

## Chen Ke - Li Jikai - Wei Jia

November 1 - December 8, 2007

Opening reception: Thursday, November 1 from 6 - 8:30

Information: [www.thomaserben.com](http://www.thomaserben.com)

Thomas Erben is pleased to present the United States debut of Chinese painters Chen Ke, Li Jikai and Wei Jia. Through numerous solo and group exhibitions, these three artists, born in the mid to late 70's, have already established strong reputations in China and are garnering international recognition as the new face of contemporary Chinese painting. Their work illustrates a transitional stage within the process of individualization born out of the recent socio-economic transformation. The use of cartoons or stylized human forms, which are a visual constant, reveals a mindset born of the equalitarian conditions of the past yet determined to explore its own individuality.

Chen Ke combines classical techniques and imagery with a contemporary understanding of materiality and the human form. Self-absorbed prepubescent girls stare blindly out from the canvas while surrounded by chunky washes of acrylic paint, richly imagined textiles and occasionally mingle with fantastical creatures. She will also contribute to the exhibition a sculptural installation, including, among other elements, a European-style toilet adorned with dream-like vignettes that belie their vacuous subject matter through their abject materiality.

In each of Li Jikai's large-scale, chromatically reductive works, a diminutive human appears in heavily impastoed fields which bleed around the forlorn figure, giving the existential impression of a landscape on the verge of, or directly following eschatological catastrophe. The tenuous relationship between humanity and environment is focal in Li's canvases, which often locate the narrative in impossibly life-threatening situations.

Though Wei Jia's work also concerns itself with exterior, physical threats, often in the tangible form of guns and knives, his focus falls upon the shadowy realms his endangered, solitary characters inhabit. While these surroundings possess both architectural and natural elements, an overriding contextual emptiness leaves viewers with the sense of having visited a limbo - not a space, but a space between - where violence exists with unchecked, un-judged supremacy. Jia's expansive, watery works in shades of gray, pink, violet and black are awash in gothic, vaguely mystical scenarios that resist resolution.

Reacting to the kaleidoscope of compulsive economic growth, endemic environmental pollution and an uprooting of social structures all culminating in a frightening potential for social unrest, these artists have symbiotically set out on a quest in search of self. While Chen's work, which delves most fully into the realm of the unreal, supposes optimistically that separation can offer infinite creative outlets, Li remains precariously and undesirably isolated, while Wei speaks to a more encompassing view that tempers an intimidating reality with transcendent potential.

This exhibition is curated by Tamar Arnon & Eli Zagury and was co-ordinated in China by Mrs. Wei.