

Consumption (In its many guises)

2005 was the year of the Rooster in the Chinese calendar. While Pamela does not utilise the signs of the Chinese zodiac as an annually changing symbol in her practice, the beauty and strength of her work makes it an obvious choice in art commissions for the Spring Festival. Pamela's chooks encapsulate a deeper meaning. In China roosters are a traditional symbol of government – government as a concept, rather than The Government. Hens, the life-givers, passively watch.

Animals often feature in See's work as symbols of human behaviour. In 2004 she created the installation *Eco-tourism*, a work with hundreds of papercut prawns that she made when living in north Queensland. Prawns are a ubiquitous food source for many, both in the Big Blue and on land. See pondered the notion of an industry that finds awe in the Reef and then encourages their participants to dine on the same. In *States of happiness* and *Eating happiness* she revisits such ideas. In Cantonese the word for prawn is pronounced 'ha' – a meal of prawns may be considered as a reflection upon sounds of joy.

While See doesn't work within an overtly political canon, her work none-the-less addresses political issues. Thirty years after his death and Mao still stands tall as *the* key political figure in the People's Republic. *Creature comforts* is not an act of defiance but a prompt to the mass consumerism that has overtaken much of the world, at least those with the cash to be part of it. The work is not about walking on Mao's image, rather it reflects upon the ubiquitous nature of the Chairman's portrait as a symbol of China and the endless reproductions of his visage in pop culture.

Its companion work, *100% Ackyuc*,¹ is a contemplation upon notions of The Authentic and The Fake. Serious consumers often live by their brands. A 'cheap knock-off' seems obvious in Australia, but how authentic is one garment over another when you buy it from the town it was made? Is a hoodie from one warehouse more 'real' than its equivalent available from a nearby street stall? Australian wool is regarded as among the best in the world, but how much of the locally available product is produced locally? With falling sale value yet high demand, Australian wool is in a state of limbo.

In China the toad is a symbol of wealth and prosperity, while in Australia the toad is considered a pest. See's work reflects upon introduced species and the nature of life. All creatures have their lot in life, but do toads dream of life as a frog?

Similarly her works derived from beer packaging consider the potential damage of the introduction of foreign matter into a community. Alcohol has proved very damaging in many communities and has spread like the weeds depicted within the imagery. Indeed, a plant in one region can easily be a pest in another. The stylistically-related imagery cut into car mats considers the impact of modern life on the natural environment. Endangered species are represented within a manufactured product that is specifically designed for machinery that has a large impact on the environment.

In a more abstract manner, her works *Satisfaction*, *First spark* and *Sweet somethings* are papercuts of paper, more specifically the wrappings from consumer items. These are more self-reflective artworks, considering the nature, form and use of paper within a broader social milieu.

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Gordon Craig is the Curator (Collections & Exhibitions) at the QUT Art Museum, Brisbane.

¹ Write ACRYLIC in small, scrawling letters and you may realise how this misnomer occurred.





Pamela Mei-Leng See

Consumption – papercuts

Opening Thursday 22 November 6-8 pm
Exhibition 21 November – 15 December 2007
www.boutwelldrapergallery.com.au

Above, Wrapper, 2007, paper, 28 x 34 cm
Right, Fowl Play, 2007, paper, 45 x 55 cm
Cover, Cane Toad Dreaming, 2005, paper, 90 x 120 cm

Overleaf left, Inside every Toad, 2005, paper, 150 x 180 cm
Overleaf right, Daviesta, 2006, car mat, 61 x 43 cm



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