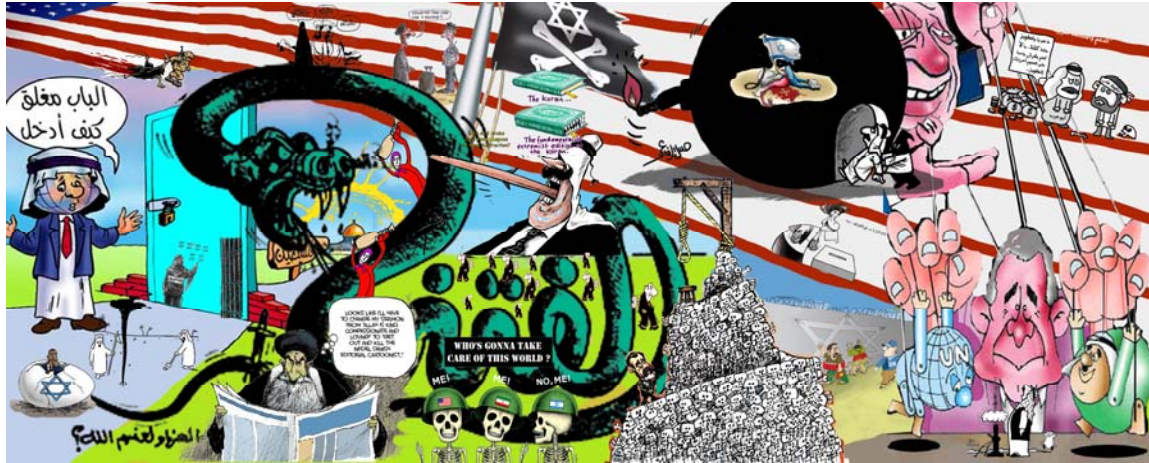


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## **XU ZHEN: *Lonely Miracle*—Middle East Contemporary Art Exhibition**

**Curated by MadeIn Co, Ltd**

**September 10—October 10, 2009**

James Cohan Gallery is pleased to present the second gallery exhibition by Chinese conceptual artist, Xu Zhen. A leading figure among the young generation of Chinese artists, Xu Zhen is a chameleon of concept whose work often takes the form of theatrical pranks and provocative interventions in order to confront socio-political taboos within the context of contemporary China.

In this exhibition, Xu Zhen plays the trickster once again by presenting paintings, sculptures and installations by a “new generation” of Middle Eastern artists. Under the curatorship of MadeIn Co. Ltd, a company established by the artist that is described as a “multi-functional art company,” Xu Zhen seeks to create a fiction that will provoke the viewer to think about issues of cultural perception. A deft master at creating alternate realities and mistaken identities, Xu Zhen challenges viewers to doubt the exhibition’s validity even though the artworks and ideas are presented as facts.

## JAMES COHAN GALLERY

By choosing the Middle East as subject, Xu Zhen makes a statement about the Iraq war and Western imperialism while declaring, somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that this exhibition “authentically reflects the freedom and the variety of the artistic creation in the Middle East’s contemporary cultural environment”. He presents us with works rife with clichéd symbols, such as Arabic calligraphy, fragments of ceramic artifacts, images of camels and political cartoons, in an attempt to create work that meets Western expectations for a new brand of contemporary Middle Eastern art much in the same way that smiling Mao and Panda paintings became the brand for post-Cultural Revolutionary art in China in the 1980’s. This exhibition highlights the interplay between the tendency of the West to create a neat package for art from other cultures and the artists’ willing participation in these expectations, a phenomenon supported and enhanced by the market bubble. With a wink of an eye, Xu Zhen defies artistic colonialism by asking the viewer to accept these stereotypes as compelling. In essence, by displaying a fiction, Xu Zhen creates the real, thereby posing his answer to the question faced by the next generation of Chinese artists—what, after all, is authentic?

Over his decade-long career, Xu Zhen has exhibited at museums, biennales and art fairs worldwide. Most recently, his controversial installation, *The Starving of Sudan*, 2009, was seen in Art Unlimited at Art Basel 40, as well as at Long March Space in Beijing in early 2009. In a memorable installation at Art Basel Miami Beach 2007, Xu Zhen created an exact replica of a Shanghai convenience store complete with product packages, cash register and uniformed employees, making a clever commentary on the commercial context of the art fair. Xu Zhen has participated in major international group exhibitions such as *The Conspiracy* at the Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland (2009); Performa07, New York (2007); the 10<sup>th</sup> International Istanbul Biennial (2007); Art Unlimited at ArtBasel 38 (2007); *China Power Station: Part II*, Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway (2007); and *The Real Thing: Contemporary Art from China* at Tate Liverpool (2007). Xu was also included in the 49<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale (2001), and represented China at the 51<sup>st</sup> Venice Biennale, (2005). Xu Zhen was born in 1977 and lives and works in Shanghai.

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