

ARTS

Diverse and accomplished show by promising new artist

ART

Sasha Grishin

WEI Rong Wu: Glimpses.
Beaver Galleries, 81
Denison Street, Deakin.
Closes May 30, Tues-Sun
10am-5pm

Wei Rong Wu is a Shanghai-born artist who has been living in Australia since the 1990s and is based in Canberra.

In 2013 she graduated from the art school in Canberra and in 2019 she collaborated with eX de Medici when they undertook a three-week trip to China. This resulted in an 11-metre-long Chinese painting album that recorded their shared travel experiences. This exhibition at the Beaver Galleries is her first solo show.

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inks and materials are combined in some of the pieces with European modes of visualisation and techniques of representation.

She writes of her intentions in this exhibition, "glimpses of China and Europe during my travels, my local landscape (that, though fleeting, exerted a profound impression), current affairs and works by ancient Chinese masters. The synthesis of Western-Eastern artistic techniques and concepts expresses my concern at the current and ongoing situation over the last year and hopes to acquire harmony and peace with beauty beyond time and space in

the painting."

A key feature of this exhibition is the use of the traditional Chinese Xuan paper that was originally produced in the Tang dynasty and was famous for its soft and fine texture and a white surface that was particularly suitable for calligraphy and painting. In 2009, the traditional craft of making Xuan paper was inscribed on UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Her Use of Spies is an intense drawing (measuring 84 by 60cm) that is covered with red ink calligraphy on Xuan paper where interspersed amongst the



Wei Rong Wu, The Gallery (detail).

Chinese characters are several exquisite watercolour insertions by eX de Medici highlighted with passages of gold leaf. The text is drawn from the famous ancient treatise 'the art of war', attributed to Sun Tzu, where in chapter 13 he outlines the use of spies. Part of the text reads: "Hence the use of spies, of whom there are five classes: (1) Local spies; (2)

inward spies; (3) converted spies; (4) doomed spies; (5) surviving spies. When these five kinds of spy are all at work, none can discover the secret system. This is called 'divine manipulation of the threads.' It is the sovereign's most precious faculty." The interspersed watercolour drawings can be read as a visual gloss on the text with emblems of contemporary

and ancient forms of surveillance, power, vengeance and authority.

Despite the surface lyricism the underlying message concerns the deadly consequences of spies and authority. It is an unusual and effective piece where possible layers of meaning accumulate the longer one stays with the work. Some of the other pieces at the show, including The Gallery, are overwhelming in their conceptual ambitions. This drawing is like a kaleidoscope of art and ideologies whirling around what I take to be an image of the artist. It is indeed a very crowded assembly of glimpses.

Wei Rong Wu's first solo exhibition is a diverse and promising field of artistic endeavour where different traditions meet, collide and dart off in different directions. A promising start for an emerging artist.