

21 NOVEMBER - 17 DECEMBER 2008
opening 6 - 8pm Friday 21 November

Turner Galleries are very pleased to host their second exhibition of paintings by the acclaimed contemporary Chinese/Australian artist Guan Wei.

Guan Wei was born in 1957, in Beijing, a descendant of Manchu nobility under the Qing Dynasty. He graduated in 1986 from the Department of Fine Arts at Beijing's Capital University, and began work as a high school teacher. He first visited Australia in early 1989 to undertake a two-month residency at the Tasmanian School of Art. He returned home to witness the atrocities of Tiananmen Square and painted his most political work to that date, *Two finger exercises*, in which his irresistible and exuberant plump figures extend two fingers in a V-for-victory sign.

The Tasmanian School of Art invited Guan Wei back to Australia in 1990 and he applied for permanent residence under the Distinguished Talent Scheme. Guan Wei's wife Liu Pin joined him in 1992 and in 1993 he was granted Australian residency. During these early years in Australia his paintings underwent obvious stylistic changes. His colour palette began to reflect the strong colours of Australia, his forms became increasingly graphic and simplified, and Australian animals and western icons were incorporated into his search for a unique visual language that would combine his Chinese cultural background with his new home. Environmental, political and scientific themes pertinent to Australia also emerged, such as the *Test Tube Baby* series of 1992 and the *Efficacy of Medicine* series of 1995. Guan Wei has laid down three requirements for his artworks: wisdom, humour and knowledge. "Wisdom is to do with making clever choices to engender an interesting combination. Humour makes the pictures lively and fun, reducing the gap between the work and viewer, to allow for an intimate friendly feeling. Knowledge imbues the work with a certain depth, so that it is not just pleasing to the eye."ⁱ

Guan Wei's socio-political themes evolved to include colonisation, migration and the plight of refugees. Two multi-panelled screens in this exhibition, from the *A Distant Land* series of 2006, picture small boats overflowing with people, the silhouettes of sailing ships, sea monsters eating dragons and menacing boat people, whilst spear holding natives watch on from imagined islands. He stated in 2005 "The longer I live in Australia the more involved I become. I sometimes think what if I had gone to Europe or to America instead? I can't imagine what my work would be like because my work is really about what is happening here. Or if I was still in China my work would be totally different. For some artists they would be doing the same things but I am very sensitive to the culture and the responsibilities to this land and these people."ⁱⁱ

Artworks from two other current bodies of work are also on display in this exhibition: *Zodiac*, and *On Cloud*. They both contain the design elements that his work has become instantly recognisable for: the plump floating figures and stylised clouds. *Zodiac* combines East with West with each panel suggesting man's cosmic explorations. Lines and circles indicate orbital motion and planes, the names of the western Zodiac are inscribed along with their star formations encased by floating white figures. However, Guan Wei is also evoking ancient Chinese legends and folk literature relating to the heavens as well as the meridians in an acupuncture diagram. He is also influenced by the philosophy of traditional Taoism and the concept of the dualism of being, which is why the figures in his paintings have just one eye.

Guan Wei was represented by Sherman Galleries until its recent reconfiguration into the Sherman Foundation and is now represented by Kaliman Gallery in Sydney and Arc One in Melbourne. He has exhibited widely, both in Australia and overseas, and has been awarded numerous prizes (9), grants (6) and residencies (15), including a Fellowship Grant from the Australia Council this year, and the prestigious Sulman Prize in 2002. He has held over forty solo exhibitions and he has been included in numerous important contemporary exhibitions in Australia and internationally, such as *The Rose Crossing*, 1999, *Lines of Descent*, which toured in 2000 - 2001, *Nature Machine* at the Queensland Art Gallery in 2005, *Scienceasart* at the Art Gallery of NSW, and major survey exhibitions such as the *Third Asia-Pacific Triennial* held in Brisbane in 1999 and *Handle with Care* the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art in 2008. His artworks can be found in many public collections.

Guan Wei first came to Perth in 2004, to participate in The Church Gallery (now Turner Galleries) Artist in Residence Programme. He currently lives in Sydney and Beijing.

Please do not hesitate to contact staff on 08 9227 1077 or email info@turnergalleries.com.au should you require more information or images from the exhibition. Exhibition works are available to view on line: www.turnergalleries.com.au

ⁱ Guan Wei, "10 years in Australia", *Postwest*, #19, 2001, p.17.

ⁱⁱ Quote from "Guan Wei: Cultural navigator" essay by Dinah Dysart, *Guan Wei*, Craftsman House, 2006, p.13.