

DRINKING TEA WITH ARTIST WU XIAOSHEN

IN...ART FEATURES

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3 / 15 Wu and Gu

Artists tend to spend a lot of time reflecting upon the world, looking at what most of us see everyday as a casual visual experience and making it into something profound; in his paintings, sculpture and woodcuts, artist Wu Xiaoshen takes everyday people and settings and speaks through them to us.

In his series of paintings, *On the Road* and *On the Subway*, Wu explains that he wanted to show common people in their everyday life. He works all the time, using his spare moments passing from place to place or from home to his studio on the metro, to draw and reflect upon his ideas. He has many tiny sketchbooks, notebooks, and random scraps of paper from these daily voyages, containing detailed drawings recording his private thoughts before he starts a painting, sculpture or woodcut.

His past jobs included drawing cartoons of Donald Duck and Mickey Mouse for a Japanese company, and creating advertisements for a movie director. Wu says that these jobs were 'too hard,' so he decided to just be an artist.

Wu's mentor is Lu Zhiping, the leader of the Woodcut Print Association in Shanghai. The woodcut medium has been strongly associated with revolutionary ideals throughout the twentieth century, and Wu's outlook seems to still be influenced by the idea that art should draw inspiration from the *laobaixing*, the common man. It was Lu Zhiping, Wu claims, that convinced him that it is 'more important to create images of common people that show them as equals' and that if Wu looks at them objectively his work will be stronger.

Nevertheless, the mystical and historical finds its way into Wu's ordinary, everyday work. In the latest series, he portrays the Monkey King, which is not only a reference to Peking Opera, but also to a popular game from his childhood. He says the monkey king represents the spiritual inside of his generation. The image he is working on with the monkey king, a part of his *On the Subway* series, also makes reference to a novel, *Journey to the West*.

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DRINKING TEA WITH ARTIST WU XIAOSHEN



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He creates his paintings more like drawings, beginning with charcoal sketches. The figures in his best pieces are mixed up as if watching an accident showing, he says, the ease with which people fall into a line, the 'culture of onlookers.'

His studio is large with high ceilings, a warehouse space that is owned by a village, which makes it much less expensive than the spaces at M50 where his work is on display at the For Art Gallery. Limited by the space at this gallery, his sculptural forms are tightly composed, as with his most recent pieces which are sleeping dogs and pigs. These sculptures, which begin in clay, will later be molded and cast in resin, so that they may be reproduced and hand-painted by him.

In the corner, there are several unpainted pieces, reproductions of a little boy, who he says has the face of his son. One of the finished versions of these sculptures is already on sale at the For Art Gallery at M50, from a series entitled Travelling Around the World. He says they are taking the opposite route to Marco Polo carrying Chinese pagodas behind their backs and taking Chinese culture with them to the West.

Wu's drawings show a kind of humor that seems to evaporate in the resulting paintings, but is heavily present in his sculpture. The gallery is showing several sculptures that are humorous portrayals of figures in a bubble bath and others of Don Quixote. There is an obvious influence from Lucien Freud's work in his paintings. Wu said he really likes his work but he thinks Freud is 'crazy' because he paints every leaf, every detail with care, which takes so much time.

If you can, you really should check out Wu Xiaoshen's work at either his [solo exhibition](#) or at [For Art Gallery](#) in the future. It will certainly be an experience that will affect you in unexpected ways. The solo exhibition opens at the "Zhong Sheng Zhi Xing," Brand Promotion and Experience Centre (at No. 99 Jin Yun Road, near Jinshajiang Road). Exhibition hours are from 10-6 September 29th until October 6th.

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