

Fan Dongwang Carving Perspectives

25 January to 22 February 2025



FOYER

Lady & Lion – After Botticelli Pallas and the Centaur, 仕女和狮子 2023,
acrylic on canvas, 184 x 174 cm

The main message in Botticelli's painting is associated with uncontrolled passion, lust and sensuality, and submission of passion to reason. Here it is about the conflict of race and gender difference played out between the west and east (lion and lady).

Dragon and a wisdom pearl, 龙和智慧之珠 2014, acrylic on paper, 57 x 56.5 cm

A dragon is a quintessential Chinese cultural icon developed through many thousands of years from the historical pictographic letters into to an imaginary image in paintings. The dragon became an imagined divine animal that combines the body of a snake, face of a horse, antlers of a deer, claws of an eagle, beard of a goat and scales of a fish. In Chinese folk religion, dragons control the rain and they are aquatic creatures living in sky and water with fluid and hybrid identities, using their wisdom to navigate the terrain of ongoing environmental change.

Big Dragon Head, 大龙头 2016, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 180 cm

My dragon image is a hybrid of tradition and the contemporary that represents this unique cultural identity in today's Australian communities. I have mixed traditional Chinese three-dimensional carving techniques and blended it with Western pop art colour palettes, thereby combining these two schools of art via the iconography of the dragon. It's a contemporary interpretation that sets my work apart from the traditional style design, while retaining its accessibility and popular appeal given its roots in the traditional dragon images.

Nüwa Mending Sky and Creating Human, 女娲补天造人 2024,
acrylic on canvas, 90.5 x 73.5 cm

Nüwa, a female snake, embodying both human and serpentine characteristics, was celebrated as a mother goddess and a cultural hero within the framework of Chinese mythology.

Revered in Chinese folk religion, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, Nüwa is credited with the creation of humanity and the restoration of the Pillar of Heaven. According to Chinese mythology, Nüwa is considered the progenitor of all humans. She shaped individuals from yellow clay and brown mud, giving rise to the "cord-made people" who emerged from her unique process of creation.

A Study of Abbotsleigh, 阿伯茨利习作 2024, acrylic on canvas, 33 x 46 cm

ENTRY BETWEEN ROOM 1 AND 2

Dragon Banner 1-4, 龙旗 2024, printed fabric, 1 x 3 metres each

These four large dragon banners were designed for the Sydney City Council 2024 Year of the Dragon celebration, exhibited at George Street (from QVB to King Street) in February 2024. The design was based on my paintings of dragons.

ROOM 1

Arhat, 罗汉 2023, acrylic on canvas, 181 x 124 cm

In this exhibition I employ a new method of 'painting as relief sculpture' to produce the 'sculptural painting' the same way as jade or lacquer carving, I use the brush to 'carve (paint) out' the painting's surface, as if carving a jade low relief. This brings out a sense of 3D volume on the 2D surface, a visual illusionism expressed brilliantly in traditional Chinese art. The flat brushwork and bright colours are influenced by hard edge abstraction and pop art. In these ways, my paintings combine the principles of contemporary Western and traditional Chinese art.

Arhat in Buddhism is a perfect person, one who has gained insight into the true nature of existence and has achieved nirvana (spiritual enlightenment). Here he is sitting under a Bodhi tree of life, pointing towards the future.

Guardian, 门神 2015, acrylic on canvas, 181 x 124 cm

Guardian is a temple god (Persian looking warrior that protects people's property/home). Persian culture spread to China when they came from the west to trade with the Tang dynasty. The Arhat also looks like a Persian. The traditional Chinese decorative arts are heavily influenced by the west: India and Persia.

Jade Dragon, 玉龙 2010, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 180 cm

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Jade Maze (Pendant of Auspicious clouds), 玉佩 2010, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 180 cm

A pattern of auspicious clouds or water from ancient Chinese ritual bronze vessels associated with deities, Chinese Immortals and the Will of Heaven.

ROOM 2

Dragon in Water Diptych #1, 龙在水中升起 (三连画#1) 2023, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 120 cm

After decades of working on the dragon image, they have evolved over the time. Now a dragon is rising from the sea. Here the water is the environment, the agent for changes. Water dissolves and transforms the old into the new. The horizontal lines represent complex layers as though the dragon is coming through many different realms (earth, water and air). Therefore, the traditional Chinese icon has been developed into a new kind of postmodern dragon: one that has disintegrated and is reintegrating. The dragon has not diminished but re-emerged at an unprecedented new level.

Dragon in Water Diptych #2, 龙在水中升起 (三连画#2) 2023, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 120 cm

The flat brushwork and bright colours of my dragon paintings are influenced by the western hard edge abstract, optical illusionism and pop art. In this way, my paintings combine and transform the principles of contemporary Western and traditional Chinese Art. Works by Roy Lichtenstein, Kandinsky, David Hockney as well as Hokusai and many Chinese masters are in my mind when I am working.

Dragon in Water Diptych #3, 龙在水中升起 (三连画#3) 2023, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 120 cm

In ancient Daoist thought, water is a highly charged significant symbol, a fountain from which wisdom springs. More than this, the Daoist tells us, water is life, water is Dao, and water is the Way. Be Water is Ch'an Buddhism (Chinese Zen). Therefore, in Chinese art, water is everywhere and important: sea, lake, river, mountain waterfall, sky and clouds.

Yellow dragon head, 黄龙头 2010, acrylic canvas, 180 x 180 cm

My dragon image depicts a creature of myth and legend, a symbol of good fortune, strength and health. It is a divine beast that delivers good fortune. It is a powerful cultural symbol of many Asian communities. The Lunar New Year of the dragon celebrated its characteristics of innovativeness, enterprise, flexibility, self-assurance, bravery and passion, and connected the people both to their past as well as to their future advancements.

A Roaring Dragon Head, 咆哮的龙头 2010, acrylic on canvas, 180 x 180 cm

The dragon is also a symbol of protection. It has a fierce and aggressive appearance that can drive away the evil spirit. Chinese dragons traditionally symbolise potent and auspicious powers, particularly control over water, rainfall, typhoons and floods.

***Golden Age – Willow Pattern*, 柳树的黄金时代 2024, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 50 cm**

This is inspired by the China Blue Willow pattern blue and white porcelain dishes depicting an oriental love story that turned into a tragedy. A pair of young lovers rebelled against the expectations of the patriarchal society, longing for freedom, and were ruthlessly killed. The Chinese story became famous when the British turned it to a successful global trade showcased in the early 19th century. The work aims to be part of the cultural exchange and artistic dialogues instigated by global trade and migration through many centuries.

***A Foot Bridge Towards Abbotsleigh*, 通往阿伯茨利的人行桥 2024, acrylic on canvas, 65 x 89 cm**

In this painting I walked on the footbridge several times choosing different observation points to combine multiple perspectives to build a composition that is ideal for portraying the complex scenery.

***Train Station (Wahroonga)*, 火车站 2024, acrylic on canvas, 60.5 x 90.5 cm**

Here, Western postmodernist art theory was instrumental in the painting's process of seamlessly transforming the traditional, in combination with the Western linear perspective, to achieve a sense of space beyond the canvas surface.

***My Deck and Watery Sky*, 我家凉亭天如水 2024, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90cm**

人散后，一钩淡月天如水（谢逸）“*Guest leaves, New moon rises, Sky still like water*” by Xie Yi. Sky like water（天如水）was expressed by many traditional Chinese poets that the tranquil sky resembles water, showing the peacefulness of one's inner world. On my deck, the guests have left the tea gathering, a new moon is rising and the tranquil scenery is very beautiful.

***Sunrise*, 日出 2024, acrylic on canvas, 90 x 90 cm**

Carvings of landscape images were especially popular but difficult, employing semi-abstract design and elegant decorative elements. The narrow dimensions of the jade or lacquer used by Chinese artists to carve landscapes strongly affected the composition and restricted the figure's volume and depths. Decorative lines and patterns are essential in this process. Artists also used larger shadows (deeper cuts) to enhance the image. Pine trees symbolise steadfastness, self-discipline, and endurance. It is often depicted with other symbols of longevity such as the cranes, associated with Immortals in Chinese art. Three light sources are used in depicting the scenery: A sun shines through the tree trunk, a spot light shines on the canvas surface, and the gallery light casts shadows under the pine leaves.

***Rock Tree and Bird*, 岩石树和鸟 2024, acrylic on canvas, 100 x 75 cm**

This painting resembles the visual effects of a low relief Chinese lacquer or ceramic carving. My painting reverses the traditional process from painting to carvings. The willow tree brings back the memory of the past friendship and is symbolising longing for the loss of love and simplicity. The bird is the messenger of that thought.

***Royal Summer Palace*, 颐和园 2023, acrylic on canvas 80 x 98 cm**

The Summer Palace (颐和园) is a vast ensemble of lakes, gardens and palaces in Beijing. It was an imperial garden in the Qing dynasty. Confucius values both the inner spirit and external practices of rites as a guideline of behavior to harmonize the society.

***Waterfall and Pine Tree Pavilion*, 水边松亭 2023, acrylic on canvas, 62 x 67.5 cm**

A small courtyard in peaceful scenery. Taoism emphasises harmony between humanity and nature.

***Empyrean Landscape – Courtyard Light*, 帝景庭院之光 2024, acrylic on canvas, 61 x 92 cm**

The Summer Palace is a vast ensemble of lakes, gardens and palaces in Beijing. It was an imperial garden in the Qing dynasty. Chinese buildings (tower, pavilion, temple and courtyard) represent the development of regional culture, historical memory and architectural narratives. Under the influence of Confucianism, they are important architectural forms that convey Chinese culture. My paintings depict scenes of bittersweet memories of the past and uncertain outlooks of the future. A heavenly light shines onto a place that merges its past, present and future.

***Southern Mountains and Chrysanthemums*, 南山菊花 2023, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 50 cm**

Chinese landscape painting has evolved into an independent genre that symbolises 'Tian-ren-he-yi' 天人合一, a Daoism concept of "uniting nature and humanity" that allows the natural environment to be given respect – moral and ethical consideration by humans. People paint landscapes with basic elements of mountains, rivers, waterfalls and trees that allow them to immerse themselves in and to escape their quotidian world to commune with nature.

This painting depicts the scene from the famous Chinese poetry 采菊东篱下 悠然见南山 – “*Picking chrysanthemums under the eastern fence and leisurely seeing Northern Mountain*” by poet 陶渊明 (东晋诗人365-427) 《饮酒（其五）》 *Drinking Wine #5*: 结庐在人境，而无车马喧。问君何能尔，心远地自偏。采菊东篱下，悠然见南山。山气日夕佳，飞鸟相与还。此中有真意，欲辨已忘言。“*Building a cottage in madding crowd, while having no noise of car and horse. Asked why I can do like this, a distant heart brings me to peace. Pick a chrysanthemum in the east fence, see the south hills at ease. Mountains look beautiful in the sunset, flying birds get home together.*” These scenes include the real meaning of life, but there is no need to speak out.

ROOM 3

Red Pavilion, 红亭 2023, acrylic on canvas, 50 x 60 cm

Inspired by Chinese poetry, these smaller sculptural paintings depict the symbols of the Chinese landscape: Water (lake, river, sea, clouds and waterfall), Mountain, Tower, Pavilion, Temple, Courtyard and Pine tree.

Yellow Crane Tower – Homage to Shi Tao, 黄鹤楼-向石涛致敬 2023, acrylic on canvas, 71 x 42 cm

Yellow Crane Tower was inspired by the Chinese poet Cui Hao (崔颢704-754) *Yellow Crane Tower*, which describes a melancholy atmosphere when Immortals in the past flew away on the yellow crane's back. Now only an empty yellow crane tower is left behind. The world has quickly changed beyond recognition. My paintings depict scenes of bittersweet memory of the past and an uncertain outlook of the future.

Shi Tao, born into the Ming dynasty imperial clan as Zhu Ruoji, was a Chinese Buddhist monk, calligrapher and landscape painter during the early Qing dynasty. He is one of the most famous, innovative and individualist painters of the early Qing years.

ALSO AVAILABLE

Fire Dragon, 龙在水中 2024, pencil on paper, 35 x 50 cm

The dragon is a god of fire. The symbol of a fire-breathing dragon is often associated with power, strength and protection. In many cultures, dragons are seen as mythical creatures that possess great power.

The Chinese dragon has very different connotations from the European dragon. In European cultures, the dragon is a fire-breathing creature with aggressive connotations, whereas the Chinese dragon is a spiritual and cultural symbol that represents prosperity and good luck, as well as a rain deity that fosters harmony.

Dragon in Water, 火龙 2024, pencil on paper, 35 x 50 cm

The dragon images often evoke different and ambiguous meanings in many cultures that are represented by different visual images. In this painting, by submerging the dragon in different layers of air, water and soil, I have adopted a Western postmodern mode of fragmentation. This is different from the Chinese approach that emphasises the wholeness of the image.

Dragon, 龙 2010, dry point etching on paper, 15 x 15 cm image size

Fan Dongwang is represented by Art Atrium



Gallery hours Tues to Sat 10 am-5 pm FREE ENTRY | Gate 7, 1666 Pacific Highway, Wahroonga | **02 9473 7878**
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The GCS Gallery acknowledges the unique status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the original owners and traditional custodians of lands and waters, including the land and waters of our region.

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