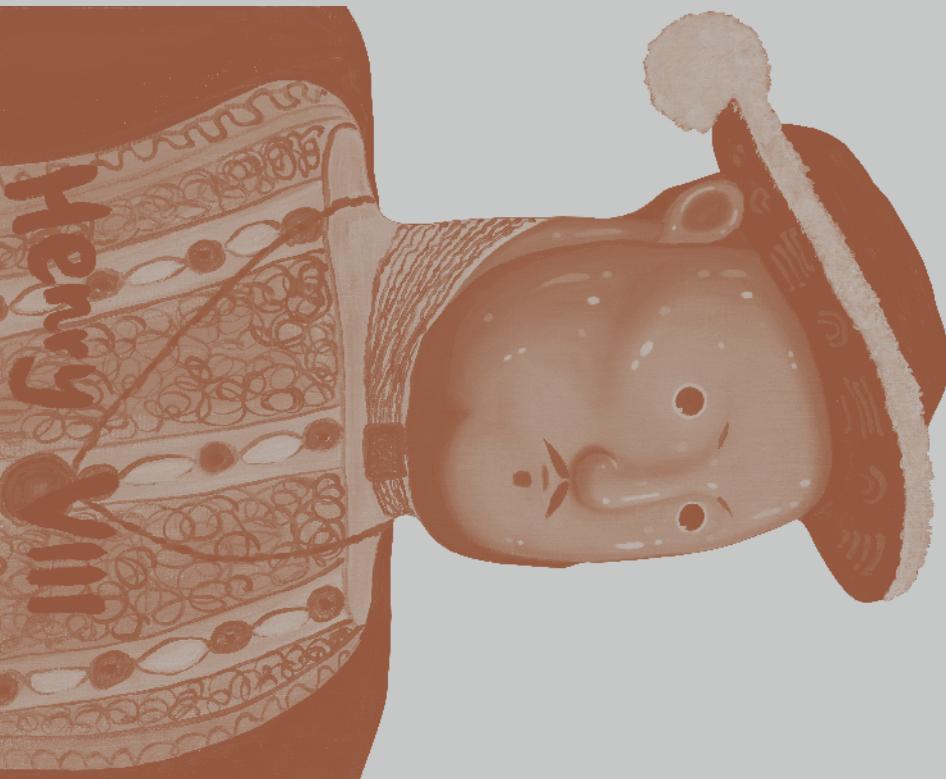
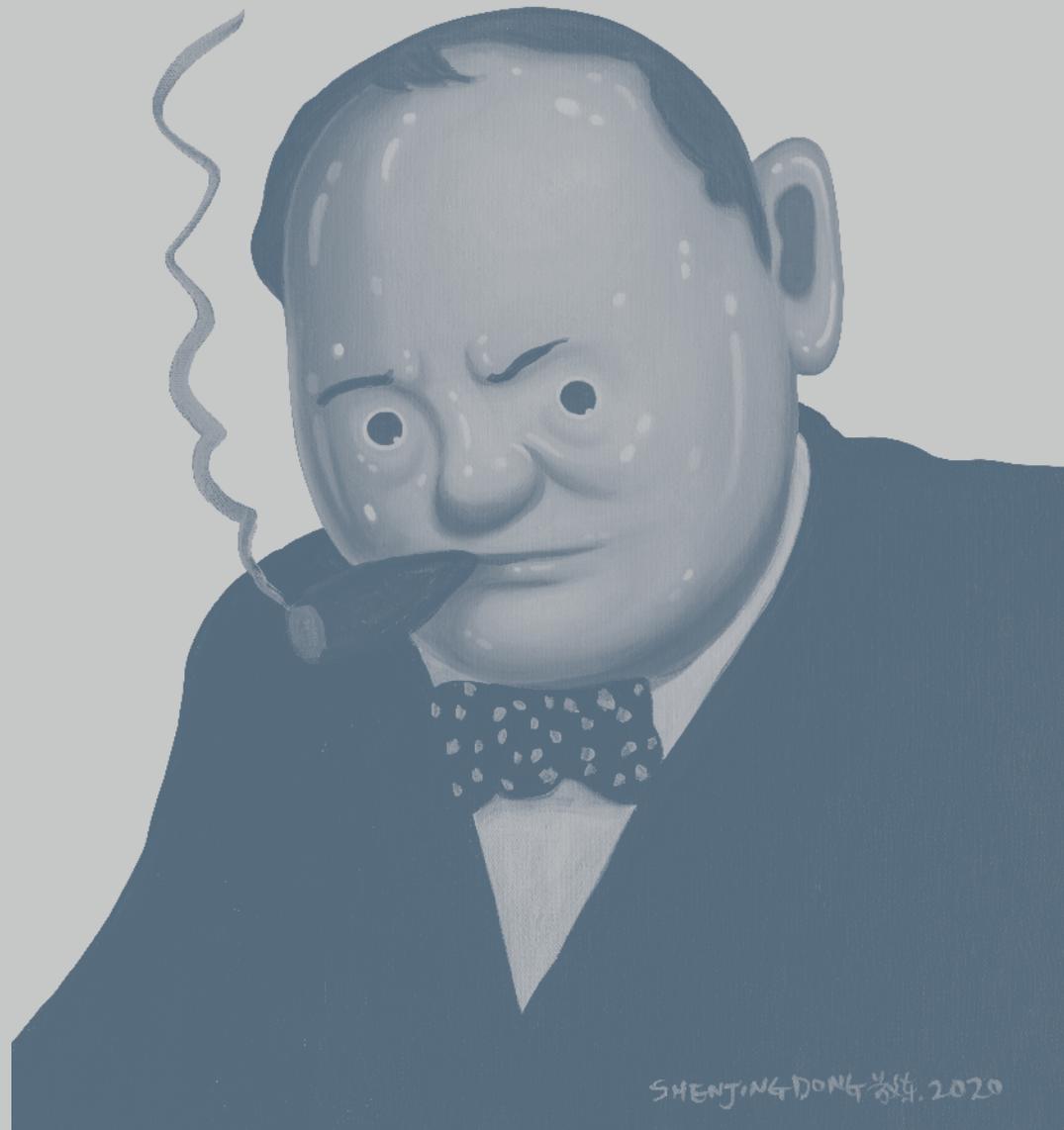


SHEN  
JING  
DONG



Churchill

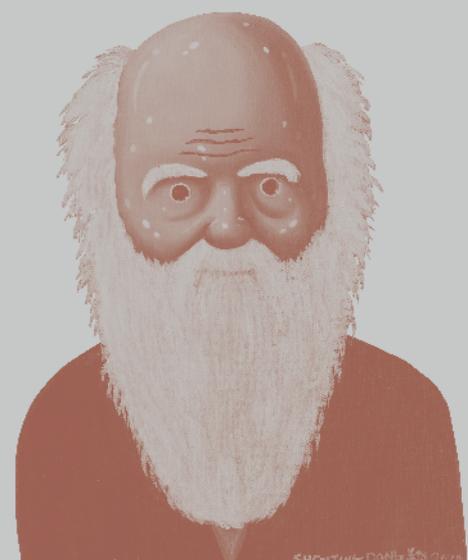




James Watt



Charles Robert Darwin



Charlie Chaplin



John Lennon



William Shakespeare



沈敬东  
SHENJINGDONG

# Shen Jingdong

沈敬东

- 1965 Born in Nanjing, Jiangsu, China
- 1984 Graduated from the fine art class of Nanjing Xiaozhuang Normal School
- 1991 Graduated from the Department of Fine Arts, Nanjing Academy of Art
- 1991-2009 Serving in the Battlefront Art Troupe of the Political Department of Nanjing Military Region
- At present living in Beijing

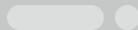


## Solo Exhibitions

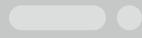
- 2020 Shen Jingdong: The Beautiful Fairy Tales, Asia House, London, UK  
Small eyes-big world, XSPACE Gallery, Nanjing, China
- 2019 Art. Design and Home, Red Star Macalline, Guiyang, China  
Shen Jingdong came here, Hôtel de l'industrie, Paris, France  
Shen Jingdong is here, Chinese gallery, New York, USA  
Shen Jingdong was here, Il Giardino Bianco Art Space, Venice, Italy
- 2018 From South to North in 2018—Shen Jingdong's Invitational Exhibition of Individual Works, Art Museum of School of Fine Arts and Design of Shenyang Normal University, China  
Start from Nanjing, Jinling Art Museum, Nanjing, China.  
Guns N'Roses—Shen Jingdong's Solo Exhibition, Parkview Green ART, Beijing, China
- 2017 International Joke: Shen Jingdong, Ross Art Museum, Maryland, USA  
Art Career Record of Good Soldier Jingdong: Shen Jingdong Literature Exhibition, Songzhuang Contemporary Art Documentary Exhibition, Beijing China  
Shen Jingdong Story: Shen Jingdong, Art and Design Academy Art Museum, Yanshan University, Qinhuangdao, China
- 2016 International Joke: Shen Jingdong Solo Exhibition, Korean Craft Museum, Cheongju, Republic of Korea  
Shen Jingdong + Jon Tsoi: No head No heart, WhiteBox, New York, USA  
Let's Paint Together: Shen Jingdong and Liao Mingming Collaborative Exhibition, Yue Museum of Art, Beijing, China  
New Representational Art in China, Hudson Center for Contemporary Arts, Poughkeepsie, USA
- 2015 The Little Prince, E Space, Hong Kong  
Dawn of a New Age: Ink Redefined, Art Futures Gallery, Hong Kong  
Censure, Galerie Dock Sud, Sète, France
- 2014 My Kingdom of Fairytales, Art Futures Group, ArtOne, Hong Kong  
Hidden Meanings, Colour Explosion, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China
- 2011 Continue with Revolution, 3V Gallery, Nanjing, China
- 2010 We could be Heroes II, The Rotunda, Exchange Square, Central, Hong Kong
- 2009 Hero, Volta Art Fair, New York, USA
- 2008 Hero, China Square Gallery, New York, USA  
The Most Beloved People, Today Art Museum & New Millennium Gallery, Beijing, China
- 2007 Making of Heroes over 10 Years, Imagine Gallery, Beijing, China  
We could be Heroes, Yan Gallery, Hong Kong
- 2006 Images of Heroes, New Millennium Gallery, Beijing, China  
Exhibition of One Painting, 88 Art Document Storehouse, Beijing, China

## Public collection

- 2019 *Hello, Van Gogh*, acrylic on canvas, 80×60cm. French Industrial Palace, Paris, France
- 2018 *The Little Prince*, oil on canvas, 100×100cm. Jinling Art Museum, China
- 2014 *Salute*, Stainless Steel, 200cm high. Bengbu University, China
- 2013 *Salute*, Stainless steel, 200cm high. Xiamen Jimei University, China
- 2013 *Soldier with a Gun*, Cast bronze, 200cm high. Xiamen Jimei University, China
- 2012 *Salute*, Cast bronze, 170cm tall. Nanjing Art Institute, China
- 2009 *Hero*, oil on canvas, 100×100cm. WURTH Art Museum, Spain
- 2008 *Harmony One*, oil on canvas, 200×600cm. Oberte Museum, Germany
- 2008 *Head of a Soldier*, spray paint in glass-steel, 56×52×35cm, Henan Art Museum, China
- 2007 *Heroes Series No.12*, oil on canvas, 200×200cm, National Art Museum of China, China
- 2007 *Heroes Series No.42*, oil on canvas, 200×200cm, Singapore Museum of Fine Arts, Singapore
- 2006 *Founding Ceremony*, oil on canvas, 200×700cm. Shanghai Art Museum No. 1, China



015	From Fairy Tales to the Real World - Shen Jindong's Art The Social Implications of Recent Works	Kim KiBu, Curator
033	A Cute Critique? The Work of Shen Jindong	Julian Stallabrass, Professor in Modern and Contemporary Art, The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London
041	Heroes in the World	Barry Curtis, Associate Director of Doc- toral Programmes in University of the Arts London
049	Sonnet for Shen JingDong	Roger Wagner, Artist and Poet
053	Shen Jindong's Soft Powerplay	Wenny Teo, Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Asian Art, The Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London
061	Shen Jindong: Fairy Tales Reimagined for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century	Bojana Popovic, Post-War and Contem- porary Art Specialist in Christie's
069	<b>Works</b>	
126	Index	



# From Fairy Tales to the Real World - Shen Jindong's Art

The Social Implications of Recent Works

Kim KiBu,  
Curator

# 1 The function of fairy tales

Fairy tales have several functions - they are stories that unravel tales intended to enchant, whilst teaching morals and ethics in ways that are easily disseminated to children. They feature relationships with other individuals, within structures of power, conveyed figuratively in fictions where animals often play a part. Fairy tales persist as sources of advice and wisdom from childhood into the adult world.

Shen Jingdong is a Chinese artist who portrays innocent characters, sometimes recognisable from fairy tales, sometimes seeming to propose unknown tales. *The Little Prince* is an instantly recognisable character among others.<sup>1,1</sup>

1.1 *The Little Prince 3* 120x100cm 2014



1.2 The cover of *La Cina in Dieci Parole* (a work by Shen Jingdong)



## 2 The words of the leader and the meaning of authority according to Shen Jingdong

2.1 Shen Jingdong (right) in during the boot camp, 1991



2.2 *Tiger Crouches in Zhong Mountain* (*Hu Ju Zhong Shan 虎踞钟山*) performance in Zhongnanhai (中南海) (right side of the third line), 1998



2.3 The performing arts  
*Catch the Evil* 2002



For Shen Jingdong there is a special relationship to the words of leaders and narrators. He graduated from Nanjing University of Arts in the 1980's and was allocated work in charge of stage design in the military zone of Nanjing. He designed backdrops for troop education and propaganda performances.<sup>2.1</sup>

To an extent, the production of scenarios was a routine task arising from an ordered environment. In 1998, he participated in the play *Tiger Crouches in Zhong Mountain* (*Hu Ju Zhong Shan 虎踞钟山*) which garnered numerous awards throughout China. The play describes the life of Liu Bocheng (刘伯承) and his foresight and hard work in the formation of the Nanjing Military School in the early years of the founding of China. The play was performed in Zhongnanhai, Beijing - an important symbolic site for Chinese politics, with the leader Jiang Zemin (江泽民) in attendance.<sup>2.2</sup>

Since 1994, equipped with a knowledge of Western Modernism, in particular Dada and Pop Art, Shen Jingdong has produced work which relates to those inspirations. In 2002, The Nanjing Naval Command College exhibited his performances *Cutting and Shaving* and *Catch the Evil*, in which he shaved all the hair from his body.<sup>2.3</sup>

In 2003, he initiated the *Hero* series, after six years of ex-



ploring a suitable style through sculpting. His *Hero* series of sculptures and paintings were exhibited at the National Art Museum of China in 2006. The series explores a characteristic style of painting and sculpting that features a ceramic effect of radical simplicity and glazed surfaces.<sup>2.4</sup>

The soldiers appear as mass produced artifacts, consistent in shape and mood - reflecting a society in which people are formed in accord with the goals of the State and military, sharing the same systems of thought.

In these works, the characters seem quaint and appealing, like toys, without individual emotions. They seem to have a reflective halo of light - a formalised product with a manufactured impersonality.



After the success of the *Hero* series, Shen Jingdong's work was exhibited widely in China and abroad. In 2009, he fulfilled a long term ambition of painting *The Founding Fathers* (开国群英图), and retired after 18 years of military service.<sup>2.5</sup>

The site of the founding of the Peoples' Republic of China is a common inspiration and subject for Chinese artists, irrespective of the conspicuous political issues it raises. Shen Jingdong, who had been promoting the nation and the army for many years in his work, stealthily includes himself among the founders - standing respectfully at the extreme right.<sup>2.6</sup>



For political reasons Dong Xiwen's *The Founding Ceremony of the Nation* has been edited many times. Shen Jingdong's appearance could be a homage, or a parody - the impassive nature of the figure offers no clues.

2.7 *The People who doesn't listen* (不听话的人) 60x80cm 2016



The heroic style of Socialist Realism, adapted for Chinese use, was in dominance until the 1980's and it lent itself to interpretations that were inspired by Western Pop Art. For Shen Jindong, the history of the Republic and the words of its leaders had been a constant presence for half a lifetime and constituted an element in his style that inserts his work within a tradition.

His work *The People Who Don't Listen*, presents a series of portraits of artists and critics who survived under social pressure and coercion.<sup>2.7</sup> With their variety of characteristics and expressions they are comparable to characters in comic books or animations. But the images also raise questions. Ai Weiwei - a dissident installation and performance artist's career focuses the issue of what being 'The People who don't listen' means in recent Chinese history. Is there a necessary relationship between avant garde practitioners and resistance to the Government?

In the late 1980's young Chinese artists described artistic activity as a struggle against the adversary forces of official art and politics. They flourished in the recent periods of reform and 'opening up' and benefited from the opportunities to absorb and assimilate art and theories from other cultures.

Young people were able to access books translated from Western languages and meet foreigners in China. There was considerable enthusiasm for discussion and learning and an increasing reluctance to submit to authoritarian values. However, as the art critic Li Xianting observed, there was a danger of being 'swept away by the tide' of Western modernism.

### 3 Shen Jingdong, who finds himself in the face of Marxism, the only face of propaganda

For Shen Jingdong, an incident in 2017 had a damaging effect on his career and the scars of that event are present in his work. A celebration of the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth involved installations to support important propaganda activities during 2018. He painted a picture of Lenin featuring only the head - the omission of the body was seen as a sign of his critical relation to State propaganda.<sup>3.1</sup>

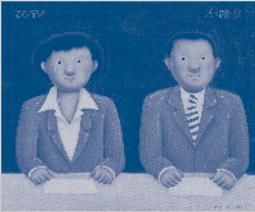
The news broadcast series conveys Shen's thoughts on the fleeting temporality of information. From 7-7.30pm the News is broadcast on CCTV. It prioritises the work of the President of State and then official business relating to members of the Government, following that news from Beijing and other regions is read - the concluding feature is news from abroad.<sup>3.2</sup>

An announcer, speaking formal Beijing dialect is displayed in a play-like scenario. Shen Jingdong depicts the broadcast with a greyed out screen and backdrop, suggesting a loss of vitality, a sense of the entropy of news becoming worthless information - a repetitive ritual masking the real events and signifying a loss of public interest and trust.<sup>3.3</sup>

3.1 Lenin 80x60cm 2018



3.2 The News broadcast (新闻联播) 100x120cm 2018



3.3 The News broadcast 4 100x120cm 2018



## 4 Shen Jingdong and the March 29, 2017 incident Shen JingDong

4.1 *March 29, 2017* 200×300cm 2017



His work is capable of conveying a sense of the despair of people accustomed to the destruction of the individual and the implacable forces of public officialdom.

On March 2017 an incident occurred that ruptured the fantasy world of Shen Jingdong's fantasy creations. He was evicted from his studio which he had built on land purchased for 450,000 yuan (CNY), without notice. He experienced the further shock and menace of watching it being dismantled whilst he was overpowered by a police officer and forced to the ground. He memorialised this event in a work titled *March 29 2017*.<sup>4.1</sup>

In 2017 many rural migrant workers lost their homes in a very sudden action by Government forces. This was just one incident in the ongoing social issue of dispossession and harassment that effect the 'Low -end population'. The use of an excavator was a vivid memory for Shen Jingdong, appearing to him as a symbolic device - a kind of tyrannical tool, he rendered it as a tool turned into a weapon of war, responding to orders that can have the effect of destroying individuals. Their ambivalence - as tools for development and growth, but also as anti social weapons, is conveyed in his *EXCAVATOR 2*.<sup>4.2</sup>

Renowned curator and Executive Director of the Beijing Songzhuang contemporary art archive, Wu Hong cites this work in his text 'Shen Jindong: The Art Journey of a Good Soldier':

4.2 *Excavator 2* 170×250×72cm 2017



*The March 29, 2017 incident in Beijing's Songzhuang Arts District was an ironic event in which Shen Jingdong's studio - a literary and artistic worker in the Chinese military's Political Frontier Theatre Company - was destroyed and demolished as a result of the State's coercive public force. Once a part of a powerful army, he quickly degenerates into the lowest class in the country's power structure as soon as he becomes an artist. Those who belong to the category of gangsters are officially conferred the power to trample on the rights of others. This absurd inversions of relations demonstrates how there has been a symbolic breaking down of China's social reality. This inversion provides a key to understanding the symbolic meaning of Shen Jingdong's work. In it he sends a message to Chinese society: Respect for individuals and human values are more important than development and growth.*

The characters in his work have the same facial expression, whether they are oppressors or victims - what does this impassivity reveal about Chinese society?

China is facing a problem when social issues are criticised - there is a tendency for insiders to respond cynically and with inhuman coldness. There is a culture of misinformation and disregard for people who expose social ills. The complacent public accuse critics of being ungrateful and tend to victimise them.

Shen Jingdong has found ways of metaphorically depicting the social situation in China using Lego-like figures with impassive faces - their lack of humanity communicates a social coldness and an implicit critique of a society in which submissiveness to authority and cruelty to the weak is the norm.

## 5 From fairy tales to the real world

Recently Shen Jingdong's works have featured realistic stories that lie outside the realm of fairy tales. His *Finding* and *It's just a game and dream* are works that suggest a shift in his focus, he portrays himself as a retired soldier who has sustained injuries, but smiles and holds a sign identifying himself.<sup>5.1,5.2</sup> In *It's just a game and a dream*, security forces devour the public like Pac Man in an arcade game.

At the top right the title cues the despair he has experienced. In two of his latest works address the paradoxical smile of the soldier/victim. The story behind the laughter of the main character and the 'happy faces' of his persecutors is mysterious and inaccessible. It may help to consider it as a fairy tale about living in the real world.

'Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.' (Proverbs 14:13 King James Version Bible)

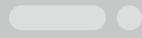
Editing: Jonathan Balmer,  
Translation: Barry Curtis

5.1 *Finding* 100×80cm 2017



5.2 *It's just a game and a dream* 200×250cm 2018





# A Cute Critique? The Work of Shen Jingdong

Julian Stallabrass,  
Professor in Modern and Contemporary Art, The Courtauld Institute of Art,  
University of London

Even by the standards of Chinese political-pop, Shen Jingdong's combination of attitude, style and subject matter lies at an extreme—of neutrality, sheer surface and cute, toy-like form. If the figures are meant to have a fairytale quality—and if, as Shen says, even the baddies in those tales are cute—this handling extends even to genuine monsters, to Stalin or the foot-soldiers of Hitler's *Wehrmacht*. And if even Christ on the Cross can appear cute and, when compared to Shen's usually cheery figures, merely a bit upset, this is to spread a Koons-style shallowness to the most unlikely subjects, with the same effect that all interiority is banished. Koons' toy-figure bronzes (of the Incredible Hulk, for example) bear an affinity with Shen's sculptures, particularly of Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince, and as with some of Koons', feature cartoon figures standing at the shoulder of the main character, like Jiminy Cricket whispering into Pinocchio's ear. In Koons, no matter how popular and even debased the source, aesthetic distinction is maintained by finely graded judgements over material, colour, form and quality of surface. While Shen invents his own forms, that distinction stands on wobblier ground. In their cuteness, they mine the oscillation that Sianne Ngai explores between the urge to cuddle or abuse: oh, you are so cute, I could just eat you all up!<sup>1</sup> There is something edible about Shen's figures, particularly the soldiers, lined up smiling, as if about to be dipped in egg. The overall result of this combination is a shallow, kitschy art—popular, and perhaps populist—of a straightforwardness that would have made Warhol blush.<sup>2</sup>

This populist simplicity is accompanied—as is usual, and is found not only in Koons but in Takashi Mu-

1 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 2012, ch. 1

2 On populist art, see my essay 'Elite Art in an Age of Populism', in Alexander Dumbadze/ Suzanne Hudson, eds., *Contemporary Art: 1989 to the Present*, John Wiley & Sons, Oxford 2013, pp. 39–49.

rakami, Yoshimoto Nara, Damien Hirst and many others—by a concerted brand-spreading strategy, by an urge to achieve ubiquity which has a parallel in corporate culture and graffiti alike, and also by a rejection of politics. These are all linked: the need to get the brand out as widely as possible—with products to suit all pockets, including postcards, stickers, tote bags and T-shirts, some of them made in collaboration with magazines and fashion brands. This fits with the graffiti writer's hyperactive distribution of the tag, which Shen invokes in his 'Shen Jingdong Was Here' exhibitions (an echo of the legendary Kilroy), which had his stickers and posters printed with the slogan plastered all over the cities in which it was shown, including Venice. Shen says that he would like his characters to be as popular as Mickey Mouse.<sup>3</sup> As in much street art, an undermining humanism prevails. Shen says of his figures: 'People are people. Skin colour doesn't matter. Uniforms don't matter.'<sup>4</sup> A utopian equality is prefigured here, in which politics and enmity have been abolished, and people can indulge their tastes with a clear conscience. This attitude stands in marked contrast to the origins of political pop, which was staged in a revulsion against the long tradition of humanism in China, which some prominent artists set out to 'liquidate'.<sup>5</sup>

There is a wilful and carefully cultivated naivety here which is a logical accompaniment to the cute. Shen's 'heroes' lived through dark times, were formed by them, and some had their part in creating them. Mao and Lei Feng were forged by imperialism, Japanese fascism and civil war, Ho Chi Minh by the concerted attempt to suppress anti-colonial revolt by genocidal force. Yet here they all appear as if seen by a child—as

3 Meimei Song, 'Shen Jing-dong Colours the SAR', *Tatler Hong Kong*, 17 September 2010.

4 Mark Bloch, 'Shen Jingdong: "Shen Jingdong is here"', *Whitehot Magazine*, July 2019.

5 Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2011, p. 256.

friendly toys or cartoons. Even the soldiers, says Shen, are not meant to be seen as ‘sarcastic or political’, but to be just another, and humorous, side of humanity.<sup>6</sup> The smile in political pop, which is often exaggerated to the point of implied derangement, is here hard to read behind: it is only what it seems to be.

Yet there are some not too subterranean references to critique: is the exhibition title ‘The Art Journey of a Good Soldier’ a reference to Jaroslav Hasek’s famous infantryman, Svejek, who undermines authority through an exaggerated and idiotic conformity?<sup>7</sup> The mention in Shen’s New York Gallery of Chinese Art exhibition of ‘one-dimensional man’ is surely a reference to Marcuse’s account of the commercial assault on language, thinking and subjectivity.<sup>8</sup> For those who insist on holding to a Cold War frame of thinking, the work may be read a critique of Communist propaganda—to which Shen, in his long military career, was dedicated to making—and of its strange alliance with an imposed and controlled consumer culture. Then the cute becomes a mask for the uncanny, and the figures’ empty black eyes become a register of the suppression of dissent and indeed of all individuality and interior life.

But what is the effect, as in this exhibition, when Shen applies his métier to various icons of British culture—to Alfred the Great, Henry VIII, Charles Darwin or John Lennon? They are quite variable: no one knows what Alfred looked like, and the depictions that we have emphasise regalia over character. Here Shen’s cartoon rendering seems a mild transformation, akin to an illustration of the cake-burning story in a Ladybird book. And with celebrity subjects, identified by

<sup>6</sup> Fionnuala McHugh, ‘My Life: Shen Jingdong’, *Post Magazine*, 1 November 2014.

<sup>7</sup> Jaroslav Hasek, *The Good Soldier Svejek and his Fortunes in War*, trans. Cecil Parrott, William Heinemann, London 1973.

<sup>8</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*, Beacon Press, Boston 1964.

minimal visual cues, already branded and hollowed out, the effect is also inoffensive, and sometimes slyly humorous. The Queen appears as a beaming, stooped trollish figure, who wears the crown along with a cardigan and what looks like a plastic necklace. This plays on the supposed status of the royals as both ordinary and exceptional, as like and unlike their subjects. As Tom Nairn put it, in his classic study of British royalty, they are ‘ordinary in appearance but quite super-ordinary in significance’, binding up the mundane with ‘some vaster national-spiritual sphere associated with mass adulation, the past, the state and familial morality [...]’<sup>9</sup> The Queen may actually complement the crown with furs and a substantial burden of bling, and often looks surly, but Chen gets here at the magical effect that still enthral many.

It is in the portraits of nineteenth-century bourgeois greats that the effect is most stringent, especially as set against the severe, prosaic but powerful figure of the exceptional individual, rendered in prose in vast detail in novels and biographies, and in paint in a play of telling contingency, expressive deportment and visualised character (see, for instance, John Collier’s 1883 portrait of Darwin). As Franco Moretti argues in his analysis of the class’ culture, the piling up of mundane facts is meant to produce an objective seriousness makes it hard to imagine alternatives.<sup>10</sup> The lifestyle and mores of the old bourgeoisie have melted into air, of course, unlike the system that produced them: nevertheless, there is a charge to seeing the stern charisma of figures such as Darwin and James Watt transformed into Shen’s insistently shallow playthings, especially for those deluded enough to look back on the Victori-

<sup>9</sup> Tom Nairn, *The Enchanted Glass: Britain and its Monarchy*, Vintage, London 1994, p. 27.

<sup>10</sup> Franco Moretti, *The Bourgeois Between History and Literature*, Verso, London 2013, p. 96.

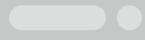
an and imperial age with proud nostalgia.

Churchill is a particular case, since his image combines elements of national legend, aristocracy, celebrity and politics. He was an accomplished self-promoter and cultivator of his own 'brand', and Shen fixes on two of its best-known components: the famous cigar and spotted bow tie. The photographer Karsh, frustrated by the old trouper's posing in a portrait session, claims to have snatched the cigar out of Churchill's hand in his effort to pry off the mask. The reputation of the Tory maverick, at least in the UK long pickled in myth, has been subjected to challenge lately, particularly in light of the Black Lives Matter movement: how do we read the fixed stare of Shen's toy figure, with knowledge of Churchill's strident racism and defence of empire, his armed suppression of strikers, and manufacturer of famine in Bengal? Churchill so much objected to Graham Sutherland's portrait in which he appeared as an aged and haunting figure fading into wood paneling, the proud raise of his head juxtaposed with a frail interiority, that he had it burnt. It seems unlikely that an excess of exteriority would have been any more congenial to the exceptionalism that he cultivated, and was cultivated around him, personally and politically.

For Ngai, the appeal of the cute is based on an unequal power relation between the viewer and the object. It reverses the formula of the sublime, in which the viewer is awed and overwhelmed, and is instead the domain of ownership and consumption. While artists who trade in the cute usually attempt to hold themselves above the effect, as the heroes of exceptional individuality, and by implication do the same for the

viewer, the cute can rebound on them. As Marx wrote of art's dialectic, an object is created for a subject and simultaneously a subject for an object.<sup>11</sup> So the subversive charge of Shen's shallow, shiny toy world is to undercut distinction and to suggest (as a child might put it): that's you, that is.

<sup>11</sup> Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, trans. Martin Nicolaus, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1973, p. 92.



# Heroes in the World

Barry Curtis,  
Associate Director of Doctoral Programmes in University of the Arts London

Shen Jing Dong's work has an immediate, playful appeal. The images, mostly of faces or figures, seem obligingly innocent, with slight inflections of posture, grouping and posing. They look out, with pinpoint eyes, from seductively coloured and perfect surfaces. It is only when viewing the range and variety of his work that more troubling and ambivalent meanings are revealed. Familiar elements of his early - uniformed 'Heroes' continue to re-appear in different scenarios - interacting with Disney characters, or as elegiacally broken statues, as defaced, monochrome, and, occasionally as bandaged and abused, The military characters seem to relate to Shen Jing Dong's and China's past, they are innocently rendered social realist figures, animated, and progressively combined with an expanded cast of characters of different ages, roles and ethnicities. These new forms of sociability and affability seem to reflect the opening up of Chinese culture, coinciding with Shen Jing Dong's own journeys and experience - his regular visits to New York and the increasing scope of his exhibitions and audiences.

The work that features uniformed men and women, inevitably provokes curiosity about their roles and significance, and raise questions that so frequently accompany the reception of Chinese culture in the West. A writer of Chinese speculative fiction warns that attempts to make interpretations relating to 'subversion' and political orientation have become an 'ideological crutch' for Western critics <sup>1</sup>. 'Dissident' Chinese art has been highly valued in the West. Shen Jing Dong is ambivalent in this respect, although there are works that seem responsive to political moods and issues rendered schematic and enigmatic.

<sup>1</sup> Introduction: 'China Dreams': Ken Liu p. 15. *Head of Zeus/Macmillan*. London. 2016

Writers have drawn attention to the immaculate surfaces of his figures, and their resemblance to ceramics - to traditional Chinese vessels, to figurative funerary sculpture, and shiny plastic toy-like entities associated with mass production. In all instances, these characteristics can be read as evocative of 21<sup>st</sup> Century China - looking both ways towards a long, venerated past, and an accelerating future. The hard, shiny surfaces and the brightly variegated colours are attractive and distancing at the same time. They deflect the gaze in ways that produce a sense of the detached autonomy of the figures and their seductively reflective 'skin'. The sheen configures a sense of perfection, and a certain resistance to interpretation. Analogies with traditional Chinese ceramics as well as the mass production of ceramic figures of party leaders and heroes of the Revolution link them to deep history as well as the ambitions of the partly discredited 'Cultural Revolution'. At the same time, they are reminiscent of collectibles, of the cute/dark dialectic of anime and manga figures.

Shen, born in 1965, had his first exhibition as an artist in Beijing in 2006, whilst still serving in the army. He had studied printmaking and spent the years from graduation until his mid 40's as a set designer and scenery painter, attached to the army and working on some acclaimed theatrical productions. He was in his teens in the late 70's, at a time of uncertain and troubled liberalisation, but his generation were still assigned roles on leaving college. He was a student at the time of the significant Rauschenberg exhibition in Beijing and was part of a generation that experienced the optimistic early stirrings of the opening up of Chinese culture to Western influences. He was also witness to a

period of repression and the ‘Cynical Realist responses of the 90’s generation’.

Shen Jing Dong’s range of experience in designing large scale realist graphics and image-making for performance is evident in his work, in the high level of technical proficiency that comprises prolific work in photography, sculpture, design for exhibition design, posters and publicity, as well as self-portraits and performance pieces. He shared this practical and pragmatic training with some of the mid 20th century Western pop artists whose formative experiences were in sign painting, window design and advertising graphics and whose work often combined celebratory awe with an ironic critical edge in the Pop Art of mid-century America.

The cultural opening up of Chinese culture in the 80’s came at a time when New York was the centre of the art world and the ideas of Duchamp and Andy Warhol, among others, were revelatory in inspiring new private and public dimensions for artists. It is likely that the neo Dada ethos was particularly relevant to the contradictions that new artists in China were experiencing – the attempt to break with traditions, the re-evaluation of chance and spontaneity as well as the place of the personal, in ironic and humorous ‘against interpretation’ realms of artistic practice. Certainly, there is something of Warhol’s iconicity in Shen’s work – where the reflective surface becomes the primary meaning and his strategy of an unproblematic, affirmative ‘liking’, functions as an affective openness. The sharing of knowledge, eased travel conditions and cultural exchanges, combined with the successful establishment of a gallery system and extensive trading in contemporary art are all registered

in the enthusiastic and explorative dimensions of Shen Jing Dong’s art.

The postmodernist influences combined with a personal iconography, and an adaptiveness to new opportunities for display are evident, as are more traditional affinities to practices of calligraphy, realist iconographies and modes of performance that provide opportunities for the artist to enter into the celebratory presentation of his work. Early exponents of contemporary art in China exploited the affinities of the official State approved Socialist Realism with Pop and what was termed, particularly in Germany, ‘Capitalist Realism’, to refer to the ‘quasi propagandistic’ way in which advertising dominated the visual landscape. An inflected form of Pop, along with ‘Red Humour’ was an initial response to the questioning of State mandated art in China. The use of irony and ridicule produced an ‘exotic dystopianism’ that has proved to be appealing to Western art collectors and audiences.

China’s growing sense of the importance of ‘soft power’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has developed at a time when the West has undergone financial crisis and deterioration in the quality of political leadership. A dangerous imbalance in mutual knowledge and understanding has developed with nearly 700,000 Chinese students studying abroad annually, and many English-speaking Chinese citizens with abundant access to Western media. Ideological diversity in the Chinese population is rarely acknowledged. At a time of renewed tensions in Sino-American and British relations there is a conspicuous difference in government competence over the handling of the Covid epidemic.

Shen's 'Heroes' have acquired a new resonance in the light of the Covid crisis. The bravery and social responsibility of low paid healthcare, transport and supply workers has been widely celebrated and, occasionally become a subject for art. The BLM movement has led to a questioning of conventional attitudes to which historical characters should be memorialised. In the light of these recent events – images of 'ordinary people' have acquired a new currency. The figures in this exhibition are characterised by a congenial positivity that reflects their 'heroic' status. They seem content with uniformity – there is little that could be termed cynical or dissident in them, although Shen is responsive to tensions in the relations of individuals to the State.

Shen's works demonstrates an interest in allegory, fantasy and 'fairy tales'. The recurring figures of Saint Exupery's 'Little Prince' and his fox companion suggests a profound sympathy with the story's validation of emotional understanding, creativity and heartfelt aesthetic engagement. In recent work there is a creative interest in the carnivalesque mood of theme parks and an evident pleasure in the advertising, merchandising and staging of his work. 'Shen Jing Dong Was Here' stickers, were a conspicuous presence in his exhibit at the Venice Biennale. He designs posters, book bags and presents his work in short promotional films. Alongside his more sombre works there are strong affinities with advertising, graffiti and street style, evident in designs for skateboard decks. Shen's Facebook feed is restless and experimental – comprising more 'traditional' and conventional portraiture and abstractions of emojis and logographs.

In some of his recent works, notably the ones on display

in this exhibition, the stylised images of famous British people are conveyed in portraits, reminiscent of ones that appear in childrens' books, collectors' cards or as 'famous' national presences on stamps or banknotes. They are emanations of 'soft power' – the personalities that create a charismatic national aura, ranging across scientists, monarchs, inventors, performers, rendered as a kind of homage to national 'genius'. At this moment in British history, there may be unhappy resonances with the British 'exceptionalism' that has played a malign role in the British exit from the European Union, but they are also representative of a generous Chinese perspective on British culture.

Shen Jing Dong's characters are playful and iconic, skilfully crafted and provocative. They appear to us as characters from an extensive work of speculative fiction. There is a long tradition in China of expressing alternative views through fable, metaphor and irony. In the opinion of Chen Quifan<sup>2</sup> the rich vein of science fiction in recent Chinese literature is a way of making sense of accelerated transformation in a society experiencing rapid growth and accelerated change. He suggests that myth and speculation are ways of describing and, perhaps resolving the 'social rips' that are a consequence. Shen Jing Dong's 'fairy tale' characters seem to relate to the impact on individuals of living in conditions of social and political unrest, new opportunities and exposure to wider international currents of thought and feeling.

<sup>2</sup> Chen Quifan: The Torn Generation: Chinese Science Fiction in A Culture in Transition. In Ken Lui ed. 'Invisible Planets' Head of Zeus/Macmillan, London 2016.



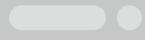
# Sonnet for Shen JingDong

Roger Wagner,  
Artist and Poet

— *The Little Prince and Rose* 60×80cm oil on canvas 2015



A little boy is looking at a rose  
And what he sees he must see with his heart  
For only through heart-sight will it disclose  
The whole of which each petal is a part.  
*Le petit prince* is standing with a fox  
Who asking to be tamed will in that ask  
For some deep heart-key which alone unlocks  
The true face that is locked behind the mask.  
So icons of the nations may disguise  
The hidden idols hiding in plain sight  
Till laughing angels open shuttered eyes  
And all our feet of clay are lit with light.  
Then we must seek and find through other's eyes  
That deeper folly which will make us wise.



# Shen Jingdong's Soft Powerplay

Wenny Teo,  
Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Asian Art, The Courtauld Institute of Art,  
University of London

In 1993, fourteen Chinese artists were invited to show their paintings at the prestigious 45<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, in a subsection of the main exhibition dubiously entitled 'Passage to the East'. It marked the first time that the international art world elite encountered the work of a new generation of Chinese artists who were born during or around the tumultuous decade of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and came of age in an equally chaotic period of increasing materialism and individualism following the 1978 'open door' economic reforms that set China on its path to modernisation and globalisation. Unsurprisingly, the paintings that garnered the most critical acclaim were those that graphically rendered the ideological contradictions and psycho-social conflicts of post-reform China legible to the predominantly Euro-American audience.

The two stylistic tendencies that immediately stood out in this context were 'Political Pop' and 'Cynical Realism'. The former trend, exemplified by the bold, garishly coloured canvases of Wang Guangyi (b. 1957), synthesised the iconography of Cultural Revolutionary propaganda with the transnational vernacular of commercial advertising and branding; succinctly encapsulating the post-reform schizoid ideology of market socialism 'with Chinese characteristics'. Whereas Wang's work knowingly played to the audience's familiarity with the postmodernist strategies of appropriation, pastiche and parody by reducing the charged, political icons of the Revolution to a hollow play of empty signifiers; the striking, large-scale Cynical Realist paintings by artists like Fang Lijun (b. 1963) and Yue Minjun (b. 1962) put the spotlight on

questions of cultural identity, subjectivisation, trauma and resistance shorn up by China's rapid urban and socio-economic changes. Both Fang and Yue's paintings are populated with eerily identical figures, modelled on the artists' themselves. The de-individualising sameness of these personages is offset by the ambivalent emotive force of their contorted facial expressions: in Fang's work, a gaping yawn (or is it an anguished scream?), in Yue's, a manically hysterical grin. In the wake of the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989, these paintings, at once comical and menacing, were largely interpreted as defiant emblems of artistic protest against a violent, humourless, authoritarian Chinese state.

At first glance, it seems obvious enough to situate the work of Shen Jingdong (b. 1965) within this artistic milieu. Shen is after all of the same generation and appears to utilise similar painterly techniques and iconographic referents. Yet, there is something curiously out of synch about Shen's practice and artistic trajectory that necessitates closer scrutiny. In the early 1990s, several of the Cynical Realist and Political Pop artists had made a name for themselves in the underground networks of Beijing's artistic and literary circles, and came to embody the swaggering, sardonic and unruly posturing of the city's *liumang* ('hooligan' or 'ruffian') youth culture. Following their success at the Venice Biennale, these artists were soon embraced by a rapidly globalising art world – travelling to the international biennales and art fairs that began to proliferate in the 1990s – whilst their work fetched obscene prices at auction. Shen was conscripted into the Military Drama Troupe in his native Nanjing in

the Jiangsu province in 1991, shortly after graduating from the Nanjing Arts Institute. He was not permitted to travel abroad during his sixteen years of service, and spent much of this time painting stage sets for military performances. Indeed, it was not until 2006 that Shen staged his first solo exhibition in Beijing, centred on the heroic figure of the model soldier that would become a recurring motif in his oeuvre.

Unlike the tortured paroxysms that so luridly coloured the faces of Fang and Yue's protagonists, Shen's characters bear a placid, smiling mien. Their eyes are not squeezed shut in slit-like caricature, but instead shaped into coal-black dots that accentuate their unassuming blankness. The luminous viscosity of the paintwork serves to further the sense of artificiality, so much so that the figures come to resemble the cheaply mass-produced plastic toys that are made in China and sold at an inflated price throughout the world. In effect, Shen's soldiers are familiar, disarmingly 'cute' and unthreatening.

If we take the common interpretation of the work of the Cynical Realists at face value – that the ambivalent, twisted facial expressions seen in their paintings conveyed the pathological unease, ideological contradictions and the (geo) political conflicts of China's post-reform transition – then what might Shen's characters say about the state of play in the first decade of the new millennium and beyond? By 2006, the year that Shen first exhibited this body of work, the nation was gearing up for two spectacular events that were meticulously designed to present the benign face of the 'new China' to the world: the 2008 Bei-

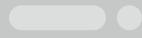
jing Olympics and the 2010 Shanghai World Expo. This global charm offensive began in earnest in 2001, when China ascended to the World Trade Organisation, resulting in a strategic emphasis on cultural and artistic development which (with certain limitations) also encouraged a flourishing of 'unofficial' contemporary Chinese art on home ground.

The epitome of this ostensible turn towards soft power as a political strategy was the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics. This global media spectacle was in many respects, a perfect alignment of stagecraft and statecraft that aimed to convey a message of international corporation, national harmony and geopolitical benevolence to an audience of billions. Indeed, many of the thrilling, meticulously choreographed mass dances and dazzling light displays were performed by members of the People's Liberation Army – wielding ribbons, drums and LED torches instead of weaponry. Of course, not everyone was so easily convinced. The ever-outspoken Chinese artist Ai Weiwei for instance, famously denounced the spectacle as China's 'fake smile' to the world, even though he had been one of the designers of the magnificent stadium that became its most enduring icon. Ai argued that such events merely masked vast social disparities and political injustices enforced by a regime that in his view, hadn't changed at all that much since the events of 1989.

It is certainly tempting to read Shen's practice in the light of these national and geopolitical developments. Shen's ongoing 'Harmony' (2006-) series as a case in point, features a pantheon of political leaders – both

past and present – as well as diverse ethnic minorities in their traditional costumes, neatly arranged in rows as if in a photographer’s studio. The title of the work is an obvious reference to the political slogan of the ‘harmonious society’ (*hexie shehui*), a socio-economic concept introduced during the 2005 National People’s Congress. The term itself has also been ironically appropriated by China’s online community of netizens as a cipher for censorship. A similar sense of disquiet is echoed in the series depicting CCTV (China Central Television) newscasters – commonly seen as mouthpieces of the state – facing the viewer in the familiar format of their daily broadcasts, with unreadable and unrevealing docile expressions. In a more recent iteration of this theme, Shen humorously – and topically – depicts these newscasters wearing facemasks, further obfuscating any indication of personal expression and identity, and alluding to more recent developments that have revived geopolitical tensions between China and the West. As the literary theorist Sianne Ngai argued, cuteness might also be interpreted as a way of ‘aestheticizing powerlessness’, but equally, Shen’s paintings suggest the myriad ways in which ‘art has the capacity to not only reflect and mystify power but also to reflect on and make use of powerlessness,’ hinting at more complex and coded meanings, hidden behind innocuous, pre-packaged smiles.<sup>1</sup>

1 Sianne Ngai, *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute and Interesting* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press) 2012



# Shen Jingdong: Fairy Tales Reimagined for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Bojana Popovic,  
Post-War and Contemporary Art Specialist in Christie's

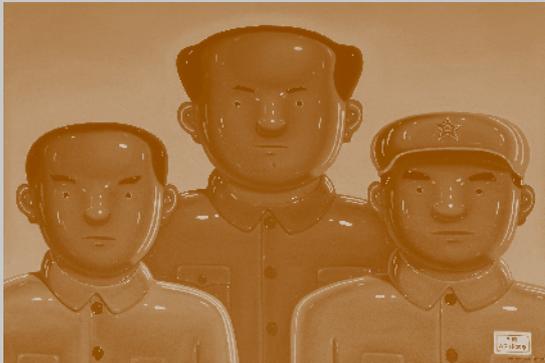
*In a fairy tale there are no good people or bad people. It's just a role. In a fairy tale, even a bad person is cute.*

- Shen Jingdong

The distinguishing mark of some of the most successful contemporary artists working at present, is their inherent ability to hold a mirror to society, to force the viewer to face issues that define and divide the world we live in and above all, to manifest these notions in an artistically eloquent manner that evokes a response in the beholder. Some of the best-selling contemporary artists who embrace such qualities manage to do so whilst oscillating between serious subject matters and witty tongue-in-cheek humour. In such a context, Shen Jingdong has defined himself as an acclaimed contemporary artist of the Chinese New Wave and whose works can be found in prominent collections worldwide. The artist's market success was displayed already on his home soil in 2013 when his painting *Three Great Men*, sold at Beijing Googut & Auction for £154,000 – Shen's auction record price to date. Furthermore, at the international auction house Sotheby's in 2018 his painting *Strength* sold for over £79,000 after generating competitive bidding from an eclectic range of clients. Though the artist lives and works primarily in Beijing, he has achieved global recognition through his bold exhibitions, including most recently the *Shen Jingdong Was Here* solo show presented during the 58th Venice Biennale at Giardino Bianco Art Space.

Entering the exhibition *Shen Jingdong: The Beautiful Fairy Tales* at Asia House in London, the visitor is immediately confronted by the polished faces of his lustrous figurine-esque characters. The exhibition space

— Shen JingDong, *Three Great Men*, sold at Beijing Googut & Auction in 2013. —



is divided into two distinct areas where one symbolizes China, and the other represents the West. The division reflects the disparate facets of these cultures and the viewers find themselves subconsciously identifying with one or the other. What Shen cleverly imposes, is the identification of oneself with stereotypical images of patriotism. The smiling faces from within the canvases, gaze omnisciently and ironically – they bring to light the very issue of clichéd nationalistic imagery. For decades images drenched in patriotic fervour and bias have been used politically in the media to promote negative stereotypes of ‘the other’ and relentlessly attack the cultures that differ from their own.

This criticism is found within Shen’s figurative paintings and sculptures and is further emphasised by the title of this exhibition. By referring to children’s fairy tales that are often deemed innocent and playful, yet typically contain dark undertones or sinister twists, we are led to find the double entendre within Shen’s compositions. Furthermore, the status of traditional fairy tales as integral to a culture’s oral tradition, perhaps nods to the stereotypes embedded in imagery that have equally been passed from one generation to another. Leading Western contemporary artists who are monopolizing the art market such as Anselm Kiefer, Cecily Brown and Grayson Perry, to name a few, have sought inspiration for bodies of their works from folklore or culturally significant tales and myths. Kiefer in particular, has defined his artistic practice through the exploration of German legends specifically looking at how their motifs have found resonance in more recent history. Like Kiefer who has explored German nationalism by referring back to some of its oldest characters

from literature, Shen looks at how fairy tales can be manipulated for modern propaganda purposes - pushing certain ideals forward under a masquerade of folklore, animals and mystical beings. After all, children grow up learning moral codes from accessible and captivating stories. Some immediately recognizable literary figures emerge from Shen’s canvases, such as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry’s *Little Prince*. Rendered in the same manner as the real-life figures of William Shakespeare, Henry VIII or Winston Churchill, reality and fiction become intertwined in a disorientating blur of bold colours through Shen’s canvases. Looking at his native China as well as the rest of the world, Shen reconstructs his surroundings with a fairy tale imagination. Stylistically, the saturated palette, graphic linear weight and Pop art influences immediately signal that all is not as it seems. It is too perfect, too polished, too flawless; there is something that makes the viewer mistrust the images and it is this which Shen wishes for the visitor to take away with them from the exhibition – a critical eye. Some of the most successful artists of the past fifty years have sought to do just that, and in this trajectory one can situate the art of Shen Jingdong.

The Pop style that Shen employs in his works of art to facilitate such concepts, is distinctly rooted in his Chinese background rather than American Pop. Though Shen has frequently commented on his huge desire to learn about Western art in the 1980s, specifically noting protagonists like Marcel Duchamp and Andy Warhol, the only way for artists in China to do so at the time, was through the limited availability of printed books and magazines. However by 2004, at the age of thirty-nine, Shen moved from Nanjing to Beijing,

after spending over twenty years tracing Western art, in search of his own style, saying: 'I didn't feel satisfied (...) I wasn't comfortable. I had to define my own style' (Shen Jingdong). While weaponry and militarism were more prevalent than consumerism for his generation, in Shen's imagery the leaders and soldiers have an Every-man quality. Leaders, soldiers, and regular people are all rendered in the same manner as characters within the same 'fairy tale'. Looking around the exhibition, the breadth of Shen's subject matters becomes inherently clear and works from his most famous *The Hero* series are presented near portraits of musical icons and fictional figures.

*The Hero* series, started in 2003, was displayed at The National Art Museum of China in 2005 and draws inspiration from the sculptural work the artist developed over six years just prior to these paintings. Arguably, it is in *The Hero* series that the artist's ideas are encapsulated most profoundly - the shape of the soldier reflects a system in which people are formed by the goals of the state and their creativity and individuality, as a result, is repressed. Like hollow ceramic figurines, they seem mass-produced and lacking emotions, but on the other hand they embody the idealized memories of heroes that those growing up during the Red Era would certainly remember. References to the Chinese military held personal significance for the artist - Shen was part of the military creating scenery from age 26 to 44 for a state-run cultural, song and dance and theatre troupe. He was assigned to the service following college near his home in Nanjing from 1991 to 2009, where he produced stage design with the Frontline Cultural and Art Corps. Such units are common in socialist countries

and provided Shen with a good income whilst allowing him to explore creative work that was to inevitably influence his artistic path decades later.

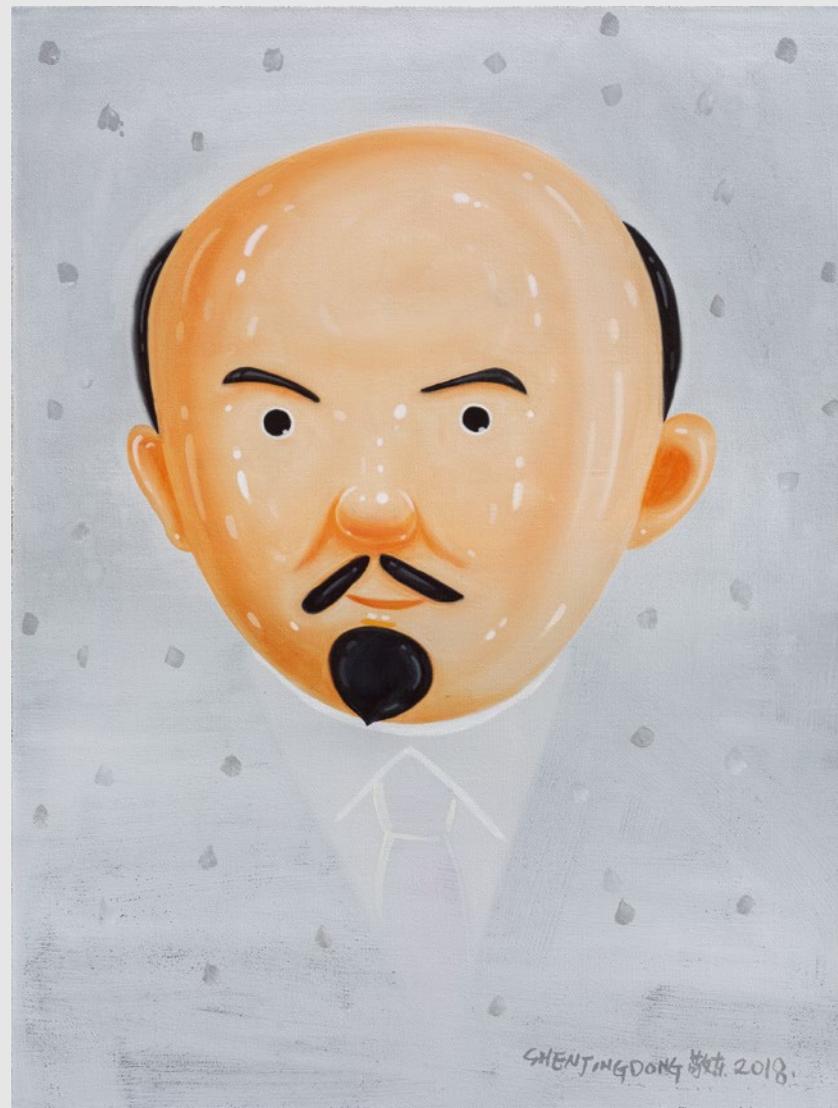
This exhibition *Shen Jingdong: The Beautiful Fairy Tales* at Asia House encourages visitors to embark on a playful, yet important, reflection on the notion of contemporary life, values and the role of the heroes across cultures - whether they are public figures from the twentieth century or the protagonists of a children's storybook, is for each of us to decide.



Works

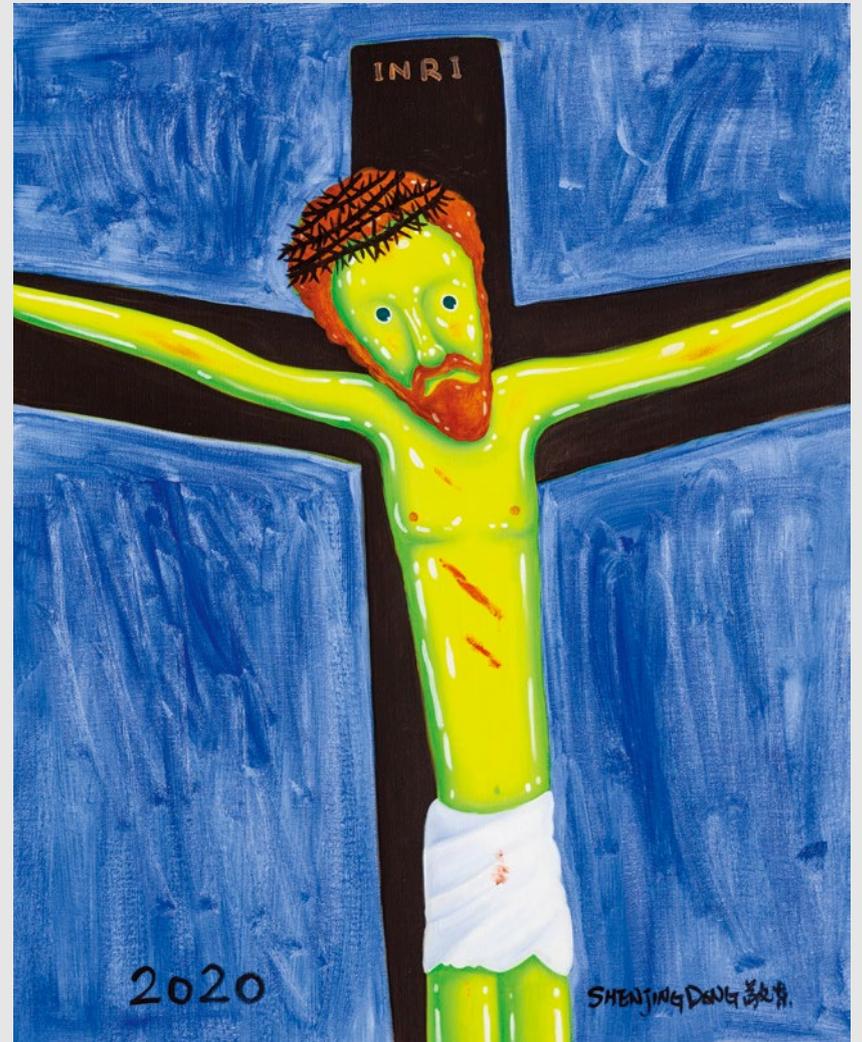
*Vladimir Lenin*  
列宁

80x60cm  
oil on canvas  
2018



*Jesus*  
耶穌

100×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020





*The Queen*  
女王

80×100cm  
oil on canvas  
2014

*The Cultural Revolution story*  
- Its time to move on  
向前向前

100x80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020



*The Cultural Revolution story*  
*- be full of lofty ambitions*  
豪情万丈

100×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020



*The Cultural Revolution story*  
- take revenge and wipe out a grudge  
要报仇 要雪恨

100x80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020





*You are malicious*  
算你狠

100×120cm  
oil on canvas  
2020



*International Comedy Series 1*

国际玩笑一

150×300cm

oil on canvas

2018



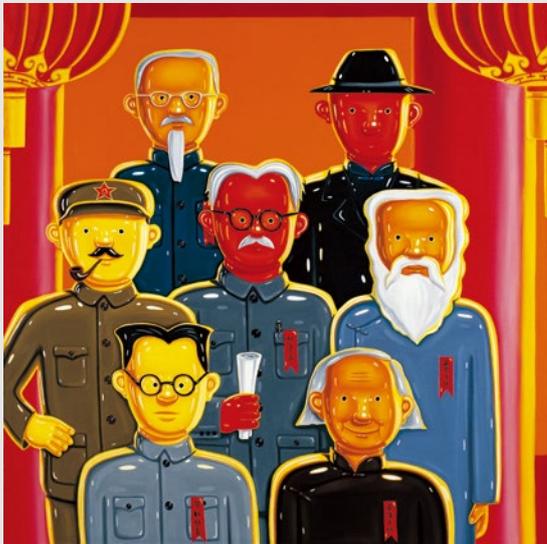
*International Comedy Series 3*

国际玩笑三

150×300cm

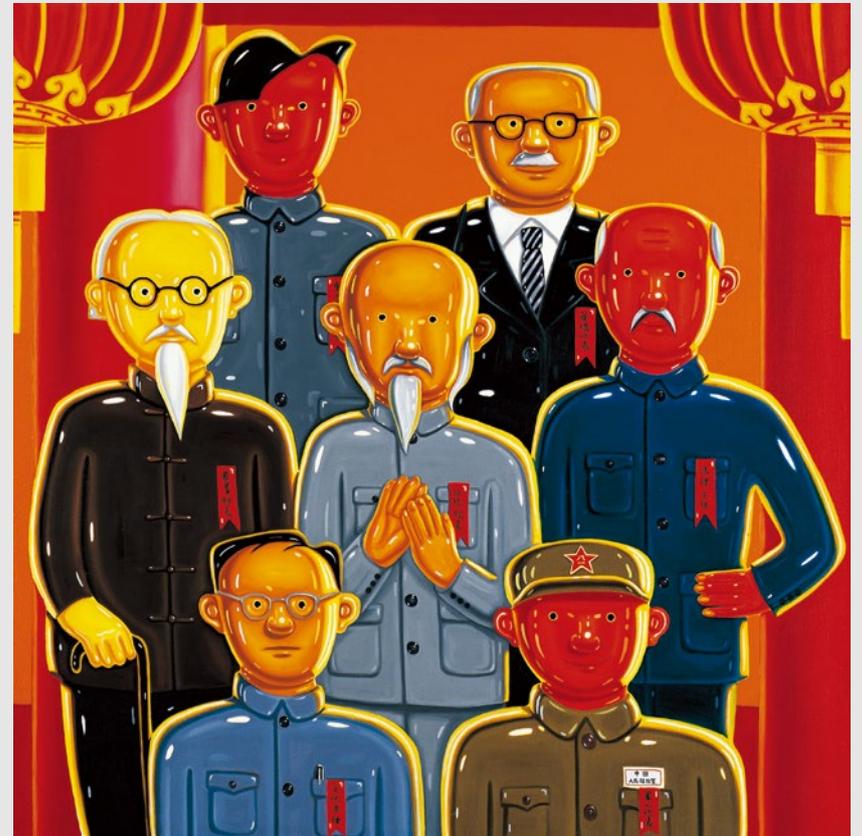
oil on canvas

2018



*Harmony No. 3 — Hero Club (Left)*  
和谐3号——英雄会 (左)

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2008



*Harmony No. 3 — Hero Club (Right)*  
和谐3号——英雄会 (右)

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2008



*Harmony No. 3 — Hero Club (Center)*  
和谐3号——英雄会 (中)

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2008

*keep one's eyes wide open*  
睁大眼睛

150x150cm  
oil on canvas  
2016



*Hero No.12*  
英雄No.12

70×70cm  
lithograph and acrylic on paper  
2016





*Epidemic news*  
疫情报道

100×120cm  
oil on canvas  
2020



*Telescope*  
望远镜

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2015

*The Little Prince and the Fox*  
小王子与狐狸

100×110cm  
oil on canvas  
2017





*The Little Prince (ii)*  
小王子二

80×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2018



*Untitled*  
无题

13×26×23cm  
Marble  
2014

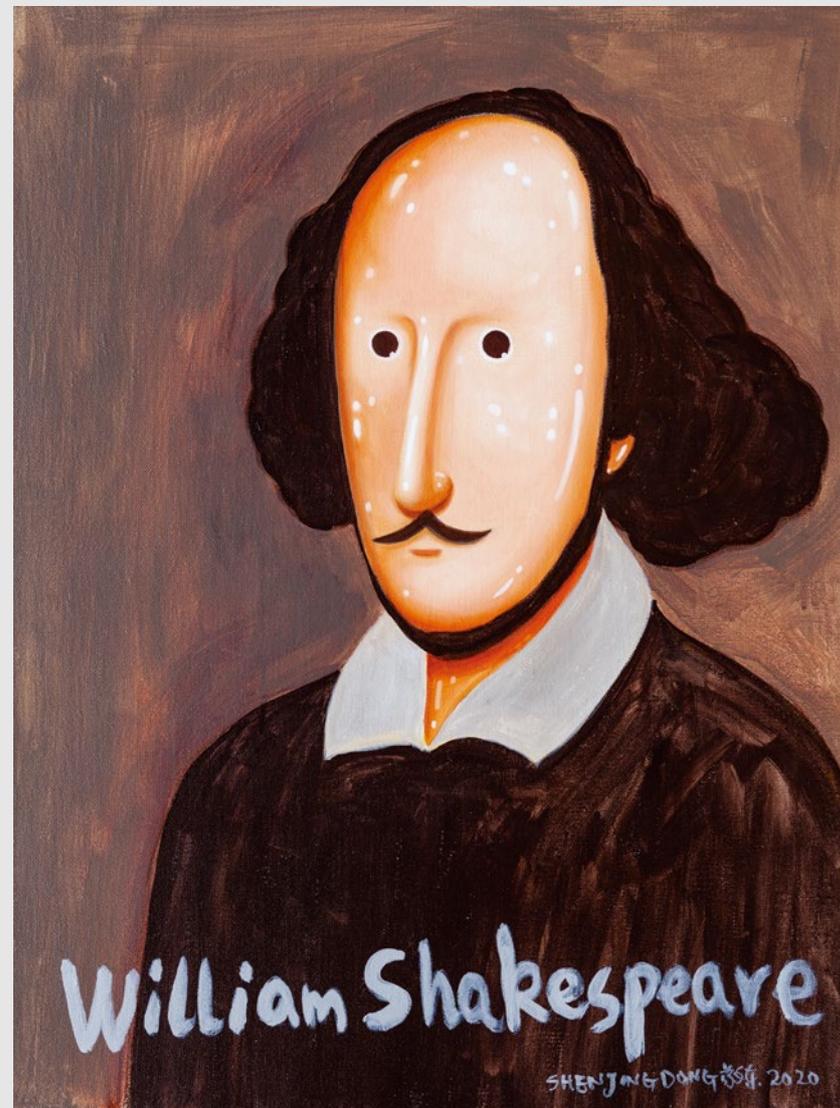


*Damaged cultural relic*  
损坏的文物

Head 15×17×19cm Body 21×10×12cm  
Marble  
2012

*William Shakespeare*  
威廉·莎士比亚

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



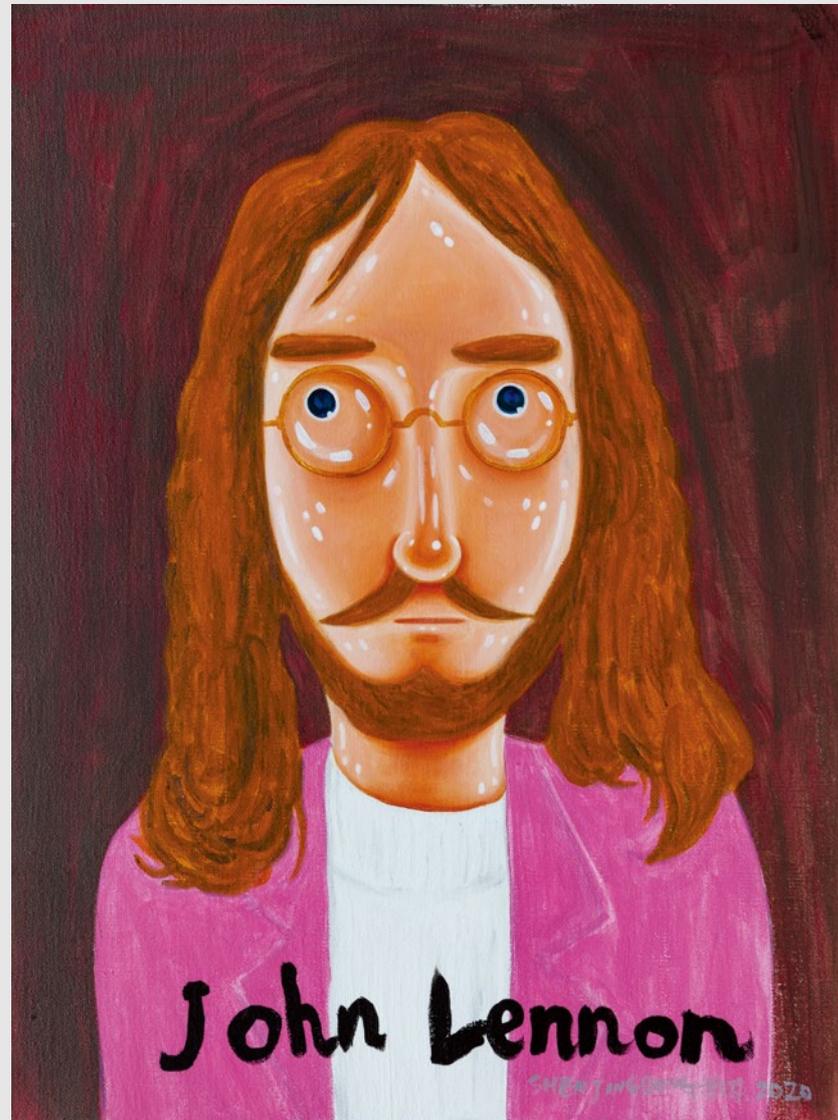
*Charlie Chaplin*  
查理·卓别林

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



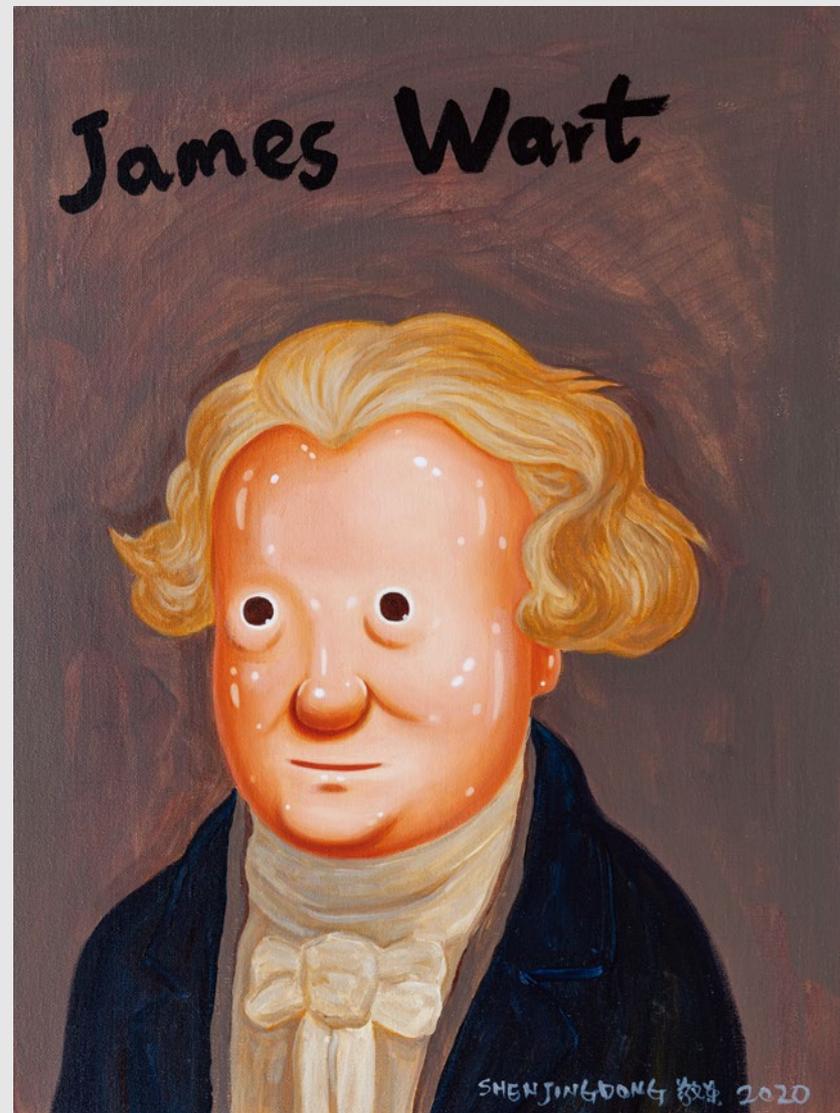
*John Lennon*  
约翰·列侬

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



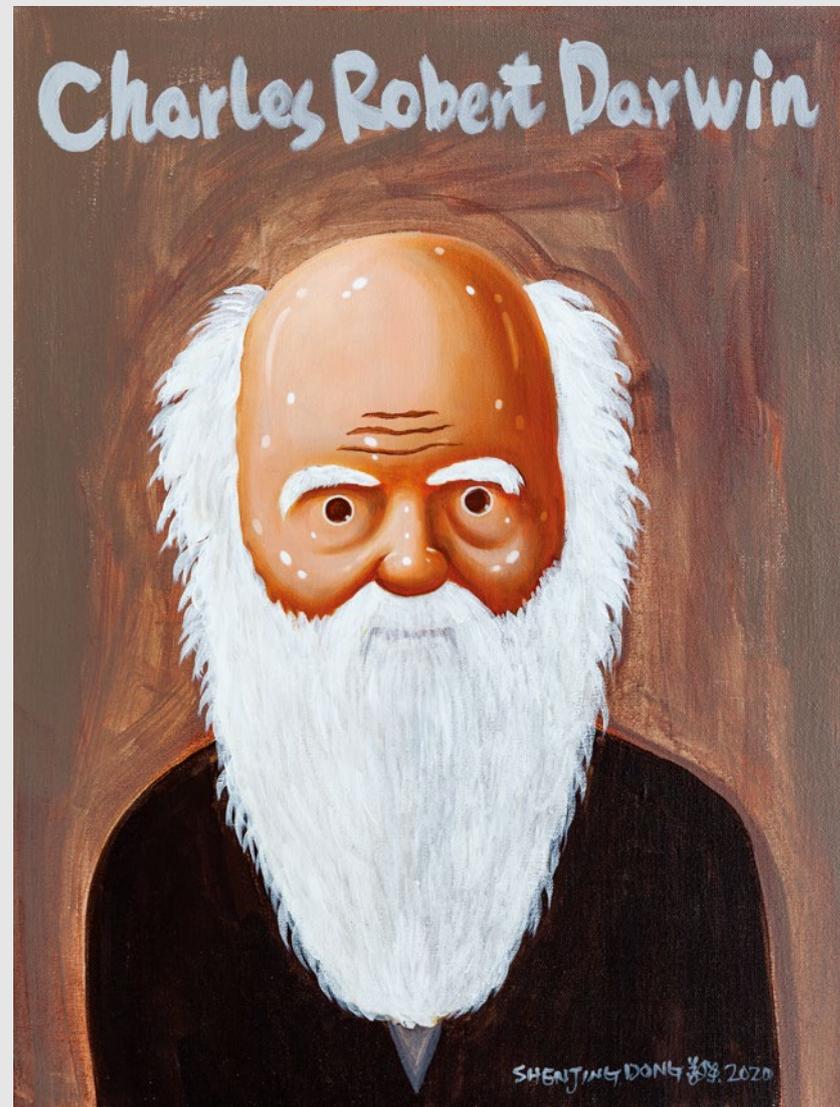
*James Watt*  
詹姆斯·瓦特

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



*Charles Darwin*  
查尔斯·达尔文

80x60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



*Stephen Hawking*  
史蒂芬·霍金

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



Henry VIII  
亨利八世

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



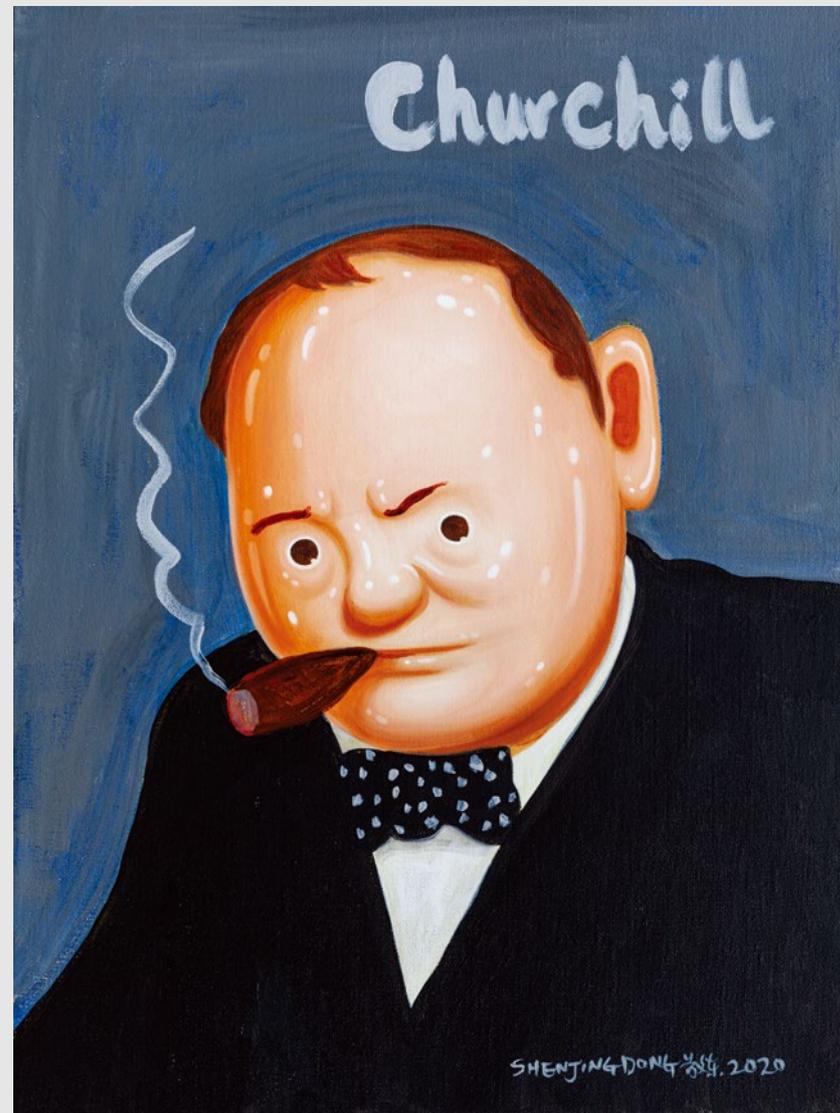
*Alfred the Great*  
阿尔弗雷德大帝

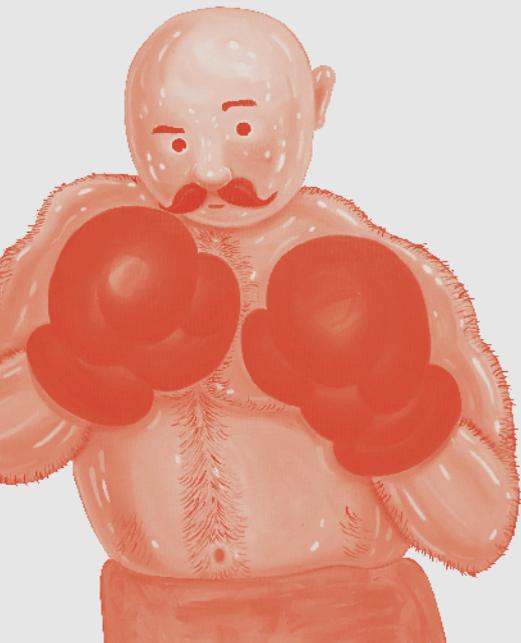
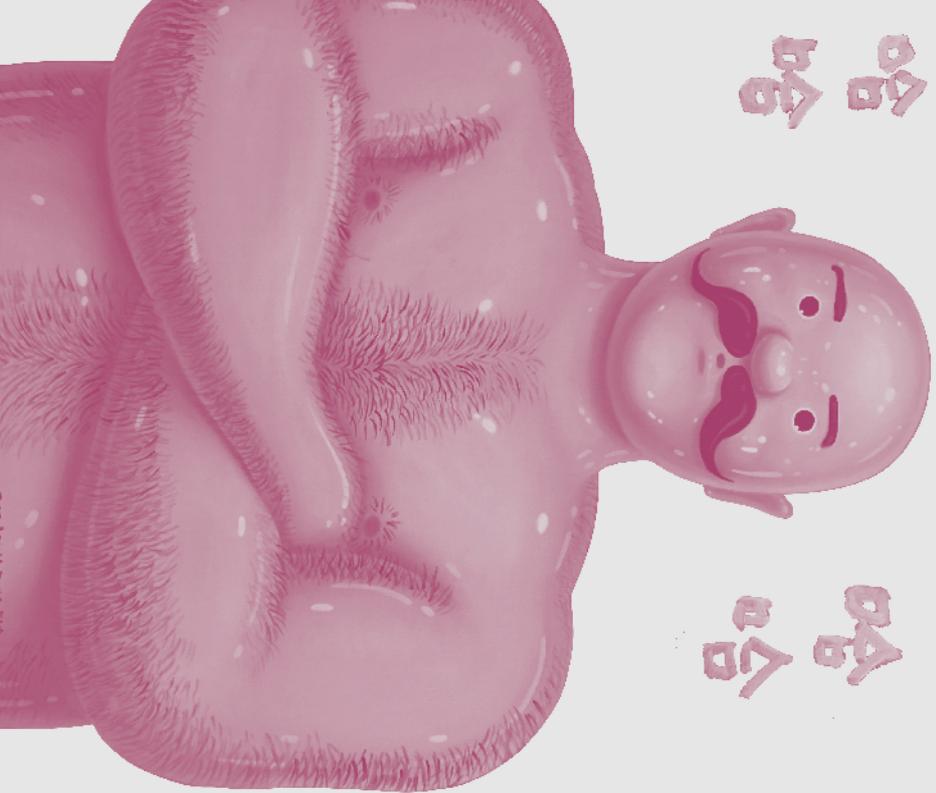
80x60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020



*Winston Churchill*  
温斯顿·丘吉尔

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020





哈哈





# Index



Vladimir Lenin  
列宁

80×60cm  
oil on canvas  
2018

—  
070

Jesus  
耶稣

100×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020

—  
072

The Queen  
女王

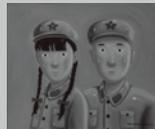
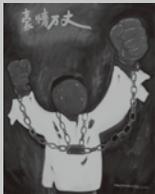
80×100cm  
oil on canvas  
2014

—  
074

The Cultural Revolution story  
— Its time to move on  
向前向前

100×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020

—  
076



The Cultural Revolution story  
— be full of lefty ambitions  
豪情万丈

100×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020

—  
078

The Cultural Revolution story  
— take revenge and wipe out a grudge  
要报仇 要雪恨

100×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2020

—  
080

You are malicious  
算你狠

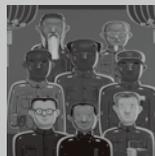
100×120cm  
oil on canvas  
2020

—  
082

International Comedy Series 1  
国际玩笑一

150×300cm  
oil on canvas  
2018

—  
084



International Comedy Series 3  
国际玩笑三

150×300cm  
oil on canvas  
2018

—  
086

Harmony No. 3 — Hero Club (Left)  
和谐3号——英雄会(左)

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2008

—  
088

Harmony No. 3 — Hero Club (Center)  
和谐3号——英雄会(中)

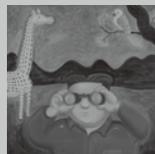
200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2008

—  
088

Harmony No. 3 — Hero Club (Right)  
和谐3号——英雄会(右)

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2008

—  
089



keep one's eyes wide open  
睁大眼睛

150×150cm  
oil on canvas  
2016

—  
090

Hero No.12  
英雄No.12

70×70cm  
lithograph and acrylic on paper  
2016

—  
092

Epidemic news  
疫情报道

100×120cm  
oil on canvas  
2020

—  
094

Telescope  
望远镜

200×200cm  
oil on canvas  
2015

—  
096



*The Little Prince and the Fox*  
小王子与狐狸

100×110cm  
oil on canvas  
2017

—  
098

*The Little Prince (ii)*  
小王子二

80×80cm  
oil on canvas  
2018

—  
100

*Untitled*  
无题

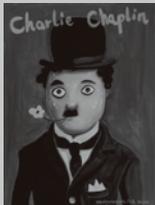
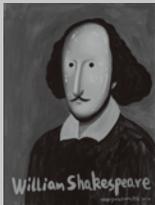
13×26×23cm  
Marble  
2014

—  
102

*Damaged cultural relic*  
损坏的文物

Head 15×17×19cm Body 21×10×12cm  
Marble  
2012

—  
103



*William Shakespeare*  
威廉·莎士比亚

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
104

*Charlie Chaplin*  
查理·卓别林

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
106

*John Lennon*  
约翰·列侬

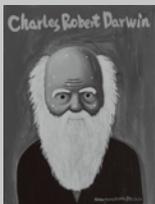
80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
108

*James Watt*  
詹姆斯·瓦特

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
110



*Charles Darwin*  
查尔斯·达尔文

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
112

*Stephen Hawking*  
史蒂芬·霍金

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
114

*Henry VIII*  
亨利八世

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
116

*Alfred the Great*  
阿尔弗雷德大帝

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
118



*Winston Churchill*  
温斯顿·丘吉尔

80×60cm  
oil and acrylic on canvas  
2020

—  
120



Shen Jingdong (1965- ) is an acclaimed contemporary artist of the Chinese new wave movement. His works depict soldiers and workers as icons of Chinese life rendered in blue, green, yellow or red. Shen's works can be seen in collections worldwide.

Shen's first solo ex-

hibition in UK, '*Shen Jingdong: The Beautiful Fairy Tales*', introduces 29 works produced in response to the changing times he faced and archives related to his works. Jingdong's Great Britain series has been selected especially for the upcoming exhibition in London. Through this, you can appreciate the portraits of representative British figures, as viewed from Jingdong's Chinese perspective.

In the 2000s, the emergence of Shen Jingdong in a period of revival for Chinese Contemporary Art suggested a dawning of a new era. Previously, ideological criticism

determined the direction of new contemporary art. Shen Jingdong provides a definitive example of commercialized aesthetics in Chinese pop art. While serving as a soldier, he was praised by a Chinese leader for his theatrical background design, in 1998. He attempted various conceptual and performing arts in the 1990s, influenced by Dadaism and pop art.

In 2006, '*Hero No.12*' was collected in the National Art Museum of China, the Most Famous National Museum of Art in China, and his artistry began to be recognized. His art received numerous praise for its pursuit

of 'cuteness' along with its commercialized ideological features.

Starting in 2007, an exhibitions of his works have been hosted in Hong Kong and New York, and his performances were held in the United States, Italy, the Republic of Korea, Japan, and France.

Through his work, he reveals his innermost thoughts, hidden in metaphors, humor and smiles. Amid the urbanization and globalization going on throughout China, Shen Jingdong can be seen in his works as a witness to the changes globalization brings. Amid the

strengthening of ideology and oppression of freedom that coincides with globalization, his work provides a new way out. Through the harmony of the realm of both imagination and reality, he builds his own fairy tales.

This exhibition shows the changes in the times Shen Jingdong witnessed from China to UK. As an observer of the times, one can see the world drawn by the artist.

His 'Fairy tale' perspective hides knowledge behind a smile. In exploring his work, we too can see what he sees- hiding our new perspective about the world behind a smile.

Published to accompany the exhibition

*Shen JingDong : The Beautiful Fairy Tales*

Asia House, London

24 September - 12 October 2020.

© 2020 Shen JingDong

The Authors have asserted their rights under the Copyright,  
Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the  
Authors of this work.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
Transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic  
Or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any  
Storage and retrieval system, without the prior permission  
in writing from the publisher.

Publisher: Shen JingDong Studio

Curator: Kim Kibu

Critiques: Kim KiBu, Julian Stallabrass, Barry Curtis,

Roger Wagner, Wenny Teo, Bojana Popovic

Designed by: Hanqingtang Design