

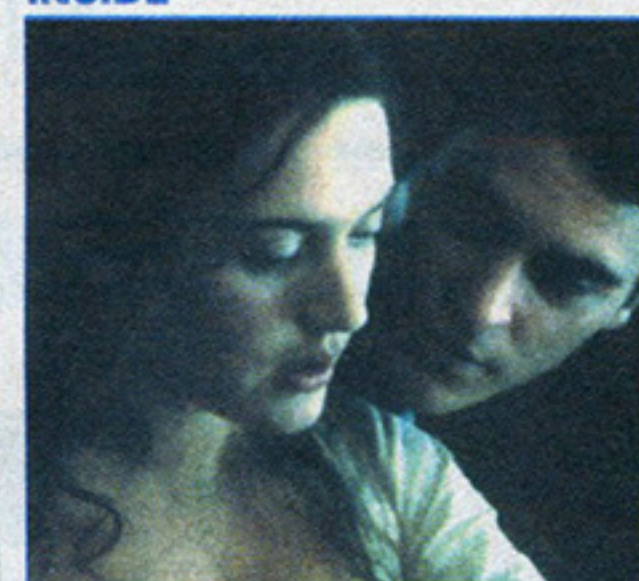
Weekend

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INSIDE



The price of repression

PAGE 3



A sleepless journey

PAGE 6



Surviving 9-21

PAGE 6

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Cartoon characters get raunchy new look

Yang Mao-lin's controversial exhibit aims to alter perceptions of immortal superheroes such as Superman, Pokemon

BY GAVIN PHIPPS
STAFF REPORTER

Three years ago, artist Yang Mao-lin created a work that was so revolutionary, it shook the local art community. Entitled "Inviting The Immortals," the exhibit saw images from Europe, U.S., Japan, China and Taiwan strewn together in a series of montages that portrayed Yang's version — however hellish it may have appeared — of "cultural intercourse." This piece attempted to pin-point Taiwan's place in the big global scheme of things.

"My idea in 1999 was to create a world in which the viewer was asked to search amongst the pieces for Taiwan's identity. After all, Taiwan is a bit American, a bit Japanese and a bit European. It's a boiling pot with a mixture of cultures and concepts all intertwined and all fighting to win prominence," explains Yang as we amble around his latest exhibition. "By creating huge collages made up of assorted images from across the globe, I had hoped to explain that Taiwan is, for all purposes a country that exists the way it does not because of one culture, but because of the many interlocking cultures that have arrived on Taiwan's shores over the years."

Amazing heroes

For his latest exhibition, Yang has taken his surreal and sarcastic approach to art one step further. So far in fact, that some might say that "Man, You're Disgusting" would be a more apt title for this new series of works.

Actually entitled "Baby, You're Amazing: Inviting The Immortals II," the exhibition has generated as much favorable attention as damning condemnation since it opened in Taipei last weekend.

This is hardly surprising, as Yang has relied on an altogether different form



In "Baby, You're Amazing: Inviting The Immortals II," artist Yang Mao-lin distorts and exaggerates images of masculinity using popular cartoon figures.

of intercourse for his latest exhibition. The artist has taken to forms of intercourse such as sodomy and fellatio in an attempt to create an Alice In Wonderland-esque world. A world, that while shocking, takes a surreal and sarcastic view of not only cross-cultural intercourse, but challenges our perception and understanding of certain stereotypical images.

"While the work is questioning our perception of certain well-known characters by putting them in an out of

place environment and then watching how they interact with characters of a different nature, I've also used it as a platform to make fun of certain stereotypical traits," Yang continues, pointing to a piece in which two robotic creatures can be seen performing a sexual act in the middle of the desert as two Bedouins ride past on camels with an angel looking on. "Masculinity for instance. When you see the cartoon character, Pokemon, sodomizing in a pornographic image,

it isn't simply to shock. After all, what could destroy our conceptions of the cute cuddly little yellow creature more when suddenly Pokemon — whom we can assume to be male — has become just that: A male with more on his mind than simply saving the universe."

Comic books meet kitsch

It's not only the Japanese cartoon hero whose clean image is tarnished by

the sarcastic graphic hand of Yang. In Yang's world, the most masculine of all characters, Superman, is caught with his pantyhose down. Atomic King can be seen baring his all and even Superwoman gets in on the act. In fact, nearly every superhero to be found on the shelves of comic book stores and book shops in Taiwan has been ridiculed by Yang in some form or another.

"I guess the idea to use pornography and superheroes came from my

"I know it may sound a bit perverse, but when people are shocked by my works and simply walk away, or drag their children away as is often the case, I get a bit of a kick out of it. After all, I've turned their world and the perceptions they have of certain things upside down."

— Yang Mao-lin

Artist

enjoyment of kitsch. I like sleazy strip clubs, not for the services they offer, you understand, but for the surreal feel they have. Funeral cars with nude or semi-nude women atop of them are the same," states Yang as a couple of young women begin to photograph several of his more illustrative works. "Wherever you look, masculinity and kitsch go hand-in-hand. By using computer generated images, I feel I've brought kitsch and vulgarity to a world that is more often thought of as cold and without feeling."

No worries

Of course, reproducing well-known cartoon characters is nothing new. The cleanest of all clean-cut cartoon characters, Tin Tin, has been reproduced in publications that depict him prowling the strip clubs of Bangkok and performing sexual acts with his lovable dog, Snowy. Needless to say, the owners of the Tin Tin copyright didn't sit idly back. They attempted to sue the culprit and had all the illegal reproductions destroyed.

Not that such actions worry Yang.

Continued on Weekend Page 8