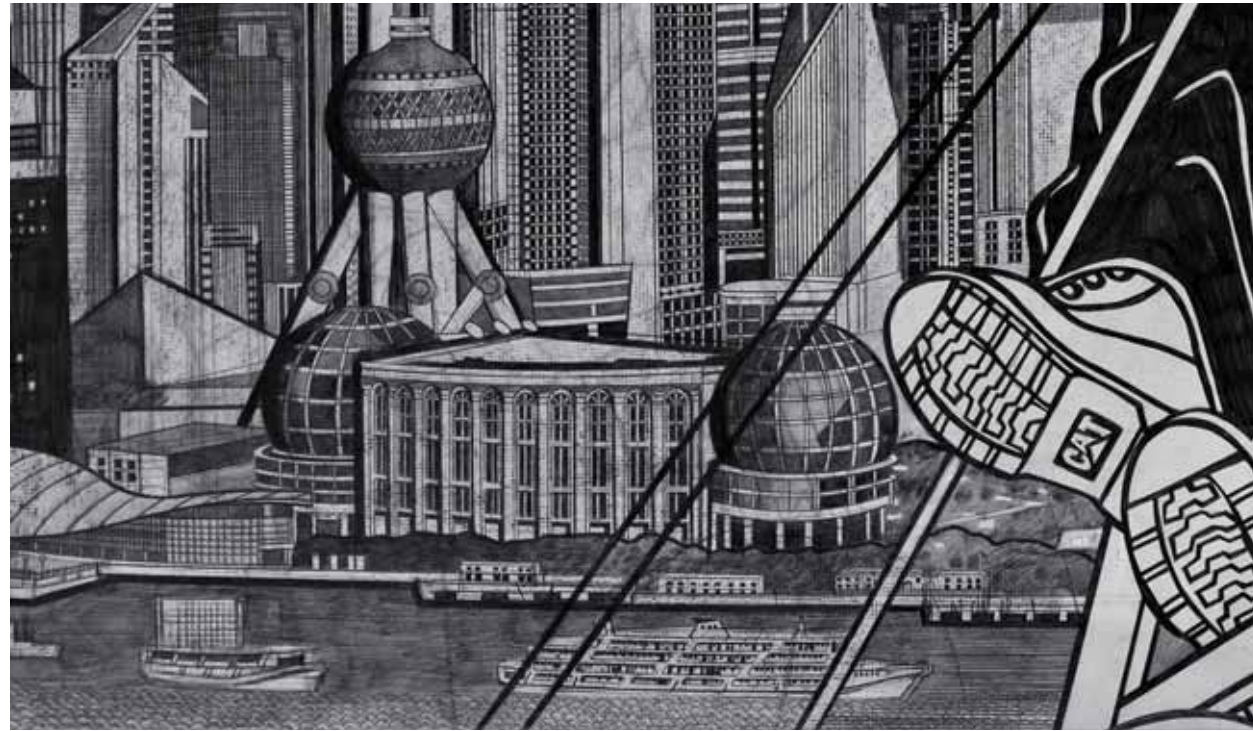
**Bu Gao Li** 2012

Pencil on paper  
100 x 140 cm  
Pages 26-27





壹貳年他鄉山人旅

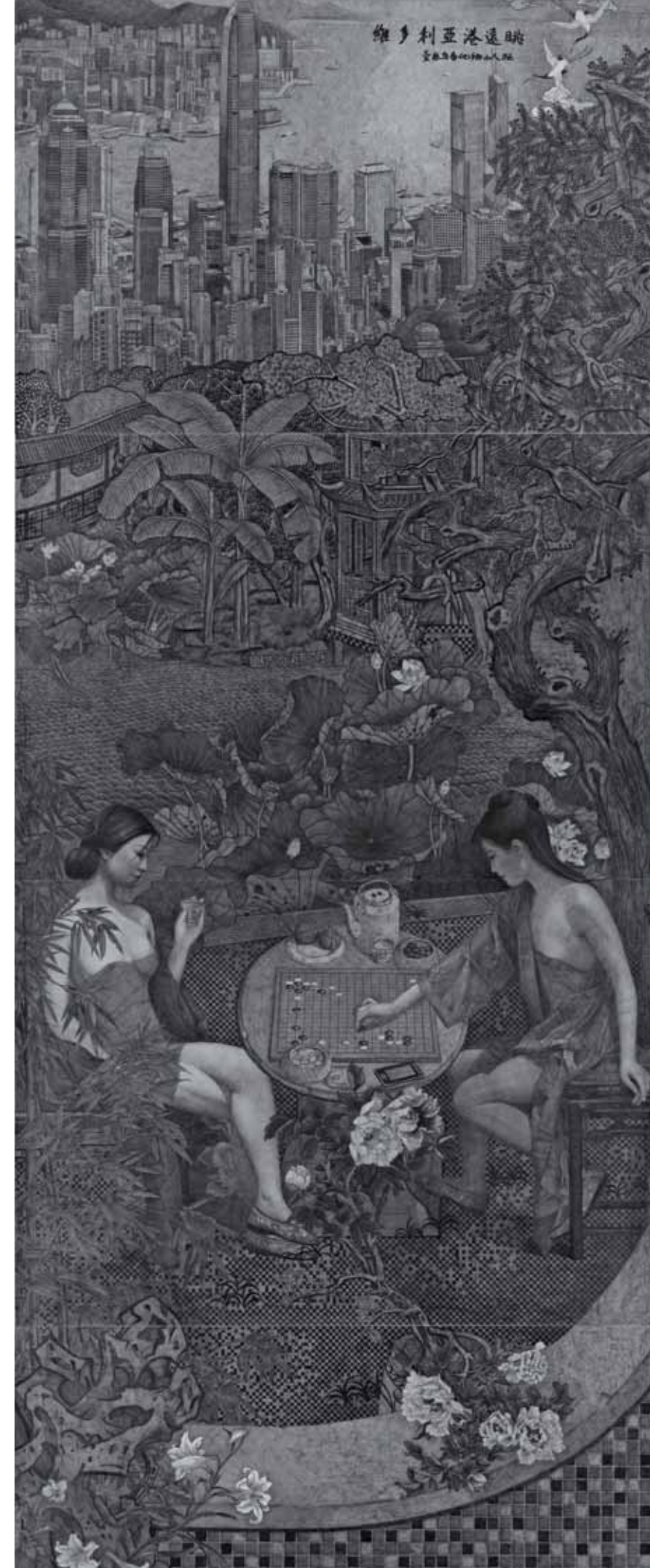


Shanghai Bund 2012  
Pencil on paper  
200 x 140 cm



**Ji Chang Garden** 2013  
Pencil on paper  
70 x 100 cm





**Victoria Harbour** 2013  
Pencil on paper  
240 x 100 cm

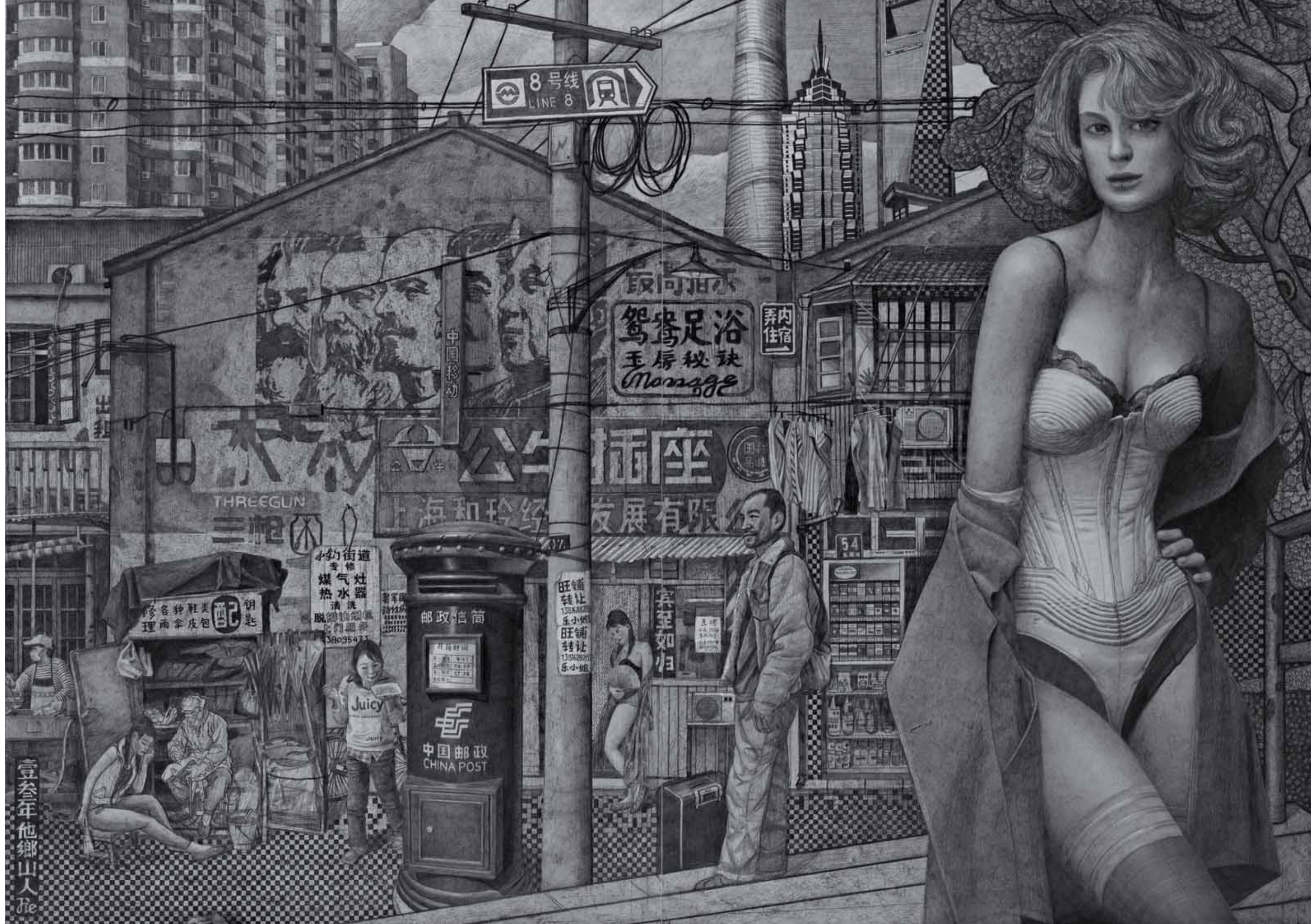
**Massage** 2013  
Pencil on paper  
100 x 70 cm

**Xi Hu** 2013  
Pencil on paper  
100 x 140 cm  
Pages 36-37

**Line 8** 2013  
Pencil on paper  
100 x 140 cm  
Pages 38-39







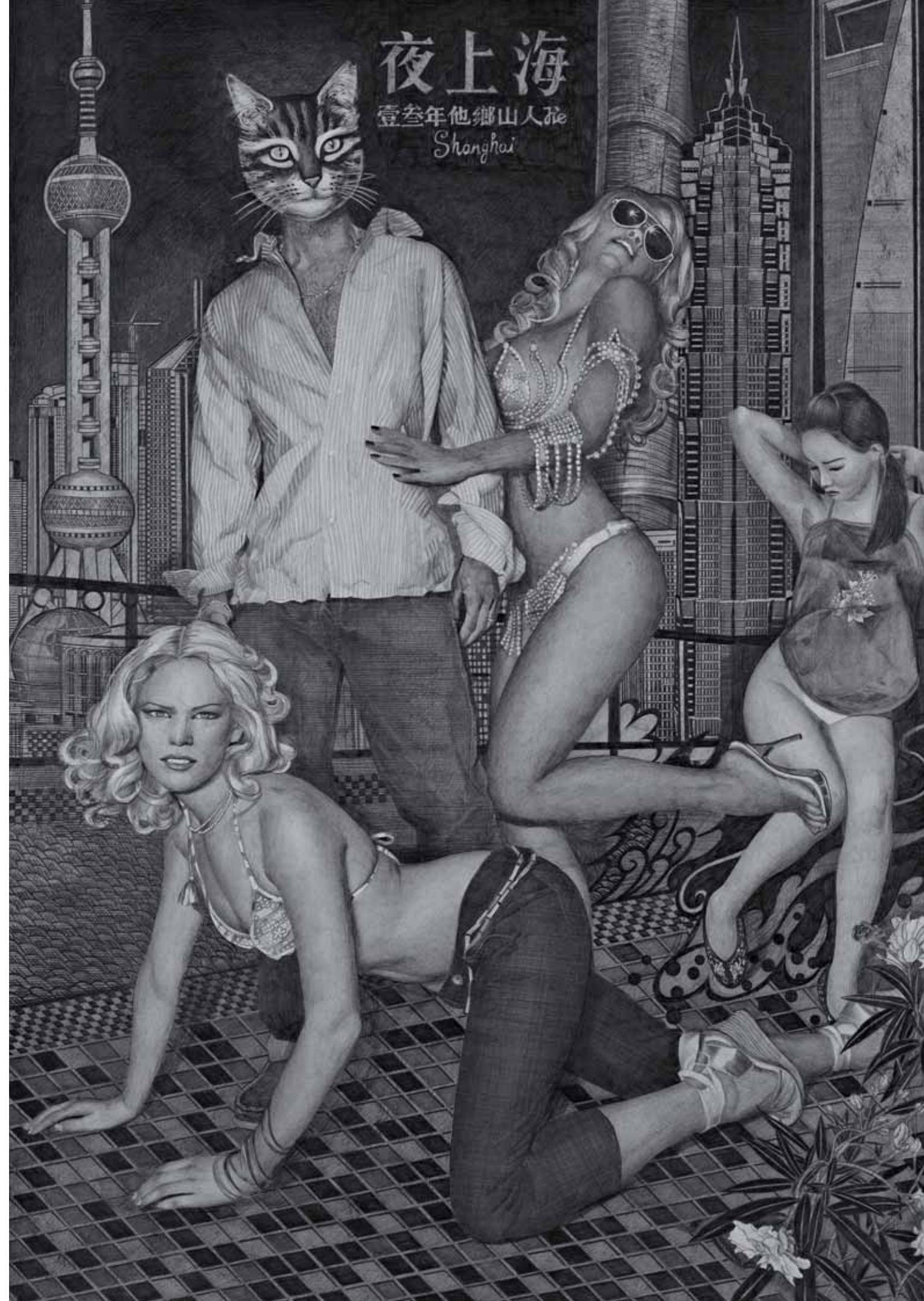
壹叁年他鄉山人花

**The Night of Shanghai 2013**

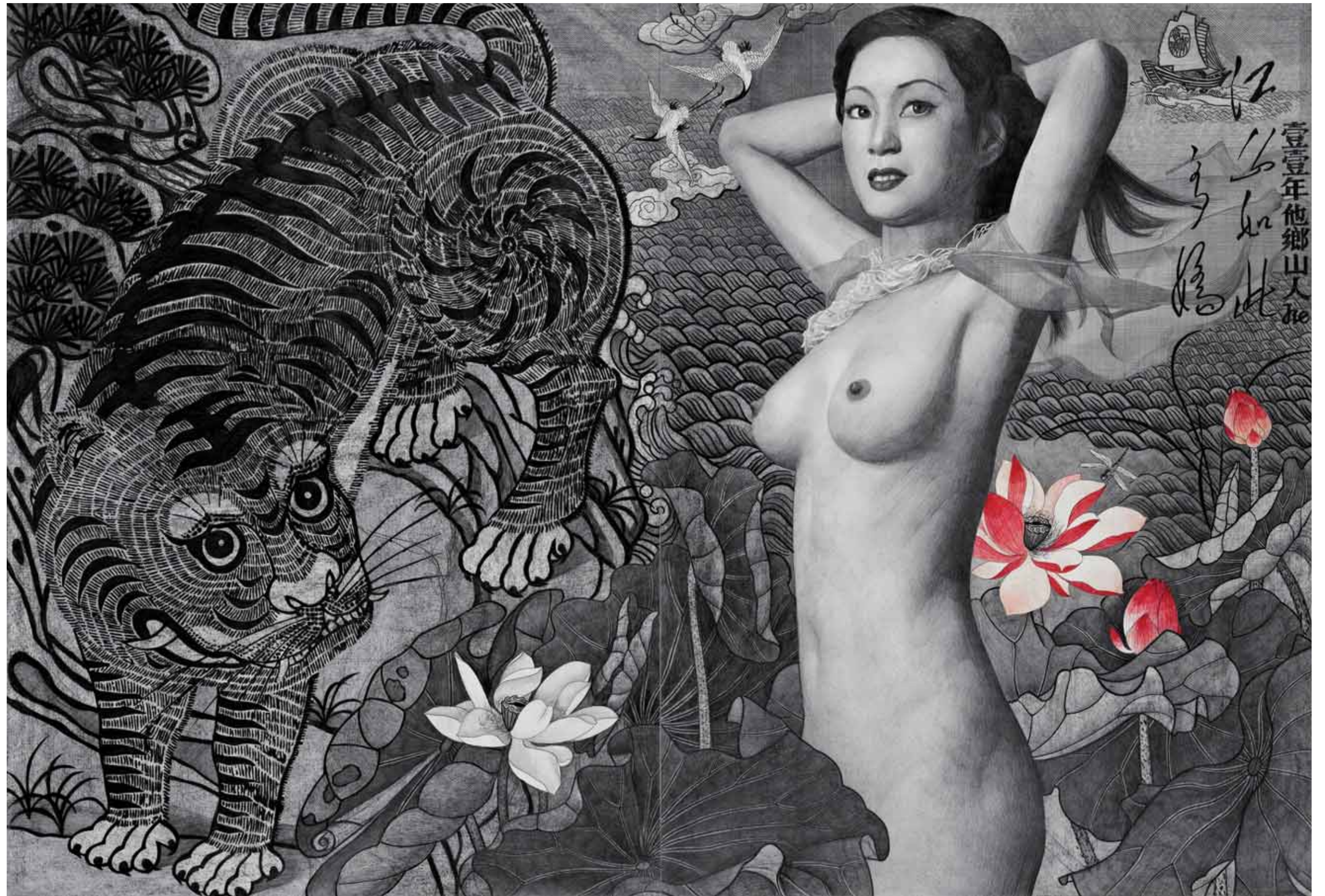
Pencil on paper  
100 x 70 cm

**Market 2013**

Pencil on paper  
100 x 140 cm  
Pages 42-43



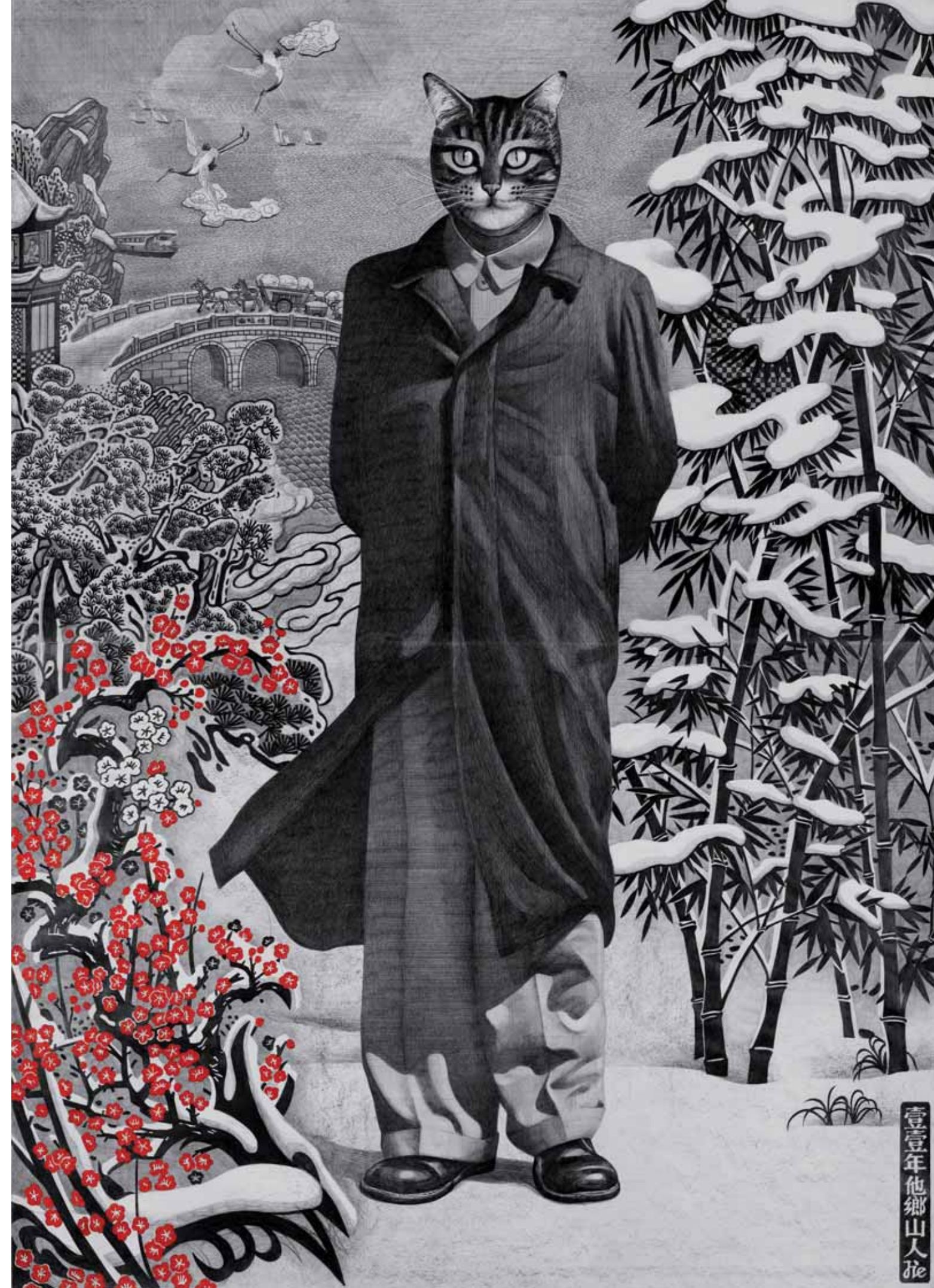




**Le Lac des Lotus** 2011  
Pencil on paper  
82 x 120 cm

Private collection, Malaysia

**Poetry of President M** 2011  
Pencil on paper  
140 x 100 cm



壹壹年他鄉山人記





Da Zi Bao 2012  
Pencil on paper  
264 x 402 cm



**The New Long March** 2012  
Pencil on paper  
320 x 360 cm



**BB & Mao** 2012  
Oil on canvas  
110 x 150 cm

Introduction

**Recent works**

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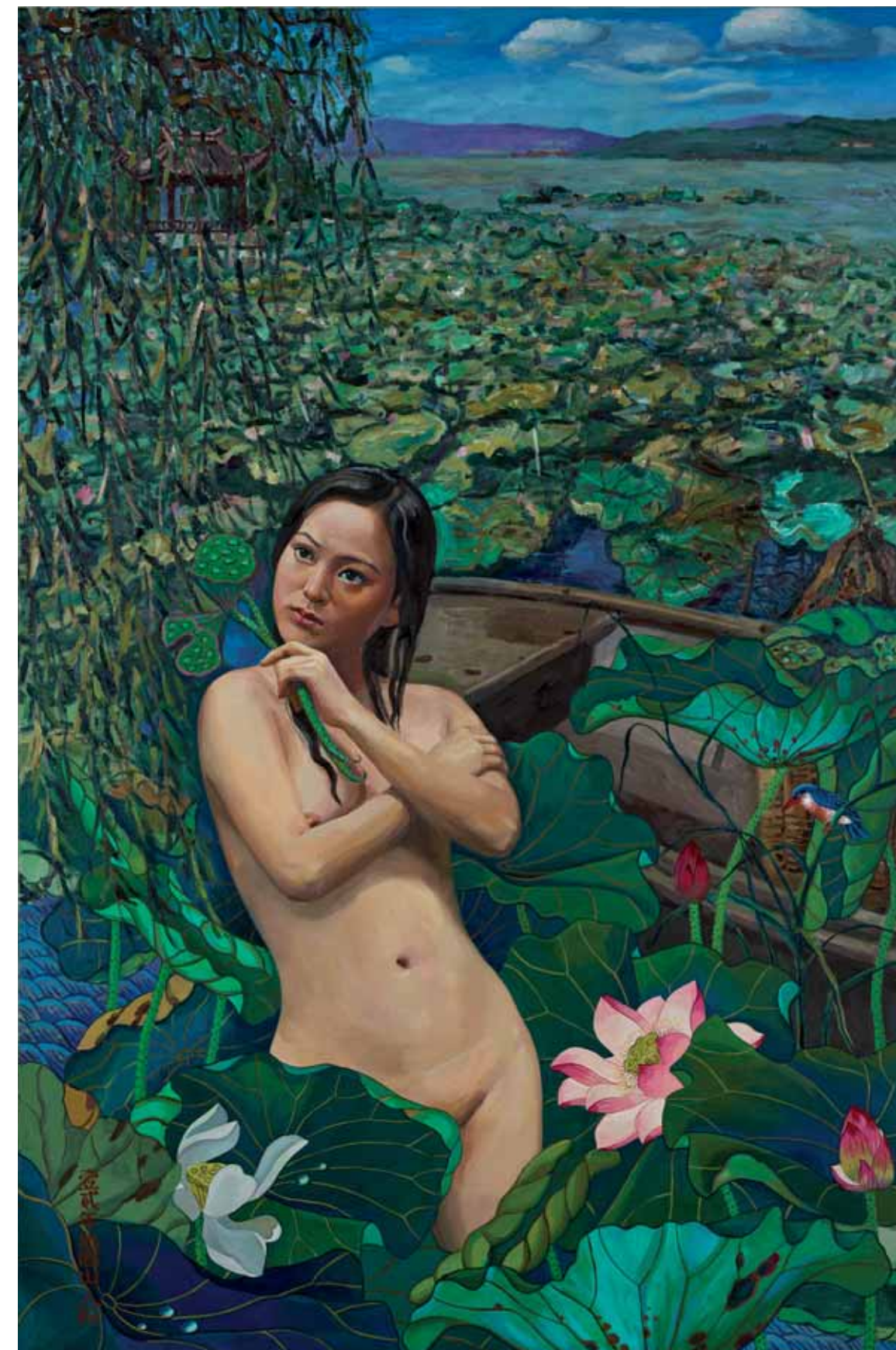
Acknowledgements

**Kingfisher** 2011

Oil on canvas  
150 x 90 cm

**Portrait series** project in progress

Oil on canvas  
100 paintings, 45 x 35 cm (each)  
Pages 56-57





# Curriculum Vitae

QIU Jie (Born in 1961) Shanghai, China

## Education

1978-1981 Art Department of the Shanghai Light Industry College  
1989-1994 School of Fine Arts, Geneva, Switzerland  
Lives and works in Geneva, Switzerland

## Awards and Distinctions

1996 Award of a workshop of Artist for 2 years  
1995 Federal prize of Fine Arts, Switzerland  
1995 Scholarship Simon I. Patino, City of Arts, Paris  
1994 1st Prize of decoration and visual art in Geneva, City of Geneva

## Solo Exhibitions

2013 Art Plural Gallery, Singapore  
2013 Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, China  
2012 Red Zone Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland  
2012 Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, China  
2011 Fundação Oriente, Macao, China  
2010 Michael Goedhuis Gallery, London, UK  
2010 Shanghai Gallery of Art, Shanghai, China  
2009 Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, China  
2008 The Red Mansion Foundation, London, UK  
2008 Arario Gallery, Beijing, China  
2008 Arario Gallery, Cheonan-si, Korea  
2006 Leda Fletcher Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland  
2004 Martin Krebs Gallery, Bern, Switzerland  
(in collaboration with J.F. Luthy and P. Stoffel)  
2004 Centre d'art en Ile, Geneva, Switzerland  
2000 Museum of Contemporary Art, Basel, Switzerland  
(in collaboration with Ai Wei Wei)  
2000 The BF15 Space for Contemporary Art, Lyon, France  
1999 UQS 1 Arcade Space, Zurich, Switzerland

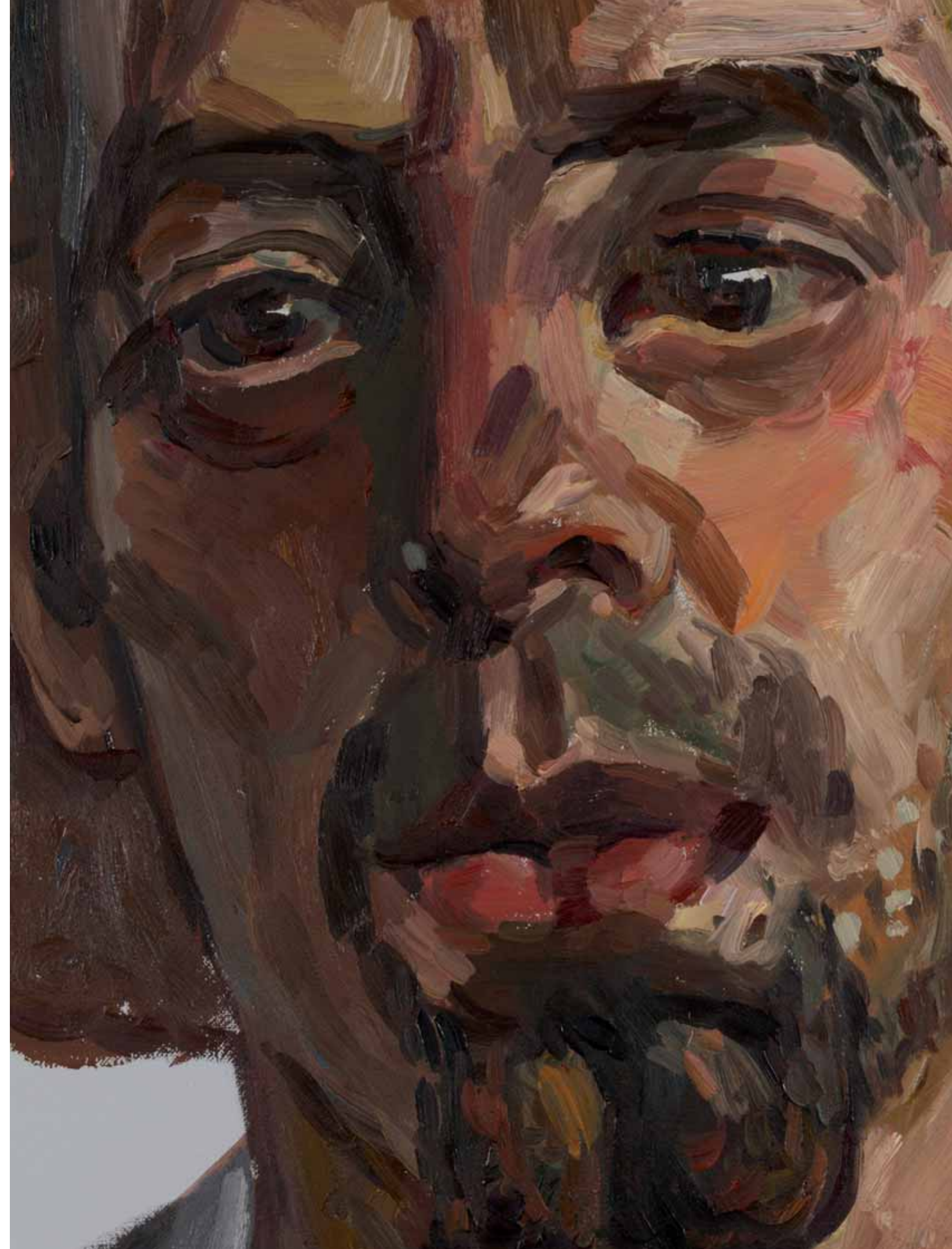
Introduction	1999	UQS 2 Artamis Stargazer Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland (in collaboration with Tomas Schunke)
Recent works		
<b>Curriculum Vitae</b>	1998	Corsnier Hall, Palais de L'Athenee, Geneva, Switzerland
Acknowledgements	1998	Martin Krebs Gallery, Bern, Switzerland
	1994	Andata / Ritorno Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
	1993	L'Arcade Chausse-Coqs, Geneva, Switzerland
	1992	Museum of Fine Arts, Shanghai, China (in collaboration with Shen Fan)
	1985	Palace of Culture, Xu Hui, Shanghai, China

#### Group Exhibitions

2013	"Like Thunder out of China", Gallery Arsenal, Toronto-Montreal, Canada
2013	Art Beijing, Shanghai Gallery of Art, Beijing, China
2012	"Future Pass" Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
2011	Art HK, Hanart TZ Gallery, Hong Kong, China
2011	Etemad Gallery, Dubai, United Arab Emirates
2011	Red Zone Gallery, Geneva, Switzerland
2011	Art Plural Gallery, Singapore
2011	"Future Pass" 54th Venice Biennale, Italy
2011	"Future Pass" National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts, Taichung, China
2010	The Silk Road, Lille 3000, Saatchi Gallery, France
2009	Art Taipei 2009, Arario Gallery, Taiwan
2009	Scope Basel Art Show, Miki Wick Kim, Contemporary Art, Basel, Switzerland
2008	"The Revolution Continues", Saatchi Gallery, London, UK
2006	"Borderless" Museum of Contemporary Art, MOCA, Shanghai, China
2005	"Discover-Rediscover" Rath Museum, Geneva, Switzerland
2004	"Art of Shanghai", Gallery Leda Fletcher, Geneva, Switzerland
2003	"Colours make the wall" Factory Secheron, Geneva, Switzerland
2001	"Mai 1968" Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Geneva, Switzerland
1999	"Change Directory", Museum of Contemporary Art, Bern, Switzerland
1999	"Somewhere 1", Museum of Contemporary Art, Kreuzlingen, Switzerland

#### Portrait series

Detail



# Acknowledgements

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## **ART PLURAL GALLERY**

38 Armenian Street  
Singapore 179 942

T +65 6636 8360  
F +65 6636 8361

info@artpluralgallery.com  
www.artpluralgallery.com

*Opening hours from 11 am to 7 pm  
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叁伍  
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