

Modern China under the artist's microscope



Li Yan / Morono Kiang Gallery

PROTEST: A detail from Li Yan's Snippets series No. 5 at the Morono Kiang Gallery. Li's painting installations are made up of various panels depicting different scenes from accidents and disturbing events.

Beijing painter Li Yan examines contemporary Chinese society and politics at the Morono Kiang Gallery.

By -- Mindy.Farabee @latimes.com

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A WOUNDED man lying upon a hospital bed. [Rioters in Tibet](#). The Dalai Lama. Uniformed athletes. The Olympic torch run. Rendered on grouped canvases, these images spread across the walls of downtown's Morono Kiang Gallery suggest an almost hyperlinked view of recent protests surrounding the Olympics in China.

For 31-year-old Beijing painter Li Yan, news is a muse, and in "Quotidian Truths," his first solo U.S. show, Li explores the various intersections between Chinese sports and politics. In seven painting clusters, called "Snippets," Li relies on splintered details to get at larger truths. "Li breaks apart an event into little pieces in order to analyze it," says gallery co-owner Eliot Kiang.

The artist culls images from television and newspapers, then disembodies them, stripping photos of captions and other contextualizing information and reinterpreting them in acrylics, which he clusters according to a new, internally devised logic. Juxtapositions spark new connections and meanings.

"I look at each of my paintings as the . . . materials needed to constitute a building," Li writes through an interpreter via e-mail. "My works are . . . completed by assembling the debris

together. . . . "

For Li's most recent Beijing show, "[Accident](#)," he set his sights on examining the war in Iraq and the wider issue of terrorism. For the new series, which will be presented in three installments, sports was a natural choice. "In China, you can't avoid the [Olympics](#). It's affecting everything. The Olympics were supposed to make the country more free, but it's doing the opposite. The country is becoming more bureaucratic."

Kiang notes that "each work is a story told through random snippets of images that are part of the whole story." Such storytelling, he adds, is an important aspect of Li's practice. Apparently, though, strict documentary is not.

"I'm only trying to find a valuable way to show the topics and present the process of my own thinking," Li explains. " 'Reality' itself is not my ultimate goal. . . . In the course of this process, crossing the border of my own thinking -- my own subjectivity -- is the most meaningful leap."

QUOTIDIAN TRUTHS

WHERE: Morono Kiang Gallery, 218 W. 3rd Street, Downtown L.A.

WHEN: 12 p.m.-6 p.m. Tues.-Sat. Ends Aug. 23

PRICE: Free

INFO: (213) 628-8208; www.moronokiang.com