

Art Reviews

By LEAH OLLMAN
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Meditations on Moral Failings

This year's Whitney Biennial has been dismissed as bleak, pious and naive by the New York Times, banal, dreary and thin by this paper. It's hard to imagine that **Yun-Fei Ji**, one of the 113 artists included in the exhibition, doesn't offer at least one redeeming moment, based on his small but engaging show at Post.

Ji's paintings cross the freakish moralizing of Hieronymous Bosch with the literary atmospherics of traditional Chinese landscape painting, and filter them both through a 21st century sensibility honed by natural disasters, warfare and violation of the environment.

Only two paintings hang here (additional studies are available for viewing), but their dense imagery sustains attention equal to a much larger show. Both paintings, in ink and mineral pigments on mulberry paper, read immediately as older than they are. Smoky gray and blue washes stain the paper, which appears abraded with age. The linear articulation of figures, craggy rocks, trees and waterfalls subscribes to a classical Chinese idiom.

As if seen from an elevated viewpoint, the landscapes consume the entire vertical span of the paper, forgoing a horizon to allow for more narrative action to unfold among the multiple, continuous zones of the composition. In "Three Gorges Project," clouds billow and waves ripple as if a final reckoning were taking place.

Scale has lost its familiar logic. Flies outsize cars. Cicadas and wasps and several creepy, hybrid, Bosch-like creatures with scissor beaks and leonine jowls posture in vaguely threatening ways. An apocalyptic wind has unhinged this world, loosing trucks and tanks and houses through the air.

"The Boxer, the Missionary and Their Gods" follows much the same format but presents a more complex narrative, ripe with the odd and grotesque.

The cast here includes goddesses and demons, decapitated bodies and a multi-headed tree. Creatures of land, sea and air, mortal and mythic, all exercise their power—or suffer their powerlessness—on this fantastic, time-warped stage.

Something has gone cosmically wrong here, yet the New York-based Ji has given us an opportunity to savor and reflect. His work, as he says, "is a meditation on the land as the image of our own moral failure."

Post, 1904 E. 7th Place, L.A., (213) 622-8580, through May 18. Closed Sunday through Tuesday.