

The Rebel Alliance theatre company likes to chart its own course. Refusing to depend on public funding to stage its work, it is joining forces with the seven-man band Bored Gordon for a night of cocktails, music and a one-off performance of the solo show *The Orderly* at the Town Hall Concert Chamber on Sunday at 6.30pm.

Montana Wines is a sponsor for the fundraiser, which aims to raise money to take *The Orderly* to Wellington's Bats Theatre next month and support the company's next production, *The Bomb*, at Auckland's Herald Theatre in June.

The Orderly is based on the life of the late Peter Russell, whom writer and performer Michael Downey met when he worked at Auckland's North Shore Hospital. Peter fought as a Viking in the weekends in the historical re-enactment group the Auckland Norse. The last season of *The Orderly* was a sell-out.

imentary canal, and a row of and disappointment. Yet three little rope is fastened to a clear in rock. The miserables to The Third Man to gain

A showcase of China's sinister si

VISUAL ARTS: A new style of Chinese art reflecting a post-Tiananmen Square life is being snapped up worldwide. Isabel Haarhaus reports

TO COINCIDE with the Chinese New Year, Gow Langsford Gallery is exhibiting, for the first time, *Contemporary Artists from China*. "This is part of our international programme," explains gallery co-director Gary Langsford, who has noticed worldwide interest in Chinese art grow over the past decade.

"I've seen works go from \$25,000 to \$1 million in five years. It's a tremendous growth market and we want to offer our collectors the same opportunities as overseas collectors."

The exhibition is a broad overview — including painting, photography, sculpture and performance — rather than a thematically based show, but it reflects China's recent socio-political changes in its homage to Western visual art influences: high renaissance, expressionism and pop art.

But overall, the tone is slightly sinister, as if something is not quite right. The works imply post-Tiananmen Square disillusionment, cynicism and even condemnation. For example, Cui Guotai's two large acrylic paintings of an industrial rooftop and a factory, under bland oppressive skies, are bleak to say the least.

Blood seems to be dripping from the external staircase in one of them and the buildings look more like slaughterhouses than testaments to the superpower's economic boom.

Feng Zhengjie's pop art-style woman, *China 2005 no 21*, is spookily cock-eyed, and Sheng Qi's street scenes are peopled only by the ubiquitous Mao banner, overlaid with graffiti-like scrawl in what appears to be an effort to rewrite or at least engage with the country's long domination by one figure.

Li Luming's *The Wedding* deals with similar subject matter, although his repre-

EXHIBITION

- **What:** Contemporary Artists from China
- **Where and when:** Gow Langsford Gallery to March 3

sentation is of the lambs to the slaughter, a blurred portrait of the hopeful couple, dressed in standard-issue Maoist uniform, the bride holding the mandatory little red book. Only the pink roses — one each for the bride and groom — distinguish the pair as anything other than sacrificial soldiers in the great march forward.

According to his biography, Luming is heavily influenced by the German artist Gerhard Richter, whose work is also concerned with the brutalising of his country by dangerous leadership and ideology. Luming renders his paintings in a style similar to Richter's photo-based series.

Luming is a big name in China and has exhibited prolifically throughout Asia, Europe and the United States. *The Wedding* is lifesize (2m x 1.5m) and technically ambitious — a mark of what Langsford identifies as the key characteristic of contemporary Chinese art.

"Unlike Western artists, the Chinese, almost without exception, are traditionally trained. They are highly skilled drawers and painters, and no matter how big they get they seem to continue to make their own work.

"Whereas the Western tradition has the studio within which the artist presides over the realisation of an idea, in China the process remains very much hands-on for the artist."

The only artist in the show outside China is Auckland's Frank Fu. In his thrice-daily piece, Fu ritually kneels on a rug outside the gallery's main prays for one hour to the word of Contemporary Art" pin yellow-gold electric candle.

Fu stays remarkably still in prayer, unaffected by the traf work noise and pedestrians' his white synthetic suit and pose, Fu cuts quite a figure an familiar to those who have s described "interventionist" p art elsewhere.

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Downcase of China's sinister side

Western style of Chinese art reflecting a Square life is being snapped up by Haarhaus reports

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The only artist in the show to be trained outside China is Auckland MIT graduate Frank Fu. In his thrice-daily performance piece, Fu ritually kneels on a red prayer mat outside the gallery's main window and prays for one hour to the words "In Memory of Contemporary Art" printed above a yellow-gold electric candle.

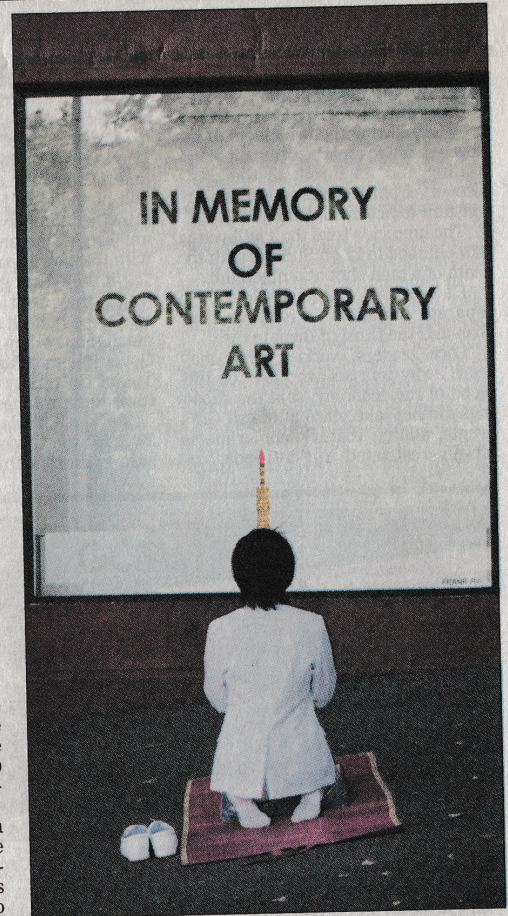
Fu stays remarkably still throughout his prayer, unaffected by the traffic and road-work noise and pedestrians' reactions. In his white synthetic suit and concentrated pose, Fu cuts quite a figure and may appear familiar to those who have seen this self-described "interventionist" practising his art elsewhere.

Influenced by Zen teachings about the potency of direct action and direct experience, Fu's methodology is grounded in the "here and now" of everyday life.

He is interested in "equalities and the freedom for everybody to talk", and at the Sydney Biennale last year, he interrupted an inaugural speech by standing on a stool, ringing a bell and reading from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

He has also been known to hand out 300 ping-pong balls to passers-by, set up rogue radio stations, stage a 12-hour public life and, posing as a lift attendant, coerce unsuspecting (and remarkably obliging) passengers to bounce up and down on a pillow in time with the lift's motion.

"We need something new and fresh in our lives," Fu enthuses, "something so we reconsider our daily lives and surroundings." Much younger than the other artists in the show, Fu shares a commitment to change and outspokenness, which in the context of historical China comes across as tentative and daring, as well as timely.



PRAYER TIME: Frank Fu performs interventionist art outside the gallery. PICTURE / DEAN PURCELL

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