

百年大计
教育为本



red brick, while behind them are fields of wheat and rubble, and buildings latticed with scaffolding. Most of Han Bing's subjects wear beaming smiles. The colours are saturated, which gives the images an emphatic air. There's also something theatrical to the poses; the labourers hold their red brick in a pose reminiscent of the way revolutionaries grasping Mao's Little Red Book would be depicted in hand-drawn propaganda posters.

Talking to Han Bing, via a translator, he explains that most of the people in these photographs come to the big cities to work in construction. "But once they've finished and go back to

their rural towns, the experience changes them. They want to be part of a new, urban culture that they've seen."

The dream of the 1980s, the artist explains, was of red-brick houses for all – the dignity of a home for every family. Yet that blessed brick is now obsolete. The new materials, seen in the grey urban expanses behind the subjects in these photographs, have taken over: cold, functional steel and plastics. These migrant workers are still chasing a faded dream.

While Nixon was visiting China, Mao's Cultural Revolution was in full swing. Han Bing's father, a noted academic and intellectual, was forced to work on a farm collective as part of the programme along with millions of others. Had he protested, death would surely have followed. This sort of unequivocal wrench, Han Bing explains, could be compared with the unfamiliar and harsh urban world that China's rural masses are today being dragged into as they plug into the migrant economy.

But some habits die hard. Workers will collect the bricks from houses that have been demolished to make way for shining new towers. They will take these back to their rural villages, in the hope that, eventually, they'll have enough to build their own house.

This urge for self-reliance, Han Bing suggests, is an act of resistance. He says there are regular protests by the migrant labour force – disaffected with corruption and missing wages – that slip beyond the eye of the international press. Holding bricks becomes an act of protest, according to the artist, even if they are not being hurled at glass houses. ㊟

"THE URGE FOR SELF-RELIANCE, HAN BING SUGGESTS, IS AN ACT OF RESISTANCE"

THE NEW REVOLUTION

A new exhibition highlights the migrant workers caught in China's rush to urbanisation

BY CHRISTOPHER LORD

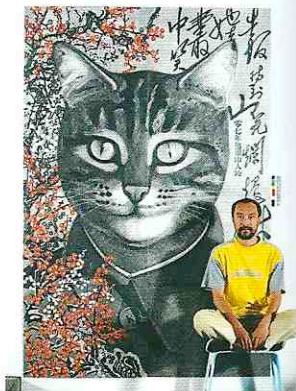
In John Adams's opera, *Nixon In China* – the story of the U.S. head of state's 1972 visit to Mao Zedong's new utopia – a haunting refrain is repeatedly sung by a chorus of grey, identically-dressed men and women: "The people are the heroes now, the behemoth pulls the peasant's plough."

Yet China's lightning economic ascent over the past two decades increasingly overshadows these rural origins. When Mao declared that the future of the country lay in an agrarian revolution, and propagandists began sketching smiling peasant folk hauling oversized vegetables, the plough became as fundamental to the Party line as the Soviet hammer and sickle. But today, China's identity is one of growth rather than growing. And as industrialisation ripples out from newly built megacities across the country, farmland is engulfed by factories and farmers down tools to join that most modern of movements – migrant labour.

These people-in-flux are at the centre of artist Han Bing's 2005 photography series, "New Culture Movement", part of a group show of Chinese artists at Dubai's Etemad Gallery. Han Bing's work explores the villages that cling to the edges of Beijing's suburban sprawl. The locals – mostly migrant labourers – have been snapped each holding aloft a humble

CHINESE EXPORTS

The 25 Chinese artists participating in Middle Kingdom offer an alternative to what we might think of as contemporary Chinese art. Here are a few highlights:



QIU JIE

Huge charcoal drawings offering an idealised vision of China, and eerily stitched together with communist rhetoric. Subjects include women in Mao-style garb fixing electricity poles over ancient pagodas.



CHEN HENG FENG

Logos, branding and Colonel Sanders, the subject of a video work in which the artist assembles the KFC patriarch's face out of corn kernels, all come under scrutiny in Hang Feng's work. Look out also for his projects using the ancient Chinese art of paper cutting.

WANG ZIWEI

An emergent artist from the lesser known Shanghai scene, Zi Wei pulls the cutesy carpet out from under pop art to offer more breathless and disturbing portraits of icons of the West – executed with a sense for wry Chinese styling.

Middle Kingdom is at Dubai's Etemad Gallery from September 19-November 12